Something to Celebrate: Theories, Beliefs and Practices of an Exemplary Inclusive Educator

by

Tamra Wilcox

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Tamra Wilcox
Department of Education – Curriculum, teaching and learning
University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

In this study, the theories, beliefs and practices of Gail, a general elementary teacher who is exemplary at including special needs students in her agenda for the classroom, are collected, documented and analyzed for emerging themes. The study begins with a literature review in the areas of effective teaching, exemplary practices in inclusion, adapting and calibrating instruction, caring and leadership. Information, collected through interview and observation recounts the objectives the inclusive educator sets for individual students during a lesson and the accommodations she makes to help them achieve the objectives. Themes that emerge through the analysis of interview and observation information are: maximizing teaching time, ownership and responsibility, caring, calibrating and instruction, self-regulated learning, collaboration and leadership. Themes are discussed, including implications for practice and future research.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The elementary classroom in today’s school can be a diverse environment. Students differ in their economic, social, cultural, medical and educational backgrounds, to mention only a few areas of difference. Today’s regular classroom may also include students whose behavioral, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program by a committee (Education Act, Revised Statutes of Ontario, 1990).

In May, 1992 a policy statement was issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education that indicated the placement of students designated as exceptional would normally be the regular classroom if this placement was able to meet the needs of the student and satisfied the parent request. Regular classrooms are now a likely place for serving the educational needs of exceptional students. Attempting to meet these needs is a challenging task for any educator, yet some have developed an expertise in creating effective inclusive classrooms for their students. In this paper, I will introduce Gail, a primary educator whose beliefs and practice allow her to create an exemplary inclusive learning environment. Although she manages a challenging grade 1-2 class, which includes some children with exceptional needs, and one child who has been designated as having a Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD), Gail has created a learning environment that allows her students to achieve success. I will identify themes that incorporate her beliefs and practices into a framework that may assist others in modifying their beliefs and improving their skills as inclusive educators.
Literature Review

Teacher beliefs. Pajares (1992) agrees with the body of research on teacher beliefs which suggest that beliefs are the best indicators of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives. Pajares also suggests that the beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions, and, consequently, their behaviour in the classroom. Logically, then, the development of an understanding of the belief structures of teachers is an important foundation for the study of improving teaching practices. However, due to the broad and encompassing construct of educational beliefs, Pajares emphasizes the need for research to focus on specific categories of educational beliefs: “beliefs about confidence to affect students’ performance (teacher efficacy), about the nature of knowledge (epistemological beliefs) about causes of teachers’ or students’ performance (attributions, locus of control, motivation, writing apprehension, math anxiety) about perceptions of self and feelings of self-worth (self-concept, self-esteem), about confidence to perform specific tasks (self-efficacy)” (Pajares, 1992, p. 316). In his synthesis of findings on beliefs, Pajares’ conclusions do not favor the likelihood that teacher beliefs, in any category, are easily altered. However, he tempers this by suggesting the possibility that biography and narrative offer promising ways of understanding teacher beliefs, and that belief change through staff development is also a realistic possibility. Pajares contends that the research into educational beliefs must provide insight into the relationship between teacher beliefs, teacher practice and knowledge, and student outcomes. “Attention to the beliefs of teachers and teacher candidates can inform educational practice in ways that prevailing research agendas have not and cannot” (Pajares, 1992, p. 329).
Jordan, Lindsay and Stanovich (1997) use two terms to identify the extremes of a continuum of beliefs which teachers hold about their roles and responsibilities in addressing the needs of exceptional students: pathognomonic and interventionist. The pathognomonic view reflects the belief that something is internally wrong with the student. Steps taken to deal with student learning difficulties are expected to be directed toward confirmation that something is indeed wrong with the child. As a result, staff members with special expertise would be primarily responsible for assisting the child (Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar & Diamond, 1993). The interventionist view reflects the belief that student difficulty is the result of the interaction between student characteristics and the learning environment. Teachers holding this belief accept the responsibility for working with student learning difficulties, and trying to solve the problem by modifying their instructional strategies. Several strategies would be attempted before the student is referred to special education personnel, and even then, the purpose of the referral is to assist the classroom teacher in identifying instructional approaches or resources that best fit with the student’s learning characteristics (Jordan et al., 1993). While teachers may vary in beliefs about their roles and responsibilities, about 25% tend to hold to a pathognomonic perspective, and about 20% to an interventionist perspective. The remaining teachers express beliefs that combine elements of both (Jordan-Wilson & Silverman, 1991; Jordan, Lindsay & Stanovich, 1997).

The beliefs mentioned above significantly contribute to differences in the instructional interactions of teachers with their normally-achieving and special needs students and with their stated preferences for different services such as pull-out or withdrawal of exceptional students versus in-class collaborative support (Jordan-Wilson
and Silverman, 1991; Jordan et al., 1993; Jordan et al., 1997). In a study of classroom teachers' instructional interactions with exceptional, at-risk and typically achieving students, Jordan et al. (1997) report that the pathognomonic-interventionist theory translates into teacher practice.

Pathognomonic teachers were less confident of their ability to deal with learning difficulties, favoring withdrawal and resource classroom support services over in-class collaborative consultation. In short, they saw the student as the source of the problem and believed they were ill-equipped to deal with the specialized demands of exceptionality. In the present study, this seems to have been reflected in their low rates of interaction with these students and in the predominance of comprehension monitoring when academic talk did occur. One might speculate that they are avoiding instructional interaction because they do not see reaching these students as their responsibility, or because they do not feel confident in doing so. Interventionist teachers, on the other hand, had higher levels of efficacy. They saw learning difficulties as challenges for which the responsibility was to be shared with the student. They favored in-class consultative support, and they expected assessment data to provide them with insight into tackling the learning difficulty (Jordan et al., 1993). In this study, [interventionist] teachers appeared to rise to the challenge of learner differences, adapting instruction through multiple interactions of the [cognitive extension] type. [Pathognomonic] teachers, on the other hand, were less successful in cognitively engaging students and thus may overall be less successful in raising student achievement” (Jordan et al., 1997, p. 92).

**Expert teaching.** Recent attempts to characterize effective inclusion, that is, teaching students with disabilities in regular classrooms, have suggested that it may be
akin to effective or expert teaching (Englert, Tarrant & Mariage, 1992). But what is
effective or expert teaching? For the purpose of this study, the terms effective, expert and
exemplary will be used synonymously. Research included in the process-product literature
has attempted to objectively and reliably describe the relation between the teaching
process and student outcomes to determine the teaching practices that lead to the highest
levels of student achievement. In this volume of literature, teacher behaviours and
instructional activities have been discussed at great length, including classroom
management strategies, time management practices, lesson presentation and management
of student work (Englert et al., 1992). Englert et al. (1992) has provided a brief summary
of the process-product literature – the foundation for our present understanding of good
teaching. The following are some selections from that summary:

1. Effective teachers arrange minimally disruptive traffic patterns, create rules and
   procedure related to instructional and non-instructional events, teach rules and
   procedures through demonstration, rehearsal and feedback, consequate rule
   compliance and non-compliance [and] use a variety of management techniques
to ensure follow through and consistency…(p. 63)

2. Effective teachers manage the school day to provide ample instructional time
   and maintain high task engagement during instruction…they carefully structure
   and communicate their expectations for lessons, transition times, and
   seatwork…(p. 65)

3. They introduce and orient their students to the content by reviewing previous
   lesson content, building background knowledge and providing organizational
   frameworks…(p.65)
4. They actively model and demonstrate concepts by providing metacognitive strategies [and] they check for understanding... (p. 65)

5. They maintain a brisk pace and high success rate... they monitor progress through daily, weekly and monthly reviews to evaluate and enhance retention (p. 65)

6. Effective teachers provide independent practice, at an appropriate level of difficulty, related to academic goals [and] they have accountability procedures to ensure that students know when work is due and what criteria will be applied to its evaluation. (p. 68)

In a study of exceptional teachers of primary literacy classrooms, Wharton-McDonald and Mistretta Hampston (1998) reiterate some components of the literature and add some unique characteristics to the knowledge base of exceptional teaching. Masterful management practices which lead to high levels of on-task behaviour were noted in these classrooms, as were brisk, engaging, and integrated lessons. These teachers effectively used human resources, such as resource teachers and teaching assistants. These additional classroom teaching staff were consistently observed working closely with students, assisting and providing instruction. By resources in this way, teachers allow themselves the opportunity to give feedback and encouragement, provide additional instruction, and circulate to monitor seatwork – all qualities of effective teaching according to Englert et al. (1992).

"The classrooms with outstanding teachers were filled with the message that students can and will learn. These teachers were determined that their students would
develop as readers and writers” (Wharton-McDonald & Mistretta Hampston, 1998, p. 165). In these classrooms, observers also noted that the teachers were “exceptionally active in scaffolding students’ learning (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), providing hints and prompts when students faltered, whether during whole group instruction or one-on-one interactions” (Wharton-McDonald & Mistretta Hampston, 1998, p. 166). The final point noted by the observers was the high incidence and consistent encouragement of self-regulation. Students often worked with each other on learning tasks, engaged in their learning activities, even when the teacher was not directly monitoring them. They had learned to do much of what was required of them without assistance.

**Exemplary practices in inclusion.** Larrivee (1985) suggests that teachers who are most successful with special needs students in regular classes have profiles that are very similar to teachers who are effective in teaching students in general. Larrivee notes that while the majority of teaching behaviours in the process-product literature are beneficial in the instruction of mainstreamed students, there are three particular teaching behaviours that should be emphasized when instructing special needs students. Providing positive and encouraging feedback, ensuring a high success rate in seatwork and classroom activities, and refraining from criticism are the suggested areas of focus.

The research provided by Larrivee (1985) regarding positive feedback and criticism begins to approach the area of social and instructional interaction, but these are only two of the fifteen effective teaching behaviours noted in her research. Many of the remaining thirteen behaviours focus on classroom and lesson management. Although it has provided useful information for the development of effective teaching skills, the
research on expertise in teaching has been accused of being incomplete in the area of the "qualitative dimensions of instruction and the social contexts in which students are instructed" (Englert et al., 1992) because the focus on time management and management of behaviour may lead educators of special needs students to adopt a work model rather than a learning model. In the work model, success becomes accuracy on discrete tasks, whereas the learning model has goals of higher-order thinking and self-regulation (Marshall, 1988). Englert et al. (1992) suggest that if special needs students are to become part of a learning model, teachers may need to apply higher-order thinking and problem solving, cognitive bootstrapping and calibrating instruction to individual learner needs. In this situation, special needs students are part of the whole activity, but receive some support or bolstering in areas where they may have weakness. This allows students to continue to acquire basic skills without being withdrawn from the social and learning community of the class.

**Adapting Instruction Based on Knowledge of Individual Students.** The call for further research in the qualitative nature of classroom interaction and instruction is supported by Jordan and Stanovich (1996). They suggest that more information is needed in the area of adapting instruction based on individual student characteristics. They conclude that the literature on the subject of expert teaching does not address the adaptation of knowledge and skills in an interactive learning context which is modulated by individual student characteristics. Jordan and Stanovich (1998) contend that the repertoire of expert teachers includes a set of practices and educational beliefs that are adaptable to a variety of attributes of individual students.
Shulman (1986; 1987) indicates that knowledge of individual student characteristics is one of ten critical components of expert teaching, although Jordan and Stanovich (1998) note that he does not elaborate on the nature and use of it. Morine-Dershimer (1978-1979) conceptualized the way teachers think about instructional activities by suggesting the idea of lesson images – visions of how a lesson will proceed based on previous experience and knowledge of the abilities of individual students. Teachers may make minor lesson adaptations when considering this knowledge of individual students. Knowledge of students’ abilities in specific areas would logically be part of the necessary knowledge referred to by Shulman. Jordan and Stanovich (1998) refer to the importance of considering students’ emotional status when teachers are making instructional decisions. This process is described by the researcher in the study as follows: “So it’s as if you’ve got them sort of in channels, you’ve got the same objectives for the kids, you’ve got them in channels and you’ll back off a little bit if their self-esteem’s down and you’ll push them forward if you’ve got them there with you that day” (Jordan & Stanovich, 1998, p. 25).

Some studies have addressed teachers’ use of knowledge about learner characteristics. In the research of Cushing, Sabers, and Berliner (1992), teachers were presented with a Student Information task in which they were asked to review classroom material and information about individual students before taking over a science or math class approximately six weeks into the school year. Teachers were asked to plan instruction for two days, and answer questions about students, management and instruction. Results indicated that experts, compared to novices and advanced beginners indicated their desire to develop their own personal feelings for students, rather than rely
on the information cards left by previous teachers. This information suggests that teachers are concerned with the specific needs of individual students, and that this information is important in guiding their instructional decisions.

**Calibrating Instruction.** Sabers, Cushing, and Berliner (1991) report that expert teachers have refined skills of interpretation, and are better equipped to distinguish the instructional relevance of situations compared to their novice colleagues. These skills of interpretation allow expert teachers to develop advance decision making skills. Specifically, the on-the-spot decision making that takes place during classroom instruction (Gersten, 1990). Teachers use these decision making skills when deciding how to proceed with the instruction of students. When teachers have considerable knowledge about individual students across a range of areas, they are able to make informed judgements about how to proceed with instruction.

One strategy that a teacher may decide to employ with a particular student, either on-the-spot, or in advance, is cognitive bootstrapping. This strategy is a specific adaptation made by a teacher based on the teacher's knowledge of the student. Englert et al. (1992) describe cognitive bootstrapping as a way to involve in higher order thinking activities students who lack some basic skills:

In cognitive bootstrapping teachers approach the process in a holistic fashion (as though the student could perform the entire process) but use scaffolding or bolstering to assist performance in areas in which the students' knowledge and skills are weak. In writing, for example, students who are not conventional
spellers might use invented spelling and be assisted by "writing buddies" as they participate in the entire writing process (Englert et al., 1992, p. 71).

Surely the bootstrapping described above is based on the specific areas of need of individual students. The strategies of scaffolding and cognitive bootstrapping have been mentioned as desirable strategies in assisting special needs students to progress academically. Each of these techniques is a way to adapt instruction, but each requires that the teacher have knowledge of students' learning needs. This knowledge allows the teacher to carefully calibrate instruction to an appropriate beginning level and rate of progression for each individual student.

**Self-regulated Learning.** Wharton-McDonald and Mistretta Hampston (1998) suggested that the idea of self-regulation was a desirable characteristic observed in the classrooms of effective teachers of primary literacy. In these classrooms, worked independently or with other students, doing much of what was required of them without teacher assistance. Although students were able to speak to one another, a high level of on-task behavior was maintained in the classroom. Englert et al. (1992) provides more detailed information on the idea of self-regulation in learning. The role of the teacher is to join students as inquirers by modeling and thinking aloud the strategies of a more expert learner. Although the teacher initiates this sharing dialogue, eventually, students begin to participate in the sharing of mental processes with both the teacher and other students. Students help other students as they self-talk themselves through processes, while the teacher sequences prompts and directions to advance the students' level of mastery.
Eventually, the strategies that were modeled by the teacher, then shared in dialogue with classmates, become familiar strategies which students can self-talk through independently. “In classroom applications, this suggests that effective teachers should involve students in classroom dialogues about cognitive processes rather than rely on seatwork and independent practice to develop students’ abilities to self-regulate” (Englert et al., 1992, p. 73). Teachers must provide students many opportunities to collaborate with their peers in order to allow the dialogue of self-regulation to flourish and to provide the practice that will allow the self-talk to advance from a group process to an individual skill.

Caring. In their study of exemplary teaching in inclusive classrooms, Jordan and Stanovich (1998) report that each of the teachers studied “cared deeply about their students, elements that Pressley, Hogan, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta, and Eittenberger (1996) include in their discussion of outstanding teachers” (Jordan & Stanovich, 1998, p. 37). Nel Noddings (1984) is concerned with the often accepted notion of empathy as putting oneself in another’s shoes in order to understand the other. In doing this, the temptation to objectively analyze another’s situation may prevent one from “feeling with” the other. So, perhaps a better term is caring, which Noddings describes as seeing and feeling with the other. The teachers in the Jordan and Stanovich study were careful to preserve the dignity of their students, and this was displayed in the ways they chose to handle disruptive behaviour in the classroom. As these teachers described their desire to praise students rather than condemn them, to encourage in their students the development of independent problem solving skills, and to help them build on their successes, the reader is convinced that these teachers are “feeling with” their students. The teachers are
attempting to understand the complex problems these students face and are making every attempt to ensure that the responses they make to student behaviours are minimizing rather than escalating the impediments to academic success that these students face.

**Leadership.** "Extensive research has supported the conclusion that the principal is of major importance as an instructional leader in a school (e.g., Andrews, Basom, & Basom, 1991; Fullan, 1991; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990; Richardson, Short, & Prickett, 1993; Smith & Andrews, 1989)” (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998, p. 223). The research of Hawley and Rosenholtz (1984) suggests that teachers derive their subjective norms from the reporting source of school norms – the principal. As the instructional leader, and reporting source of school norms, the principal influences the success of inclusive education in a school (Baker & Zigmond, 1995). If teachers are supported and lead by a principal who embraces the literature on effective teaching, who has knowledge of the strategies of adapting instruction, and who holds interventionist beliefs about supporting successful inclusive education, research suggests that teachers are more likely to adapt this vision for their own classroom.

The principal can also influence the procedures adopted by teachers when dealing with special need students. In her book on collaborative classroom consultation, Jordan (1994) outlines the ‘preventive-intégrative’ approach in considering the needs of students. In this model, staff members work as a team to identify strategies to assist the classroom teacher in dealing with minor learning or behavioral problems of a student in the class before difficulties become so extensive that the student can no longer remain in the classroom. Jordan continues by explaining that a second aspect of this approach is the
involvement of resource support when an identified special needs student is being integrated in the regular class. Thomas states: “with the best will in the world, it does not seem possible for the class teacher on her (his) own adequately to meet the needs of children who are experiencing difficulty when they are part of a large class. She (he) will need effective assistance” (Thomas, 1986, p. 22). This assistance can come in the form of a number of people, each hopeful that the child will make gains, and each committed to the process.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to expand the theoretical and practical knowledge of inclusion through a qualitative exploration of the beliefs, knowledge and practices of a teacher who is exemplary at including special needs students. Through interview and observation, I am seeking to articulate how one teacher, nominated as exemplary by peers and superiors, accommodates diverse student needs, while fulfilling her beliefs about her role as a teacher of both exceptional and non-disabled students. Through exploration of these questions, I hope to make explicit what this teacher tacitly knows, to draw from her experience the skills, beliefs and knowledge that give rise to effective inclusion:

1. Teacher beliefs
   i). What are the teacher’s beliefs about working with children with disabilities in an inclusive classroom?
   ii). To what does the teacher attribute the formation of these beliefs?

2. Teacher practice
i). What is the teacher's rationale (theories, understandings, etc.) for the practices observed?
CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Sample

To protect the anonymity of teaching staff and students in the study, pseudonyms have been used.

Gail was nominated as an exemplary teacher in an inclusive classroom by the administrative team in charge of the area schools in her district. The team consisted of centrally assigned elementary principals who had responsibility for students with special learning needs in the elementary panel. This nomination was based on a brief description of an exemplary teacher in an inclusive classroom generated by Jordan and Stanovich (1996). In the opinion of the majority of the team, Gail was an exemplary teacher in an inclusive classroom. They then confirmed their nominations with principals at each school, and gained permission of the teacher to forward the nomination to the researcher.

The School Board

Gail is employed by a metropolitan school system which serves a portion of a city of four million people. The composition of students in this board was 54% from non-English speaking backgrounds. Twenty four percent of residents in the area served by this school system are members of racial minority groups (Statistics Canada, 1998).

The Class

Gail taught a split class including both grades one and two in a K-6 school of average size. There were 22 students in the class, divided equally between grades one and two. Three students in the class were formally identified as exceptional. They are:
1. Paul, a grade 1 student, has a Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD),
including severe learning disabilities and behaviour concerns. Although his
performance is below grade level, Paul does read and write. He is able to
participate in brief conversations with both classmates and staff. This is the
second successive year that P has been in Gail's class (although he moved up a
grade, she volunteered to take his class again, despite the increase in
preparation). The interviews and observations took place in April, 1996, and
Gail reported that Paul had made significant gains in his behavior since the fall.
At that time, Paul had episodes during the day when he refused to participate
in classroom activities. His behaviour sometimes became disruptive by raising
his voice and becoming aggressive in the way he was treating furniture in the
classroom. Safety issues became a concern when Paul would leave the
classroom or school without permission as an avoidance strategy. Gail reports
that Paul continues to have a fixation with eating things: paper, cardboard,
glue, etc. During class observations Paul was participating in all classroom
activities and sustained a short conversation with the observer. Although he
did have a tendency to put the paper in his mouth during a cut and paste
activity, no seriously disruptive behaviors were observed. Paul was seated near
the rear of the room with a partner. He completed some of his activities at a
nearby table located at the back of the room.

2. Mitch, a grade 2 student, is officially designated as having an Attention Deficit
Disorder. He has been prescribed a stimulant medication to counter his
activity. Mitch often refused to comply with classroom procedures and
sometimes used profanity in the classroom. Gail reports that Mitch has a very
difficult home life situation. Children’s Aid have been involved with his family
regarding concerns of abuse.

3. Victor, a grade 2 student, had also been designated as having an Attention
Deficit Disorder. During classroom activities, Victor had difficulty focussing
attention at times. Gail describes him as having a tendency to be distracted.
During group reading activities, he is seated near Gail.

Gail reported another three students, who, in her opinion, were at risk for school
failure. We were unable to gain permission to include one of the four children in the
research. The remaining two are:

1. Kim, a grade 2 student, is described by Gail as easily distracted. She is seated
in an area slightly removed from the rest of the class, but with a partner, a
strong grade two student. In the fall of the school year, Kim was in the
Reading Recovery program. Gail describes her as “lacking in self-confidence,
sometimes irritable and defiant”. Kim was experiencing the recent (two years
prior) break-up of her parents’ marriage, and the possibility of her father
remarrying. Gail reported significant gains in her reading ability during the
year, and she is no longer in the Reading Recovery program. Early in the year,
Kim was taken to the in-school team, and was put on program alert, which
means that the Special Education Resource Teacher checks in and does follow
through with the student. It also means the child could be fast-tracked into an
identification process if needed. The purpose of keeping Kim on program alert
for the beginning of the following year, despite the fact that she had made significant gains was to allow Kim to adjust to a new teacher with support available if it was required.

2. Neil is also a grade 2 student. Neil is seated with Gail’s top grade 2 student. In January of the school year, Neil’s father passed away suddenly. Gail reports that since the death of his father, Neil has had some periods of “acting out”.

Neil started the school year in the Reading Recovery program and was also on program alert. Gail reports that until the death of his father, Neil was making improvements both in his reading ability and in his confidence level which showed in his willingness to attempt reading activities. Gail has tried to gauge Neil’s emotional status each day before deciding how to proceed with her academic objectives while being sensitive to Neil’s need to grieve the loss of his father.

The Teaching Staff

At the time of the research, Gail was in her 27th year of teaching. She has taught from junior kindergarten to grade 4 including one year of teaching remedial reading. Gail has additional special education qualifications, and has taken a number of courses relating to autism. Gail was also involved in the production of a video on including students with PDD and autism in regular classes.

Gail teaches in a modern classroom with west sunlight. The many shelves in the class are packed with materials, and the room is decorated with student-created art. Student desks are paired and there are two circular tables at the back. These tables were
often used for students to work together on academic activities. Gail’s desk is located at the back of the room near the door. She was never observed to use it except to stack papers and materials. She typically uses a stool during classroom monitoring that she places near students or among student groups with whom she is working. One side of the classroom houses a large carpet with a rocking choir where many of the large group discussions and reading activities take place.

Gail works closely with an educational assistant, Maureen. They have worked together for five years. Maureen spends only part of the morning in Gail’s class, to help Paul get settled and to assist him in starting his tasks for the morning. She returns later during the math program. Maureen had worked with Paul when he was in kindergarten and encouraged Gail to take Paul’s class. Maureen explained to Gail that she felt that as a team they could help put Paul on the right track. Maureen is involved with Gail in program decisions regarding Paul and also provides input during parent interviews and resource conferences. Gail reports that she and Maureen have a continuous dialogue during the school day in which they plan, schedule and reflect on the activities and interactions taking place in the classroom they share.

Procedure

The PI interview. Based on the pathognomonic-interventionist theory, the PI interview is an assessment inventory developed by Jordan et al. (1997) to measure the beliefs of teachers about their roles and responsibilities in working with integrated exceptional and at-risk students. The PI interview discusses the teachers’ beliefs and actions related to two students, nominated by the teacher, one identified as exceptional
and one perceived by the teacher to be at risk of school failure. The interviewer taps the teachers’ beliefs grounded in their past decisions and actions related to the two students, a technique reported to reduce the transparency of more traditional questionnaire measures and produces a profile of beliefs with high validity (Jordan et al., 1994; Stanovich and Jordan, 1998).

The teacher was administered the PI interview in a quiet location in the school during school hours. The format of the interview was a confidential semi-structured discussion between teacher and interviewer lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour. The interview was tape recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

**The recording of pre- and post-lesson interviews.** In this study, classroom observations were initially conducted by the researcher in the spring of 1997. In 1998, the researcher returned to Gail’s classroom with the author. Paul had returned to Gail’s class for a second year, and together the researcher and author were able to make some further observations of Gail’s classroom environment, her teaching interactions, and of Paul’s progress. All interviews were conducted by the researcher in the spring of 1997, with some anecdotal commentary added from the 1998 visit.

The following procedure repeats the procedure used by Jordan and Stanovich (1998). Prior to the lesson, the teacher was interviewed about the upcoming lesson, her objectives, and the composition of the class. The lesson of just over one hour was recorded onto one channel of a two-track audiotape while a researcher simultaneously recorded on the second channel the events and designation of each pupil with whom the teacher interacted. A second interview with the teacher followed the lesson in which the
lesson was reviewed and the events in the classroom discussed. This interview was held on the same day in the school library. The interview was focused particularly on the teachers' interactions with those students who had been designated as exceptional or at-risk.
Thematic analysis. The purpose of the interview was to elicit a statement from Gail about her lesson objectives and her intended adaptations for individual students. The transcripts of the actual conversational interactions that took place during the lesson were searched for specific examples that reflected the statements collected earlier. As suggested by Erickson, (1986), the evidence will be presented in the frame of general and subassertions. However, I will refer to the assertions as themes that emerged. The themes that emerged are filtered through the experience and perspective of the author, who is an educator. To conclude, the thematic analyses were returned to the teacher to verify that the thematic analyses were indeed a true reflection of her beliefs and practice. This stage is intended to avoid the problem of misinterpretation, or the likelihood of the researcher imposing her own meaning on the true meaning originally held by the teacher (Munby, 1982).

Jordan and Stanovich (1998) reported that, in their study, the themes were used to develop a framework for the reader; they were not articulated by the teachers they studied. In that study, the teachers did not categorize their beliefs and practices, but saw their teaching as an interactive process involving a holistic understanding of individual students. The themes that emerged in this study also provide the additional purpose of serving as a framework.
CHAPTER 3
RESULTS

Seven themes emerged from the analysis of the transcripts of lessons and interviews:

1. Maximizing Teaching Time
2. Ownership and Responsibility
3. Caring
   3.1. Empathy
   3.2. Choice
   3.3. Maintaining Student Dignity
4. Collaboration
5. Leadership
6. Calibrating Instruction
7. Self-regulated Learning

Maximizing Teaching Time

Effective teachers insulate themselves and their students from intrusions by carefully structuring and communicating their expectations for lessons, transition times, and seatwork. At the same time, they establish rules and procedures that reduce the time lost to disruptive behavior, student confusion about what is expected, and transition times (Englert et al., 1992, p.64). In Gail’s classroom, these management concerns are under control and allow Gail to focus on the instructional activities at hand, decision making, and adapting to the needs of individual students through personal interaction with them. In observing Gail’s classroom, I noted very little off-task behavior from students. In
the post-interview transcripts, the researcher also comments on the high levels of on-task behaviors. Children were busy and engaged in their learning activities. They had the freedom to ask one another for help, or to discuss aspects of the task that were troubling to them. The students used this freedom productively by completing the activity. During learning activities in Gail’s classroom, students are free to sit where they feel most comfortable. This gives them not only permission, but encouragement to talk with their classmates about ideas or difficulties. With the freedom to discuss their learning, students collaborated, shared and encouraged each other.

In Gail’s classroom, there is evidence that effective management techniques are in place. In and Out boxes for work that is marked or needs to be marked are readily visible and accessible. Students were obviously aware of the location of resources, and were permitted to leave their seats to get these resources for themselves. A schedule of the tasks for the morning is listed on the board. As well as this visual reminder of transitions on the board, Gail prepared students in advance for upcoming transitions verbally.

**Gail:** We have a change in today’s schedule, the things that we’re doing today. Mrs. R was very kind. She realized that in our library time on Friday there’s going to be an assembly so you would miss library on Friday. So Mrs. R was very kind. She said you can come to the library today. She’s giving you an extra library time. That’s going to be after lunch, okay. After lunch, just before recess, you’re going into the library. So that’s a bit different.

**Student:** If you go home for lunch bring you books.

**Gail:** That’s a good idea Jody. If you go home for lunch bring your books. Perhaps she’ll let you trade books. Also today your gym time is moved up. Gym will be this morning after recess.

**Students:** Yes.
Gail: Okay? So a couple of changes. Gym is after morning recess.

Student: And library is in the afternoon.

In the post-lesson interview, Gail mentioned the importance of this management technique, particularly for Paul.

Researcher: You were telling me about scheduling, that if the schedule got messed up, he would throw a fit. So as long as you really prepare him that there’s going to be a change in what he expects it will go and it did go through nicely.

Gail: I have to warn him ahead of time anything that I’m not going to do, I’ve changed my mind, this is what I’m going to do, P, and this is why I’m doing it and he’s okay. If he’s at an activity I have to warn him, in about 3 more minutes P, we’re going to tidy up.

Researcher: But you did that for the whole class anyway, 5 more minutes, and that’s called...What is it? Something transition, telling about upcoming transitions. And you did that systematically anyway.

Gail: I think you have to when you have...not just with autism or PDD, I think with the others as well that are at-risk.

Researcher: That’s good teaching.

Gail: You have to do that with PDD, with ADHD, with ADD kids, actually, with any child that’s at-risk. There’s so much insecurity in the environment that if you’re always preparing them and letting them know what’s going to happen then it gives them that sense of security and that sense of confidence.

In managing the classroom activities so that she is able to work with individuals, Gail uses the strategy of proximity. Often, she would unobtrusively pull up her stool near a student to subtly encourage on-task behavior. During the lesson on The Little Red Hen, Paul was putting paper in his mouth and chewing it. A few reminders from Gail directed him back to the task, but he continued to chew the paper. Gail subtly moved the her stool
near Paul and monitored the class from there, reminding him with her presence that she was aware of what he was doing.

Another strategy Gail uses is peer involvement. During the lesson, Gail often called on class members to assist their peers:

**Gail:** Scott, Scott, would you tell Neil to get busy please quietly. Tom, would you please help Kim find her spelling book so she can get started?

This assistance took many forms, from a verbal reminder directing a student to the task, to getting a bottle of glue to share with a friend. For Kim, peer involvement was an important strategy that Gail used. Gail commented that it allowed Kim to interact with other students in a positive way, it reinforced that atmosphere of acceptance in the classroom, it promoted the development of a community of learners, and it reduced the sense of nagging from the teacher that students who are often off-task may experience. It also freed Gail from thinking of herself as a nag by directing continual reminders toward students who were off-task.

**Researcher:** Okay. So for Kim you did a lot of reading along with her.

**Gail:** I also made sure she was sitting with a peer.

**Researcher:** Okay, you do use peers to support…

**Gail:** Oh yes. I always had her sitting with a peer that excelled in the reading and could help her out. Often someone can walk in and think that my room is very noisy but they’re asking each other things. They’re helping each other; “What does this word say?” They’re certainly allowed to do that, to talk about things.
During classroom observations, students were observed in discussion about the academic task. The pairing of at-risk or exceptional students with stronger students appeared to have a positive effect. The stronger students did assist their peers and decrease the number of times Gail was required to encourage on-task behaviour.

In another example of peer involvement, Gail effectively encouraged Paul's task commitment by attaching a picture of Paul engaging in on-task behavior on his desk. Gail would then tap, or assign a particular student to tap the picture as a reminder to Paul of the task at hand. Gail noted success with this experimental strategy in that it continued to allow her to maximize her teaching time, while using the persuasive technique of peer encouragement.

Although peer involvement relieved some of the time Gail devoted to maintaining on-task behavior, she is still very much aware of what is going on in all areas of the class at all times, a quality known as "withitness," as coined by Kounin (1971).

**Researcher:** You spend a lot of time scanning as you said, scanning and monitoring and a lot of eye contact, a lot of sort of non-verbal pointing and then a flat hand to say, shh, cool it. So you're watching a lot.

Gail showed her "withitness" while monitoring the sequencing activity of the lesson.

**Student:** What is she doing here?

**Gail:** Cutting the wheat. Okay, can you keep it at your desk for now Tom? Put your name on it please. Let's take away these papers Paul so that you aren't bothered by them. What's the word?

**Student:** Planting.
Gail: Planting?

Student: Yeah.

Gail: That’s on the board Tom. Do you see a word that starts with p? Okay, that’s it. Planting. Okay, is this your guess here?

Student: Yeah.

Gail: Okay. Ssssh. Mark, I’m gonna put this over here because that could distract Neil a bit, okay. Thanks.

During a short time, Gail interacted with a number of students, maintaining an awareness of what each was doing. Her “withitness” skills allow her to maintain the productively busy classroom atmosphere that we observed.

Gail uses the resources of Maureen, her teaching assistant, and Lisa, a grade 13 student, available to her to give her time to interact individually with students. During the classroom observations Maureen assisted Paul in getting started with his spelling. Maureen spent some time with Paul while Gail monitored the class by circulating. Gail explains how they maximize time by working together:

Researcher: So what do you do in September? You listen to all the kids read and get a handle on them?

Gail: Throughout the year I will do that. I will ask Maureen and Lisa, it’s usually on a day when the two are in there, and I’ll split the class up, can you take the 1s to do this with math and you take the 2s to do this with math and I’ll be at the back calling the children one at a time to read to me. It frees me up for one-on-one work or assessment.

Researcher: Good.

Gail: And that’s done throughout the year. I’ve done that quite a bit.

Researcher: You use your resources to do one-on-one monitoring with the kids?
Ownership and Sense of Responsibility

Although she reports that the effective inclusion of at-risk and special needs children in her class certainly requires extra effort and continued self-analysis, Gail has a strong sense of responsibility for ensuring that these students are given every opportunity to learn that they deserve.

Gail: I asked for the grade... I was going to get the grade 4 again and then no one particularly wanted Paul. They were frightened. So I went to our principal and said I think it would be best for everyone concerned if I took the grade 1/2 again.

Researcher: Well that’s hard on you though. You’ve got to readjust your whole curriculum.

Gail: It was two grade changes in two years. So I was only in grade 4 one year.

Researcher: So it was a whole bunch of preparation load back on you and there was nothing you could take from the year before.

Gail: But Maureen had worked with Paul in kindergarten with the other teacher and she really felt that as a team we could get to him. She felt that, you know, we could put him on the right track. That it would be tough but that he deserved a break, sort of a chance.

Researcher: And he’s got it and he’s responding beautifully.

Although additional preparation would be required, Gail was willing to make that investment in an effort to give Paul the educational “break” that Gail and Maureen could offer. Gail reports that part of the sense of ownership and responsibility that she feels is a deep sense of caring and concern for each child. Gail even suggests that the relationship
between herself and the children during the year has some qualities of a mother-child relationship.

_Gail:_ These are my children. They are my children for the year. I'll worry about them. I have to love them the way their mom does. I have to watch what I say and do because it could affect them for a very long time. I have to think about something before I say it.

During her classroom interactions with students, Gail is very careful about what she says. There is a sense of kindness surrounding Gail that is exemplified in her soft voice, the way she points out kindnesses displayed by other students and thanks them for it, and the way she genuinely listens as they excitedly recount their recent experiences. In an interaction with a student, Gail shows some of this kindness:

_Gail:_ You're working really hard. You must be proud of what you're doing.

_Student:_ I've got a friend for recess.

_Gail:_ Good. That's how you make friends is if you make everything fair.

With Gail's sense of responsibility comes a commitment to seek out strategies that will be effective for her in working with her students. Gail has taken an interest in professional development activities that help to prepare her for the challenges she faces in the classroom. She describes a number of courses she has taken, from general understanding of autism and PDD to ideas for use of Polaroid pictures in the classroom. Gail also took part in the preparation of a video on including students with PDD in the regular classroom, a project coordinated by personnel in her school board. Her sense of
responsibility for ensuring that she is giving her students 'the break they deserve' is evident in her commitment to continued professional development.

Taking ownership of her students means constantly reflecting on her own effectiveness in the classroom. For Gail, this translates into a constant search for effective strategies, and a willingness to persevere with experimental strategies. Gail commented on her continuing search to find a seating arrangement that can allow her to use peers as motivators in both academics and behavior. Although it was mid-June when I spoke with her, she was feeling that she had just found an arrangement that was working well for a particular pair of students. Gail did not let the fact that the year was approaching an end dissuade her from achieving her goal and giving her students that chance of having a positive experience. The investment is paying off well, as shown by this interaction between Paul and another student, Doug:

Gail: Okay, you know how to spell 'to'.
Doug: It's past the 4 (indicating that it is nearly time for recess).
Gail: Hang on. I just want Paul to finish this page.
Paul: I made????
Gail: Okay, 'the'. You know how to spell 'the'.
Doug: Can I help him?
Gail: Paul, do you want Doug to help you?
Paul: Okay.
Gail: Alright. He wants to know how to spell 'mill'. So, Paul, Doug will help you.
Doug: I…
Gail related a similar long-term investment in creating a motivator for Paul to use his most legible printing. In doing some applied research of her own, Gail hypothesized that having a peer mark Paul’s work would encourage him to print more legibly, compared to his efforts when she marked his work. She experimented with having peers mark Paul’s work in a spelling and writing activities. She showed a sample from Paul’s workbook which showed the progression from his difficult-to-decipher printing, to neat and legible some months later. Although there were times when it seemed that Paul was not being motivated to produce a better quality of work for his peer markers, long-term observations showed a slow but consistent increase in the clarity of his samples. By continuing with the experiment for enough time to collect enough samples to make a judgement, Gail was able to observe a slow but steady increase in Paul’s writing legibility.

Gail’s continual efforts as a reflective applied researcher throughout the year show the determination she has to see her students succeed with the objectives she has set for them. She expressed her determination as she explained about Doug:

Gail: Doug has given me a really tough time the last few weeks, his parents especially as well. They’re at their wits end. And I have a feeling I’m not going to get through to him by the end of June but I’m not giving up. So this morning I heard he was just horrific for the supply teacher, talking back and so on. So this morning he came up to me and said, “Can I read to you?” And rather that haul him over on the carpet for Friday, here I am and let’s start fresh, so I said, “Doug, okay, let me just explain what everybody has to do and then you can come and read to me,” and he got lots of praise for the really difficult words that he read by the had some time with me. As I said, I get discouraged with him, I get discouraged with V. And I’m not sure I’m going to reach them but I’m not giving up ‘til June 30. So I can be realistic. I’m not a miracle worker. I’m not superwoman. I may not reach them, but boy I’m not giving up ‘til the very last second. I can be realistic but it’s my job and I’m gonna keep trying and I’m gonna try every single thing.
The objectives she sets for her students and for herself are realistic, yet challenging. But Gail enjoys the challenge. In a recent letter from Gail the researcher received a picture reflecting the enjoyment Gail finds in the challenge of teaching at-risk and exceptional children. The picture showed three angels, the angel in the middle looked a little disheveled, with halo askew, while the two surrounding angels were the picture of perfection. A little arrow pointed to the middle angel and a note from Gail followed: This is the one I like to teach.

Caring

Gail attributes her caring to the sensitivity she may have developed while growing up with a grandfather who was blind, and her own struggles with health difficulties. Regardless of the origins, Gail reports a strong sense of caring for each of her students, particularly those with special needs. Having experienced the loss of an aunt, to whom she was very close, Gail describes her ability to “feel with” Neil, who recently lost his father. She takes cues from him as to how much assistance or modification he will need at a given time.

Researcher: Okay, just to continue on the theme of the objectives you have in mind. What would you like to see Neil accomplish?

Gail: For Neil it’s an emotional hurdle that we’re trying to get through now. In the fall he was in Reading Recovery. It was building his confidence. He had very, very low self-esteem and didn’t want to try reading and now he feels good in the school environment and he feels good about making mistakes and trying reading. So we were successful with that but then, as I said, his father died suddenly in January and Neil is the one who found him on the floor. So for Neil getting him through to the end of the year emotionally and helping to deal with this goes far above the curriculum.
**Researcher:** So you wouldn’t … what would you have done with respect with his Little Red Hen today because I was over here? Would you nudge him a bit?

**Gail:** I would. You will see him in a daze sometimes and you wonder what he’s thinking and he wasn’t like that in the fall so my perception is it’s his father. He’s grieving. So, for instance, when they were over here and I was explaining what to do and he hadn’t even opened his book. All the other kids had it open, had the papers out and he was in this daze. So I just sort of stretched over, went over to him, opened it, found the pages, took it out for him and sort of brought him back to where we are which is what in the seat work I had to do. Again, when I’m scanning I look and I see he’s kind of glazed over and his eyes are getting watery and red and I’ll refocus him on the work but then throughout the day if he’s doing that a lot then we’ll take him aside and we’ll talk about it and what’s upsetting and we’ll get him to talk about his dad… But for a child who’s had such a loss this year certainly you’re going to keep him with the work and keep him focused but you can’t be too hard of him. You have to remember where his little mind is.

**Researcher:** So you sort of back off a little bit if he’s glazed over.

**Gail:** Yes. And I can’t even generally say that when he’s glazed over I’m going to go and refocus him. It’s difficult to describe but I might look at him and I might think, okay, he needs to be where he is right now. I’m going to leave him alone. I’m going to let him sit and think and think about whatever he’s thinking because he may be coming to grips. So I may let something pass. I may think the work I have in front of him right now when you think about it is that as important as what he’s dealing with inside his head and I may just forget about it and I’ll let him…

**Researcher:** And then when he sort of seems to be coming back in you’ll move in. So you’re judging.

**Gail:** Yeah. So you’re asking for exact, specific objectives of what you’re going to do when I take my cues from the children…

**Researcher:** I’m thinking what in your own mind you are trying to accomplish and one of them is to leave him to grieve sometimes, in as objective for him. And another one is to…

**Gail:** Refocus him so he isn’t lost in that grieving.

Gail’s classroom rules are displayed in a visible location in the classroom and help to convey the attitude of caring that she models in her class. They are:

1. We are all friends.

2. We are kind to each other.

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3. We don’t say, “I can’t,” we only say, “I’ll try.”

The rules reflect Gail’s understanding of the needs of her exceptional students, in particular. The rules are posted in the classroom as a reminder to the students of the expectations Gail has for each of them. However, Gail states that she is the strongest influencing model for behaviour in the classroom.

Gail models her acceptance of each class member by giving meaningful praise, particularly those students in her class for whom self-confidence is an issue. In discussing Kim, an at-risk student, Gail explained some of her methods for boosting confidence, creating warmth, and modeling acceptance to encourage risk-taking in the classroom.

Gail: My main goal for Kim was, certainly at the beginning of the year, was building that self-confidence, making her like herself, making her know that I like her and that she was welcome in my class. And I knew that it wasn’t until those gains were made would I then be able to work on the academic. So in the fall it was a lot of meaningful praise. Kids are great at figuring out what is phony.

Researcher: Oh yes, oh yes.

Gail: They know. It has to be meaningful praise. Lots of encouragement. Definitely show her that I make a lot of mistakes... I send home a lot of certificates with kids. I started that mostly because actually the children who don’t give problems or don’t have problems, I wanted to be sure I wasn’t ignoring them and focusing so much on the special needs kids that the quiet, little angel in the corner isn’t getting any reward or something. So usually on a Friday, I’d send home certificates with children, you know, just thanks for being so great all week with a sticker on it. I actually started those for those kind of children but with Kim and the other special needs kids, every time they made a little gain a certificate went home as well...

Researcher: You said your first objective was to make them feel good about themselves, self-concept and the reading and writing stuff only followed that because if you didn’t feel good about yourself you didn’t dare risk.

Gail: Yes. All learning is risk based. You can’t be afraid to make a mistake and if a child hasn’t got that self-confidence and if a child doesn’t feel secure in his or her environment they’re gonna hesitate. They’re not gonna try and sound out a word. They’re not gonna
take that risk because they’re afraid. They don’t think they can do it. But right from the beginning if you make them believe in themselves, if you make them believe that you believe in them, that’s what’s really important. Then they’re willing to start taking risks. Often in the fall what I do is I make a lot of mistakes in the fall intentionally.

**Researcher:** Deliberately.

**Gail:** Writing on the chart paper, reading to them, “Oh I read that wrong, oh well, you know, everybody makes mistakes.” That’s something I do. One of my focuses in September and October is that they see me makes mistakes and “Oh, it’s okay, I’ll just try it again.”

**Researcher:** So you’re modeling for them.

**Gail:** Yeah. A lot is modeling. Children really... children react to a child exactly how the teacher reacts. If I’m accepting of this child’s bizarre behaviour, I stay calm and it’s part of him, they will react the same way. So a lot is modeling. And look at it, we’re in April now. If you were in September and October you would see building to all this. You would see all the work, all the preparation. It didn’t run as smoothly in the fall. It was exhausting. It was exhausting.

By modeling risk-taking in the classroom and modeling for the students that it is acceptable to make mistakes, Gail shows that sense of caring for her students.

Another way that Gail cares for her students is by sharing herself with her students. By this, I mean that Gail gives her students a window into her life outside of school by sharing personal information with them. On the occasion when I observed Gail’s classroom, students were invited to go to the office to see a beautiful display of flowers from Gail’s garden. Throughout the year, she had talked about her love of gardening with them, and now was able to share the results of her work with them. A result of Gail’s caring for her students is their return of caring for her. When dealing with the issue of Neil losing his father, Gail recounted her personal story of losing her aunt to the class.
Gail: It helps because last June I lost my aunt and we were so close and she was at our house every other Sunday and I'm still grieving. So it helps because I know what, some of what he's going through and so I know sometimes I can't talk about it and sometimes I just go on and on. So I kind of know where he might be.

Researcher: Did you share that experience with him?

Gail: Oh I shared it with the class when we were reading one of the books and it was a time when I could talk about it and then I had to stop. And they were so sweet, they knew, you can't talk anymore. No. And we went on.

Researcher: Okay, so this really is part of the respect issue for you as well that you not only show them you make mistakes but you also show them that you have the same vulnerabilities that they do, the same feelings.

Gail: Yes. I talk about when I was a little girl and things that happened and Mitch with his brother, Mitch had this problem with his brother beating him up, and I had that same problem and I didn't address it to Mitch. I found a story and this is how I do it too and we talked about it and I said you know, when I was a little girl I was moved ahead in school a couple of years and my older brother failed a grade so his baby sister was now ahead of him in school and he used to beat me up when my mom and dad weren't around and it was just... and I talked about it with them and I said, but you know now, he's a daddy with four kids and he and I get along so beautifully, he is wonderful. And I do talk a lot about my own life, my feelings, and the kids get to know me as well as I'm getting to know them.

Gail considers it her responsibility to create a classroom where all students maintain dignity and respect. If she is able to achieve this, then she has managed to achieve one of her goals: to create a classroom where special needs or at-risk students are not readily identified from their typically achieving peers. Gail provides the same classroom activities for all students, but gives what she call 'boosters' to those students who may not be successful without assistance. During the Little Red Hen sequencing exercise, a booster may take the form of enlarging the print, marking after each step, printing words they may need on the board or top of the page, or moving all distractions.
off of a child’s desk so he or she is able to focus. Gail emphasizes the importance of subtlety in employing these techniques:

**Gail:** But again, our technique that we both (Gail and Maureen, the teaching assistant) have is to be sort of in the background. We don’t want the children to feel that they’re being centered out or that they’re overly different than the others. So we try to do things as subtly as we can.

Gail introduces the boosters by offering them as a choice to her students. By doing this, Gail makes the boosters available to all students, and gives her at-risk students control over their learning by having the opportunity to ask for something which is viewed as something special rather than as a modification which singles them out from their peers. By giving choices, she also avoids the trap of being the constant negative, correcting voice to her students.

**Researcher:** And the fact that three of the kids are having a white, large sheet and the others are having a green, small sheet won’t be a problem?

**Gail:** No, because we’ve done it. We do a word search with their spelling words and we started out where we asked, would you like me to blow it up? Would that be easier? And that was back in September and we actually didn’t blow it up for Kim. Some of them we didn’t in the beginning but they asked for it. So if the children ask for it we’ll do it.

**Researcher:** Or is they sort of give permission to...

**Gail:** Yeah.

**Researcher:** So they’re not feeling singled out, this is a special thing for them rather than...

**Gail:** Same with the highlighter. We ask him, would you like to use that? And Paul will just say, no thanks. And he will. We won’t do something that he doesn’t want. We won’t impose it on him.
Researcher: That's right.

Gail: It has to be so subtle.

Researcher: So one of the things I'll see you doing... that's really interesting. You're asking them ahead of time whether they'd like a modification.

Gail: Yeah.

Researcher: So they're in on choosing or being supported by an adaptation.

Gail: Paul will tell me. He'll say, "Leave me alone now." Because we have a stool that we use to sit unobtrusively beside the kids. It shifts very easily and we'll just pull up the stool and sit to help. But Paul will say sometimes, "Leave me alone." And right away I'm gone. I might say, "Well do you think you can do this on your own and make sure you're working?" And then I'm gone. He needs me away and I will do that. I will leave. I might say, "Okay, but I'll check back in 5 minutes, okay, and we'll see how you're doing." But he wants to be left alone and we listen to that. We have to respect their feelings.

The aspect of choice is apparent in a simple interaction between Gail and another at-risk student, Victor:

Gail: You're finished. Fabulous. What would you like me to write on there?

Student: Super.

Gail: Super.

Student: Maybe super work.

Gail: Super work. Wow, you're finished in perfect time.

Student: Now can I go read a book or something?

Gail: Okay class, if you're spelling is finished would you please sit in front of the rocking chair. That's excellent Kim. What would you like me to write on it?

Kim: Excellent work.
By having the opportunity to make choices, students have a vote of confidence from the teacher that says they are capable enough to have some control in their learning.

Gail is the classroom model of caring and respect in the way she chooses to handle behavior issues. During the lesson, there were instances where Gail made choices as to how to deal with particular behaviors. Her choices always maintained the dignity of her students. While the class was on the carpet area, Mitch was fidgeting and having difficulty focusing his attention on the directions. Gail was able to single Mitch out in a positive way:

**Gail**: Mitch, would you please sit up here behind Kim. I can’t see you at all from there. It’s so much nicer to talk to someone when you see their faces.

She maintained the same respectful attitude when dealing with Paul, who, during the course of the lesson, made a number of attempts to eat some of the paper on his desk. Gail didn’t make repeated reminders for him to stop eating the paper, singling him out as behaving strange or differently from his peers. She simply helped him organize himself so that he wasn’t presented with the temptation of extra paper lying around.

**Gail**: Yeah, you be careful. Paul, I’m gonna put your folder out of the way at the art table. Then when this work ...

And on another occasion:

**Gail**: Cutting the wheat. Okay, can you keep it at your desk for now Tom? Put you name on it please. Let’s take away those papers, Paul, so that you aren’t bothered by them.
In a similar situation, she supported Kim who was having difficulty maintaining her focus in the activity. Again, Gail did not verbally address the behavior, but gave Kim support by pointing out her correct responses so far, and helping her in organizing her work environment to encourage success.

Gail: That one’s right, that one’s right. You’re doing great so far. Okay, what have you got? Perfect. I’m gonna take these little scraps of paper away. Right. And they are kind of distracting, aren’t they, when you’re trying to read all the pieces? What do you think happens second? Okay, you read them over carefully and I’ll take these away.

Calibrating Instruction

Gail predicts the difficulty that at-risk students in her class may have with learning activities, and may make some subtle modifications to the activity. However, she uses the indicators given by the children to gauge her expectations and objectives for them in a particular lesson. In the transcripts of a lesson including the activity of sequencing the events of the story of The Little Red Hen, Gail provided each grade one student with the same activity, and each grade two with a corresponding but more challenging activity. However, subtle modifications, and frequent assistance for some students were ways that Gail changed the expectations for some students. While some students completed the activity with complete independence, Paul had some of his words printed for him to copy, and V received intermittent marking of his activity page to check his understanding, to help his confidence, and to increase his motivation to continue. Gail spent much of her time monitoring her at-risk students with short dialogues to assist or motivate them. We can see the little boost of support she gives to Kim, identified as at-risk for school failure, and Victor, identified as exceptional, in the following interaction:
Gail: Where's your booklet Kim?

Kim: That's not mine.

Gail: Okay, we'll just put it back here. Where's your booklet? Okay, I'm gonna tuck it out of the way Kim. Thanks. Here you go.

Kim: Is this how you spell picture?

Gail: Very close. You have the p sound. You actually don't need a pencil Kim. You're just cutting and gluing. Tom, would you please get a glue bottle for you and Kim. Thank-you. Sssh. Okay, let's just put this out of the way Victor so it doesn't distract you. It's easier to pull them apart. Okay, which do you think happened first.

The example above shows that Gail's understanding of her students extends beyond an understanding of their academic capabilities. She recognized that supporting them in organizing themselves and their environment assists them in succeeding at the academic activity.

Gail explains setting objectives for individual students:

Researcher: Do you have objectives for your language arts in mind that you kind of slot kids into and sort of nudge them or how does it work?

Gail: It is so very much individual. For one child I'll push them more, you can do this, do this at the end. I'll push them a little bit more.

Researcher: Because you think they have the capability.

Gail: Yes. Where as others, the ones that are at-risk, without letting them know or letting them feel it I actually in a way let them do a little less that what they're capable of yet they feel that they've done the same work as everyone else.

Researcher: So you're adapting your expectations according to not just the ability of the child...

Gail: Yes, but subtly, so that the child doesn't realize it. In Paul's mind he did exactly the same work.

Researcher: You actually said that.
Gail: As John and Cindy and everyone else in Grade 1 but I didn’t write the words out for everyone else and I wasn’t at their desk refocusing them. But in his mind he’s done the same thing.

Calibrating instruction allows the exceptional students in Gail’s classroom to fully participate all activities, and it assists Gail in accomplishing one of her main goals mentioned earlier: maintaining the invisibility of the exceptionalities that some of her students deal with. Prior to the lesson, Gail explained a strategy that she uses with Kim, and her other at-risk students, that is to check her work often and mark those that are correct. Gail offers praise to her to encourage her to continue, and redirects her when she is off track. Prior to the Little Red Hen activity, Gail explained that the sequencing activity would be difficult with Kim. During the lesson, Gail offered Kim these boosters, or invisible supports that she described in the pre-lesson interview.

Gail to Kim: Okay, which do you think happened first?

Kim: This one.

Gail: Great. Cut it out, glue it in the #1 position.

Shortly after, Gail offers Kim some marking:

Gail: That one’s right, that one’s right. You’re doing great so far. Okay, what have you got? Perfect. I’m gonna take these little scraps of paper away.

Throughout this conversation, Gail was supporting Kim to assist her in succeeding at the academic activity. Gail expressed her strong feeling that all children in the class have the benefit of seeing themselves as equals, part of her concern for the self-esteem and dignity
of each child. So, Gail’s differing expectations for each child takes the form of how they go about accomplishing an activity or acquiring a skill, ensuring that the activity or skill appears to be the same one their peers are attempting to achieve.

During her interactions with Paul, it became apparent that Gail had objectives for Paul that stretched beyond the academic sequencing activity of the morning. In an interview, Gail referred to her focus on Paul’s developing sense of humor and her desire to help him progress with this skill since the subtleties of social interaction can be so difficult with students who face the challenges of PDD. These are two of those interactions:

**Gail:** Paul, do your coloring after we finish gluing everything in the book. Then you can color because you’re good at coloring aren’t you? Okay, I want you to put the glue on it and glue it over here please.

**Paul:** On him?

**Gail:** No, on the back. Are you being funny? Were you being funny Paul?

**Paul:** I don’t know.

**Gail:** We’ve been talking about what’s funny and what’s a joke. I thought you were practicing being funny.

And on another occasion:

**Paul:** I put some hair on the “e”.

**Gail:** Hair on an “e”?

**Paul:** Yeah.

**Gail:** An “e” doesn’t have hair. Are you being funny? You’re making a joke? I think it’s funny Paul.
In the above example, Gail is attending to the development of Paul’s social skills showing that she calibrates to the academic and social development needs of her students.

**Self-regulated Learning**

One objective that Gail maintains for all students is to develop self-regulated learning. When I visited Gail’s classroom to observe, one student asked Gail how to spell a particular word. Gail’s response was that she didn’t know, but what she always did when she didn’t know how to spell a word was to check the dictionary. Although simple, this is an example of modeling the inner-dialogue that Gail uses when she is unsure of how to spell a word. For many students, especially special needs students, spelling a word correctly can be a problem-solving activity, so modeling the use of the dictionary is encouraging self-regulated learning. She also mentioned that the students could use the ‘Try It’ book. The ‘Try It’ book is not a commercial book, but a technique used by Gail to encourage students to make attempts at spelling a word before receiving assistance from a peer or the teacher. After the student has made three attempts to spell the word correctly, they compare their results with the correct spelling, given by the teacher. Gail reports that students are often surprised when they are correct or at how close they came to correctly spelling the word. In the following example, Gail emphasizes the purpose and benefits of the ‘Try It’ book with Paul:

**Gail:** Okay. Very good guess. Here you go. Please remember when you are finished put your name on it, then you may decorate your cover. Okay, Paul, are you writing something in your Try It book? What do you want to know how to spell?

**Peter:** Is this how you spell ‘weed’
Gail: Very, very close. There’s another e. That’s what the Try It book is good for. You can see how close you are at spelling.

Collaboration

Throughout the transcripts of interviews with Gail, she frequently mentions the involvement of support personnel, including those involved directly with instruction of students in the class, and those involved in a consultative role. Gail relies on the in-school team as a source for strategies, and as a sounding board for ideas she wants to try or has tried in the classroom.

Researcher: How do you find the resources, the adult resources for you, the team meeting resources and so on? Do they give you much or do you tend to know more than most people about the topic? Is it a good collaborative model?

Gail: It is. I think it is. They do treat, I must say they do treat me as very much a part of the team. They are respectful of the fact that I have taken a lot of courses and I have a lot of experience. So I don’t feel intimidated or anything else at the meetings.

Researcher: You’re not at the bottom of the heap.

Gail: No. I feel it is very much equals sitting and talking and trying to solve a problem.

Researcher: Good.

She also finds that the board level resource personnel can be supportive in providing formal assessments and suggesting strategies based on the results of the assessments. The following conversation includes some of the strategies suggested by the resource person, but the point of including the conversation is to show the involvement of a variety of people who work as a team to provide Paul’s educational program.
Gail: Now Paul’s mom we see on a regular basis and we just... I had a lengthy interview with her during the interview session and then last week, Monday, we had from 3:30 until almost 5:30, we met with the psychologist, the board level Autism resource person, and Maureen and the mom and dad and we were discussing the psychologist’s findings. She tested him in February maybe and we were discussing what she found.

Researcher: So this would be...

Gail: ...that verbally he was doing wonderfully but getting paper and pencil tasks and fine motor coordination...

Researcher: Keeping focussed, this is hard, very hard.

Gail: Oh yes. And she gave me some suggestions, things to do, the sequencing was one that I’m really working on now because she saw that as quite a weakness in him. It came up that sequencing stories would be good for him and we suggested that the parents, after they read a story, talk about what happened first, what happened second and third. This was actually the psychologist’s suggestion.

Paul’s parents were in attendance at the meeting mentioned in the previous paragraph. According to Gail, they are an important part of the team. In discussing a difficult family situation with one of the students in her class, Gail clarifies the way she views parents and their influence:

Gail: Yeah. This is it, poor mom. Moms are great at feeling guilty. They’re wonderful at feeling guilty. But this is the way it is and marriages break up and these things happen and at the same time you sort of have to counsel the mom through her grief and yet help K deal with it as well. So, you have to be understanding for both of them. They’re part of the package.

Researcher: I don’t think there are many teachers who say that parents are part of the package. That’s wonderful.

Gail: Yes, are they ever, are they ever. I’ve learned that if mom or dad are worried or stressed about something no matter how hard they try to keep it from their child the child picks up, the child picks up. So if you can work with the parents to calm their fears or to help them deal with whatever it is - that helps the child in the long run.

Researcher: So your class of 22 has just become 66, plus or minus.
In working with parents, Gail emphasizes the importance of regular contact. She accomplishes this by sending home school work, certificates indicating progress, phone calls and interviews.

Gail reports that she and Maureen have a fluency in the way they work together that allows them to change positions when they feel that it may help to calm what may otherwise be an escalating behavior situation, or when they feel that the other may be more successful in talking to a student. The following dialogue shows an example of this relationship as it exists in a classroom situation:

**Gail:** What happened to your cheek?

**Mitch:** My brother punched me.

**Gail:** Your brother punched you. Let me take a look. Mommy and Daddy, do they know?

**Mitch:** Yeah.

**Gail to Maureen** (quietly, away from students): Okay. Mitch has quite a scrape on his face. His brother did it. He was really brief with his answer to me so maybe some time today we can try and get a bit more out of him because I have to let the social worker know.

**Maureen:** Did it happen at home?

**Gail:** He wouldn’t tell me. He didn’t want to tell me much.

Shortly after this discussion between Gail and Maureen, Maureen approached Mitch and began working with him, for the dual purpose of assisting him with his work, and of attempting to acquire more information about the mark on his cheek. During the
interviews, Gail explains that she and Maureen conference throughout the day. They have an initial conference prior to the beginning of the school day, and continue to discuss issues that develop as the day continues. In a post-lesson interview, as Gail discusses her working relationship with Maureen as she explains their dialogue about Mitch which occurred earlier in the day.

Researcher: I saw you come back and talk to her about the kid who got a scar on his face or scratch on his face. She took over for you.

Gail: Yeah.

Researcher: So that’s kind of on-going...

Gail: We work... it’s the same with the grade 13 students. I think you all have to be part of a team. When one isn’t successful at whatever you’re trying to find out or in this case trying to get some information about that mark, if it was... because Children’s Aid had been brought into this family last year so I’m careful about whatever marks I see on him that look quite bad. So if I was not successful in getting any information then I subtly as one of the others and then the third person will try, whoever he might feel like opening up to. It may not be me. It may be someone else. And then we can get to the bottom of it.

Researcher: So that’s on-going.

Gail: Yeah.

In discussing a lesson about to take place, Gail continues to clarify the team aspect of her working relationship with Mary.

Gail: So Maureen will stay first thing in the morning with me ‘til, I think it’s 9:00, I lost track. And she will help take out Paul’s books, settle him, talk him in, now you are at school, let’s look at the list of what Miss L. said we’re doing today...

Researcher: So that he’s aware.

Gail: Yeah, she’ll talk him through. If she’s not here or is needed in the other room because of a problem with those boys then I do it. We work like a team when one sees the need we shuffle, we move in and out.
Researcher: So she would take over the class if you were dealing with Paul for example.

Gail: Yes.

Researcher: You just sort of pinch hit for each other.

Gail: Yeah.

Researcher: Great.

Gail: And what we've learned to do is that whoever the autistic child is... whoever delivers the bad news of something to an autistic child delivers it and vacates the scene right away.

Researcher: And leaves. Okay.

Gail: And the other one moves in to deal with the trauma over it.

Researcher: Because the person who has delivered the news is bad news.

Gail: Yeah. And the reaction will be very physical.

Gail uses Maureen and a grade 13 student to help her manage the difficulty of getting one-on-one assessment or conference time with individual students. Throughout the year, Gail groups students, divide the student groups between the adults, and work individually with students. By working collaboratively, Gail maximizes her teaching time, provides support to exceptional students, and shares the load educating the diverse group of students that combine to form her challenging class.

Leadership

Gail reports having a positive working relationship with the principal of the school, and feels that their philosophical alignment helps her as she tries to create an effective inclusive classroom.
Gail: I know I have a lot of resources out there. I know I'm not alone. In know if I have a problem who I can access and who to call. With Paul we meet with the board wide agency for autism once a month but again, I saw her last week for two hours. I know I can anytime.

Researcher: So there are external resources that you can also draw on.

Gail: Yes.

Researcher: How is the principal? Is he supportive of what you're doing?

Gail: Yes. He's new this year in September.

Researcher: He's very enthusiastic.

Gail: Yes, I felt that way. I feel that I can go to him and...

Researcher: Philosophically he'll support you?

Gail: Yes.

Researcher: In terms of what you're trying to do.

Gail: So far we haven't disagreed.

Researcher: Well he mentioned he would like to have done some in-service because he didn't think all the teachers on his staff had the same kind of philosophy.

Gail: He's done two actually.

Researcher: Has he?

Gail: And one in our staff meeting last week. Wednesday, after school, he invited a resource consultant in and she did about a half hour, a quick lesson on autism, PDD, Asberger's. These kids are in the school and...

Researcher: And to explain Asberger's?

Gail: Yes. So it was great that he set that time aside in a staff meeting.

Researcher: So the word is out that...

Gail: These kids are here.
Researcher: And we deal with them.

Gail: Yeah.

Researcher: Good.

Gail: So I do feel very good about him.

Gail mentioned some anecdotal examples of times when she asked the principal to assist in helping her deal with some of Paul's challenging behaviors, such as leaving the school without permission. Gail notes that she limits the number of times she asks for his involvement and limits it to occasions which she describes as serious. As a result, Gail feels that his involvement at these times has had some success.
CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Maximizing Teacher Time

Jordan and Stanovich (1998) have found that the literature on effective and exemplary teachers tends to focus on the decision making of teachers which allows them to concentrate on curricular and program objectives. Primarily, this includes literature on organizing and managing instructional time, classroom behaviour, lessons and seatwork. Effective teachers organize space and resources effectively, they introduce routines, they teach and model behaviour expectations to minimize time lost to disruptive behaviour, and they provide independent practice related to academic goals (Englert et al., 1992). Like Kevin, Sandi and Eva, three exemplary teachers in inclusive classrooms (Jordan & Stanovich, 1998), Gail employs many of the time and classroom management criteria suggested by Englert et al. (1992), of which a few are mentioned above. This allows her the opportunity to spend time with students who are experiencing difficulty.

Gail also manages the human resources in her classroom to maximize instructional time. She efficiently uses the time and skills of Maureen, a teaching assistant, to give at-risk students additional support. Having Maureen greet Paul and support him during the first few routines of the morning helps to set Paul on the right track for the day, and minimizes the potential classroom disruptions that may arise if he was not supported during this first transition of the day. Gill regularly uses students in the class to assist her in monitoring the on-task behaviour of special needs students. By giving students some of the ownership of providing their classmates with gentle encouragement to maintain on-task behaviour, Gill reduces some of the strain she feels as classroom manager. This strategy is
successful in allowing her to focus more on instructional interactions with students and less on management concerns.

Ownership and Responsibility

Gail expressed her sense of personal responsibility for the education of each child in the class, specifically the special needs or at-risk students in her care. Her commitment to them is evident in her continued professional development and her efforts to collaborate with numerous people. Her in-depth knowledge of PDD achieved through extensive professional development makes Gail unique from the exemplary teachers in the Jordan and Stanovich (1998) study.

As a result of reflecting on her practice, her interaction with students, and their success at achieving objectives, Gail carried out numerous small experiments in the classroom. In her classroom, she became an applied researcher, setting up hypotheses, experimenting, and judging the results. Her sense of responsibility involves a continual search for effective strategies, and a long term investment of time to see them through. She shows her awareness of the fact that a large investment of time and effort may be required to make even small gains toward objectives, especially with at-risk or exceptional students. Kevin echoes this sense of responsibility when he explains that the worst thing a teacher can do is to give up on a child (Jordan & Stanovich, 1998). The evidence of Gail’s efforts with Paul in this study show her level of commitment and sense of responsibility to exceptional students. Today, many educators struggle with commitment of time it takes to perform the many aspects of an increased workload. It is quite remarkable that Gail would agree to take Paul’s class a second year, knowing that it

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would involve an increase in preparation which translates into a significant amount of extra work.

Caring

**Empathy.** Noddings (1984) describes caring as “seeing and feeling with” others. Many of Gail’s interactions with her students show this ability to walk in another’s shoes. Although Noddings prefers the term “caring”, empathy is a term that is often used to describe this ability to feel with others. For this reason, the term caring will be used to characterize a number of Gail’s interactions, while others will be included under specific headings under the umbrella of caring.

From the rules posted on the wall of Gail’s classroom, one can infer that Gail understands the difficulty exceptional children have with the subtle social skills involved in acquiring friendships, the incidence of cruelty towards children who are challenged with exceptionalities, and the reluctance to try, to risk failure, that exceptional students often display. To show empathy for the difficulties her students face, Gail often uses personal anecdotes to let them know they are not alone in their challenges. Part of her teaching includes an invitation to her students to share in some of her personal interests and experiences. All three exemplary teachers in the Jordan and Stanovich study (1998) shared personal anecdotes and reflections on their own childhood experiences with their students. This process of looking into the personal aspects of life, which influence the professional development of educators is a key element of improving professional practice (Knowles & Cole, 1994). Gail’s students were feeling with her as she became emotional in recounting the story of her aunt. Perhaps Mitch was able to feel a little less alone by knowing that his
teacher had experienced some similar trials to the ones he had in his own life. The sense of
caring, or “feeling with” the student is certainly evident in Gail’s interactions with Neil,
who recently lost his father. Gail is not able to articulate when she will modify objectives
for Neil, and when she will push him towards more challenging objectives. Because she
feels with Neil, she has an intuition about what he will be able to handle at a given time.
This sense of caring permeates Gail’s interactions with her students.

Gail sees one of her goals as minimizing the distinguishing noticeable differences
between her at-risk or exceptional students and her regular students, while maximizing
their acceptance in the classroom. Gail feels that some of her strong desires for
exceptional needs students to have sincere feelings of acceptance in the classroom stem
from her growing up with a grandfather who was blind. She avoids labeling children,
seeing them as more than the definition of the exceptionality they may have. Perhaps
some of this sensitivity may also arise from the fact that Gail has some health concerns.
She is afflicted with both asthma and a rare blood disorder. In combination, they increase
feelings of fatigue.

Choice. One way in which Gail is unique in her calibration of instruction for
students, is that she makes available certain boosters or helps to all students. Those
students who wish to have the support have the choice to ask for it, and it does not appear
as if they are receiving special treatment. Gail has found that those students who
genuinely need the assistance are those who ask for the boost. Jordan and Stanovich
(1998) argue that the exemplary teachers in their study see the development of
independence of learners as a primary objective and they use their knowledge about the
self-concept, emotional, social and cognitive characteristics of each student to adapt their
practice to reach this objective. Gail mentions that her first objective is to make students feel good about themselves so they will begin to start taking risks as learners and be able to accept the inevitable mistakes they will make along the way.

Examples of providing students with choice come under the heading of caring for one particular reason. The learning difficulties often experienced by special needs students may lead to frustration and low self-esteem. Gail recognizes these tendencies and attempts to minimize these feelings for her students by providing boosters that appear to be nothing more than a special perk offered to all students who ask for them. By predicting her students’ reactions to certain situations, she shows that she is able to feel with them. Providing students with choices gives them the confidence boost of being in control of their learning, which must feel infinitely more satisfying for students than the frustration of learning difficulties.

**Maintaining student dignity.** Like Kevin and Eva, Gail fosters the acceptance of students by preserving their dignity when she deals with classroom behaviour. Both Kevin and Gail try to emphasize the positive when encouraging students to take responsibility for their behaviour. Kevin concentrates on giving positive feedback to students while Gail uses other peer models to encourage positive behaviour choices in the classroom. Kevin comments on the benefits of this approach in encouraging the social acceptance of exceptional or at-risk students in the class. He explains that when he reacts with humor and understanding toward a student who is disruptive, the reaction of the rest of the class toward the student is likely to be the same (Jordan & Stanovich, 1998). He maintains the dignity and acceptance of the student by handing the responsibility for behaviour to the student.
In Gail’s classroom, the acceptance of Paul by other students in the class was apparent. Although he displayed some inappropriate behaviour, students encouraged Paul to remain on-task and assisted him in participating in all activities. Gail commented on the amount of time it took to build that accepting situation by constantly displaying to the class her acceptance of Paul, and her unconditional care for him despite his sometimes disruptive behaviour.

**Calibrating Instruction**

Gersten (1990) suggests that a focus of research should be on assisting teachers with on the spot decision making regarding the instruction of their special needs and at-risk students. It is logical then, that this instructional decision making would be based on the teacher’s detailed knowledge of individual students and their learning needs. To achieve her objectives for students, specifically for Paul and Neil, Gail’s strategies resemble those described by Eva, which she describes as “nudging”. To “nudge” a student, a teacher holds objectives for the student, but the objectives are on sliding tracks or channels. When a student shows the emotional, social and cognitive capacity to progress toward the next level on the sliding track, the teacher will push them forward, through questioning and prompting. On a day or moment when the teacher predicts the student may be emotionally or socially vulnerable, the teacher will back off a bit until the student shows readiness (Jordan & Stanovich, 1998).

The teacher’s ability to predict the student’s reaction in a given situation is a critical skill in calibrating instruction. Without a knowledge of the student, his or her circumstances and history, the teacher would be unable to make an accurate prediction. The literature on effective teaching suggests that teachers must respond to the interests,
needs and capabilities of their students (Englert et al., 1992). Shulman (1987) suggests that teacher knowledge of student prior knowledge and skills, conceptions, misconceptions, motives, difficulties, language and culture are all necessary in enabling the teacher to fit material to the characteristics of the students. The term for tailoring or fitting the material to specific students is called adaptation, and Shulman argues that it be a part of the repertoire of teachers. However, there is no specific discussion in the literature on effective teaching on how teachers come to be in tune with the social and emotional, and well as academic needs of their students. Perhaps the specific skill of uncovering this kind of student knowledge is an area that could be further explored, as it is an essential first step in enabling a teacher to make accurate predications about student reactions to situations.

Uncovering specific student information through communicating effectively with parents is one area in which Gail shows her expertise. Although she was not observed communicating with parents, her descriptions of her interactions with them characterized the valuable and necessary relationship she maintains with them. Effectively communicating with parents and predicting student responses based on student history information are skills that are often found absent in preservice teacher education programs. Sabers et al. (1991) believe that experts could be used to assist preservice teachers to begin to learn how to constantly monitor their environment, and more importantly, to develop the ability to interpret what is happening within the environment. Further development of these subjects in the literature on effective teaching may encourage teacher education programs to incorporate them into existing programs.
Like Gail, Kevin and Sandi both use the strategy of modeling to encourage their students to take risks. When these teachers explain to students what they do when they encounter a problem, and model the self-talk that they go through to solve that problem, they encourage the independence of learners in their classrooms. By modeling and thinking aloud the thoughts and strategies of more expert members of the classroom community, these teachers are promoting a classroom dialogue for self-regulated learning (Englert et al., 1992)

Gail uses her knowledge of individual students when deciding what macro-level strategies to employ in the classroom. Her decisions regarding Peter reflect this. She knows that development of social skills is a broad goal for Peter, so she creates a classroom where there is the freedom and opportunity for him to interact with his peers. She knows that self-concept is a precursor for risk-taking with her at-risk students, so she praises regularly and models risk-taking. In a study of exceptional teachers of primary literacy, Wharton-McDonald and Mistretta Hampston (1998) explained that in three outstanding classrooms they observed, the classrooms were filled with the message that students can and will learn. This is the atmosphere of Gail’s classroom, with the understanding that all students may not learn the same way at the same time.

Gail’s efforts to help her students develop confidence in themselves as learners are aligned with the arguments of Larrivee (1985) who discusses six classes of important student outcome variables by which to measure the success of integration of exceptional students in regular classes, four of which are in the social and personal domains (peer acceptance, classroom behavior, school attitude, self-concept). Gail includes outcomes in the personal and social areas for her students. Gail has a sense of the capability of each
child, including their development in social and personal areas. Each day, or during each
lesson, she judges their capability, and fine tunes her instructional questions and comments
accordingly.

**Self-regulated Learning**

Gail uses detailed knowledge about individual students as a foundation for her
decision making, but her motivation for doing so comes from a deep sense of caring and
responsibility for each student in her care, particularly for those special needs and at-risk
students in her class. Perhaps a positive correlation exists between sharing personal
information with students, and using the think-aloud strategies of modeling. Is dialoguing
about personal interests and experiences a precursor to dialoguing about cognitive
strategies? Expanding the research in this area may help teachers understand the initial
steps involved in creating classroom communities and encouraging self-regulated learning.
This is an example of an area where the objective will be different for each student, even
different for each activity based on individual abilities. However, Gail has some strategies
that encourage all students to become self-directed learners. Teachers assist students in
creating a language for thinking, problem-solving and self-directed learning when they
model the inner-dialogue they use in their own cognitive processes (Englert et al., 1992).
Gail uses this strategy to invite students, sometimes a specific reluctant student, into the
learning process.

The Try It book promotes self-regulated learning because it encourages
independence. It also allows Gail to calibrate to the individual needs of students. While
Paul may be using the Try It book for words like “the” and “for”, words that may be

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difficult for him to spell other students may use it for more difficult words that they find personally challenging.

**Collaboration**

Thomas (1986) discusses the importance of support personnel to assist the classroom teacher in providing effective instruction for students who are experiencing learning difficulties. Gail works together with all of the human resources available to her. Her partnership with Maureen is particularly helpful in working with Paul. Their alignment in attitude toward working with a special needs student like Paul, which focuses on his strengths rather than weaknesses, allows them to efficiently use very short conversations throughout the day to monitor, reflect and plan. Not only is Gail aware of the resource personnel at the school and board level, she makes use of their services by asking for board personnel to suggest strategies.

Gail's description of working with parents suggests that she sees students as part of a family. Gail recognizes that some mothers of her students have needs which they appreciate talking about with their child's teacher. By exercising the support of listening, Gail is able to let parents know that she cares about them as a family, and she is also able to gain valuable information about the home life of the student in the family. The relationship that she develops with parents is one of her most important collaborative efforts. Collaborating with parents may increase the likelihood that Gail is able to build a program for students which parents can attempt to reinforce at home. Part of Gail's effectiveness at creating a collaborative partnership with parents is the effort she makes to focus on the strengths of the students. Parents of special needs students may have experienced the disappointment of continually being faced with what their children cannot
do. The positive notes, certificates and phone calls that Gail provides may be viewed as a sign of caring and genuine concern by parents, making them more likely to enter into a partnership with her. When this is the case, the teacher, the parents and the student can only benefit from the results.

Leadership

Jordan (1994) discusses the use of an in-school resource team in helping to provide a classroom teacher with strategies for managing the instruction of special needs students. Part of this process may involve a focus on managing disruptive behaviour which may occur in the classroom. As the likely leader of this resource team, the principal is in a position to provide leadership in these areas. Gail reports her satisfaction in working with a principal who supports her efforts in the classroom, and who also provides support in managing difficult behaviour. The principal displayed his support of Gail’s efforts and his belief in an inclusive model of education by providing professional development activities for his staff in these areas. Gail’s principal has provided a positive impact in her efforts as an exemplary inclusive educator.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The importance of modeling in teaching is expressed by Borko, Livingston, and Shavelson (1990). If it is an essential quality of effective instruction, it is logical that this strategy would be used in the instruction of preservice teachers. Exposing preservice teachers to classrooms where exceptional and at-risk students are accepted, respected and cared for, as well as challenged academically could be a useful opportunity for the preservice teacher to develop inclusive teaching skills and shape beliefs. The opportunity to see another teacher conducting applied research, reflecting, engaging in continuous
professional development, and collaborating could be an enormously valuable learning experience for the preservice teacher. Although Pajares (1992) suggests that belief systems, once set, are nearly impossible to change, the research of Cushing et al. (1992) argues that novice teachers will rely on the teaching routines already in place in a classroom. If the routines they observe are covert adaptations to individual student needs, and they are given the opportunity to employ and reflect on this kind of practice, the prognosis for passing on these valuable beliefs and skills may improve. If preservice teachers could observe the efficiency and partnership of the collaborative relationship Gail shares with Maureen, and how their complementary style of working together influences the behaviour and academic success of special needs students in the class, the motivation for a preservice teacher to replicate such a desirable situation may increase. Perhaps some consideration should be given by school jurisdictions to create an incentive for exemplary teachers in inclusive classrooms to become mentors to preservice teachers.

Jordan and Stanovich (1998) offer a strong sense of moral authority for the classroom to include students with disabilities as part of the success of the exemplary teachers in their study. Of course a relationship like the one between Gail and her grandfather is impossible to replicate, but perhaps preservice training could offer teachers some experience in developing a relationship with a special needs individual. The effort would be to offer the opportunity for teachers to develop some empathy for exceptional students, and perhaps some sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning when a relationship exists between them in the classroom. A greater emphasis in teacher education programs on the broad spectrum of experiences which influence career choice and development may be valuable. Perhaps a sense of caring and responsibility lies
uncovered in the past experiences of many educators, waiting to be tapped through reflection and self-study.
References


