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CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF EDUCATORS WHO TEACH STUDENTS WITH NORMATIVE EXCEPTIONALITIES

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Theory and Policy Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Critical Success Factors of Educators Who Teach Students with Normative Exceptionalities

Department of Theory and Policy Studies
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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this research was to conduct a case study of a school whose program is geared to meeting the needs of students with normative exceptionalities and to elicit critical success factors (CSFs) of teachers, support staff and administrators. Critical Success Factors are "key areas where things must go right in order to successfully achieve objectives and goals" (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p.9). The four year study consisted of interviewing twenty respondents from an urban school in a large metropolitan school board. The students at the school range in age from 4 to 21 years. Many of them have physical disabilities (e.g., require wheelchairs) in addition to their cognitive challenges. All of them have been identified as exceptional, developmentally handicapped through the Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process.

The research used two forms of methodologies: interviews and a technical procedure designed to help participants identify critical success factors. The results from the study document different stories of successful and unsuccessful school experiences from teachers, support staff and administrators. These stories gave rise to the following nine factors that were identified as critical to the success of students at the school: staff, program, curriculum, parents, administration, educational assistants, technology, training, and health services. The study also discussed long and short term program goals, factors that facilitate or hinder success and staff perceptions of student success.

The findings indicated distinct perspectives about the respondents' purpose, roles and responsibilities at the school. This was evident from the following four major themes that emerged from the data: independence, beliefs about students with normative exceptionalities, beliefs about curriculum and beliefs about collaboration. These findings were supported by the literature in the field. The implications of this study can be used by the administrators to address areas that are critical for student success and also to implement approaches that address the disparity of assumptions and beliefs among staff at the school.
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Chapter One

Introduction

In recent years, the provincial government has given a great deal of attention to educational restructuring of schools in Ontario. The goal of this broad initiative is to promote successful learning experiences for all students (Ministry of Education and Training, 1997). Within Ontario many school boards operate programs for students who have been identified as needing a "special education." Administrators and staff in these programs face the challenge of ensuring that the needs of students with normative exceptionalities are addressed through effective school programs. These individuals require information that will help them to determine whether or not objectives and goals are being met within the school organization. Their work is further complicated by the different expectations, beliefs or perspectives that they share when trying to educate these students. In this context, administrators may not have the data required to make decisions that will lead to successful student results. This study addresses this problem by examining a way to identify factors that influence effective school practices and gain insight into the how staff understand their role in working with these students.

This study is about the identification and description of Critical Success Factors (CSFs) by teachers, support staff and administrators who deliver programs to students with normative exceptionalities. Critical Success Factors are "key areas where things must go right in order to successfully achieve objectives and goals" (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p.9).

Tomlinson, a researcher from England, (1982) identified two categories of exceptional students, "non-normative" and "normative." The "non-normative" group consists of students who have been classified on the basis of criteria which are neither locally nor universally agreed upon. These students are classified with labels such as "learning disabled," "attention deficit disorder," "gifted" and so forth. It is harder to reach a common consensus of exceptionality with this student population. Within the normative group are students with communication, vision, physical/health and developmental needs. Tomlinson believes that this group of students have been classified using "norms or criteria that were objectively applied" (Tomlinson, 1982, p. 55).
The students in this study are identified within the low-incidence category of children with exceptionalities. Oderkirk (1993) calculated a figure of 3% of children in Canada who would belong to this category. Within this group, more boys are likely to be exceptional than girls (Weber & Bennett, 1999, p. 32). Children with normative exceptionalities often require services from a range of professional disciplines (Weber & Bennett, 1999, p. 29). In Ontario it has been difficult to accurately document the number of students who receive special education. School boards have used different criteria in their classification of special education students (Weber, 1993). According to Weber and Bennett (1999) 9.24% of Ontario students were identified exceptional (p. 30). It is also important to note that approximately 50% of this number include students who have been identified as being Learning Disabled (Weber & Bennett, 1999, p. 32). The remaining students can be seen as students with normative and non-normative exceptionalities. Carrier (1986) also supported this distinction through the following remark:

Handicapped children are not the same as children in special education— an important distinction to make because the bulk of children in special education would not be considered handicapped outside of school (p. 288).

Effective leadership in special education requires the organization of a number of individuals who must come together for a single purpose. School administrators are given the responsibility of ensuring that staff within the school work collectively towards commonly agreed upon goals and objectives. Since students with normative exceptionalities demonstrate different characteristics, it is critical for administrators to provide staff with a clear vision of what is viewed as success. These leaders need to clearly understand and demonstrate what factors are necessary to educate these students successfully. School administrators need this information to focus on key areas and themes which have an effect on student achievement. This point is at the heart of the current study.

The interest of the researcher in this area stems from his involvement with students who have special needs. As an undergraduate student, he volunteered in schools that taught students with normative exceptionalities. He had an opportunity to work with teachers and support staff within a number of urban schools. While pursuing a Bachelor of Education degree, the researcher took additional Special Education courses that
focused on addressing the needs of these students. After completing the Bachelor of
Education program, the researcher enrolled in a program that focused on teaching
students who are deaf. A Qualifying Research Paper on the issue of integrating these
students into regular classes was successfully completed as part of a Masters of
Education program. Since becoming an educator, the researcher has taught students
who are deaf and students who have normative exceptionalities. As a Resource Leader
in one of these settings, the researcher worked with staff to ensure that comprehensive
programs were being provided for these students.

From working in these schools, it became clear that practitioners are dedicated to
providing students with skills that are seen as important to their education. However, the
researcher has experienced discrepancies among these educators and support staff
about what constitutes effective teaching practices and learning outcomes for students
with normative exceptionalities. As a result, the need to examine the expectations and
beliefs of those who are responsible for teaching these students because they affect
classroom interactions and learning processes became apparent. Currently, the
researcher is the principal of a large urban elementary school in Ontario. The school has
students who have normative exceptionalities. As the instructional leader at the school,
the researcher ensures that staff support the goals and objectives that have been
established for these students.

The Statement of Purpose

This research identified and analyzed Critical Success Factors of a group of
teachers, support staff and administrators in a school whose program is geared to
meeting the needs of students with normative exceptionalities. The primary research
question was:

*What are the Critical Success Factors that teachers, support staff and
administrators identify to successfully meet the needs of students with normative
exceptionalities?*

Towards this end, the study contains staff findings related to successful school
experiences, unsuccessful school experiences, short and long term student goals, factors
that promote or hinder success, differences in the perception of successful student
experiences among the respondents, and identified Critical Success Factors.
**Research Questions**

The specific research sub-questions are:

1. What do school staff view as successful school experiences for students with normative exceptionalities and what accounts for their success?
2. What do school staff view as unsuccessful school experiences for students with normative exceptionalities and what accounts for the lack of success?
3. What are the short and long term goals for students with normative exceptionalities?
4. What factors are associated with success and what factors hinder success?
5. Are there differences in the perception of what is viewed as successful school experiences among staff who work with these students?
6. What critical success factors have been identified by the respondents to meet the school’s goals and are there differences in CSFs among staff groups?

**Critical Success Factors**

The strategy of Critical Success Factors was used in order to obtain consistent information for this case study. The strategy was first introduced by Daniel (1961) as a way for business managers to focus on factors which are required in order for an organization to succeed. Rockart (1979), at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, used the method in order to pinpoint factors which business executives see as critical to meeting personal and organizational goals. He saw the need for chief executives to define their own data needs. This focus was important for organizational management and decision making.

In recent years, special education has been faced with legislative changes which are aimed at ensuring appropriate services for all students with exceptionalities (Sage & Burrello, 1986). The challenge for the local special education school is to operate successfully within an environment that features discontinuity and variety (Mintzberg, 1973). There is a need to bring goals and objectives to the forefront rather than reacting to
situations brought upon by various groups with differing goals and intentions (Burrello & Zadnik, 1986). Towards this end, the identification of Critical Success Factors is seen as a way to influence and guide practice so that staff can focus and manage the key critical areas which address the needs of the students.

Burrello and Johnson (1984) applied this strategy to special education administrators in an American Midwestern state. They found that, although differences exist between the corporate world and special education environments, there were sufficient similarities to make it possible to still utilize the CSF strategy. Their in-depth interviews with 15 special education administrators yielded 28 CSFs. These factors were then categorized into four themes. The first theme dealt specifically with determining program effectiveness. "Special education must demonstrate that it is providing instructionally effective programs and services that promote student growth in three areas: academic, behavioural, and social" (Sage & Burrello, 1986, P. 367).

The second theme dealt with human resource management. Within this area, the focus was on directing, developing and supporting staff to have realistic goals and expectations for students. The third theme dealt with Community relations and leadership. The administrators emphasized the importance of portraying special education in a positive manner. The respondents believed that parents of children with exceptionalities should feel that worthwhile things are happening within special education environments. There was also an express need for leaders in special education settings to consider the full scope of education when making decisions. An emphasis was placed on balancing external and internal community factors. The fourth theme dealt with parent involvement. Burrello and Johnson (1984) support the effective school research studies which state that "parent involvement is meaningful and in substantive ways is positively related to higher student performance" (Cuban, 1984, pp. 129-151). These four themes serve as a point of reference when examining Critical Success Factors of a representative sample of teachers, support staff and school administrators who deliver programs to students with normative exceptionalities in exclusive school settings (Sage & Burrello, 1986, pp. 149-153).
The Delimitations

The research was based on one specialized segregated school, in an urban setting, during a period of four school years. All students at the school were identified by an Identification Placement and Review Committee as being exceptional and a decision was made to place them in a special school setting (Ontario Education Act & Sections, IPRC Regulation 181). This study did not intend to determine whether or not youngsters with normative exceptionalities should remain in segregated school settings. It was also not designed to address the issue of segregated versus integrated instructional environments for these students. The opinions about the integration/inclusion debate were not collected as part of the data unless participants spontaneously alluded to them. The focus was on the views expressed by teachers, support staff and administrators about CSFs as they perceived their own school environment and relationships.

Definition of Terms

In an effort to avoid misunderstandings, it is necessary to define key terms that are used in this study. The terms "exceptional student", "special education program" and "special education services" were defined as documented under the Ontario Education Act, Revised Statutes of Ontario, 1990. The Education Act defines "exceptional student" as:

a student whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he/she is considered to need placement in a special education program by a committee.

"Special education program" means:
in respect of an exceptional student, an educational program that is based on and modified by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation and that includes a plan containing specific objectives and an outline of educational services that meets the needs of the exceptional pupil.

"Special education services" means:
facilities and resources, including support, personnel and equipment, necessary for developing and implementing a special education program.

"Normative exceptionality" means:
children placed in school programs on the basis of norms or criteria that were objectively developed and universally applied (Tomlinson, 1982).
"Segregated students" means:
Students who are designated as exceptional under Ontario Reg 554/81 and who receive their education in a special school. These students have access to specialized support, and expertise.

"Transition Plan" means
A plan that is required for students 14 year of age or older whose program "includes modifications to orientation and exit programs and linkages to post secondary institutions, outside agencies, and community partners, to help student gain access to post secondary institutions, outside agencies, and community partners, to help students gain access to post secondary options and supports that will help them gain access to theses options" (Toronto District School Board. IEP Manuel p. 15, 1998).

Abbreviations Used in this Study

CSFs is the abbreviation used for Critical Success Factors. These are key areas of activity in which favourable results are absolutely necessary for a particular manager to reach his or her goals.

IPRC is the abbreviation used for Identification, Placement and Review Committee. This committee of school officials look at students who are thought to have special needs. They decide whether or not the student has an exceptionality. They also recommend an appropriate placement for the students’ education. Periodically, a review of the decision takes place. Parents/guardians are involved in this process.

IEP is the abbreviation for Individual Education Plans. The Individual Education Plan is written after thirty instructional days for students who have been identified by an Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC). It is a working document which describes the strengths and needs of an individual student. Services established to meet the pupil’s needs and how those services will be delivered are outlined in the plan.

Significance of the Study - Normative Exceptionalities

The study provides insight for teachers, support staff and administrators who are trying to meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities. It did this by giving educators an opportunity to reflect upon what is required to successfully teach students who have exceptionalities. This reflection is important because of recent Ontario Provincial restructuring initiatives (Royal Commission on Learning (1994). One aspect of these initiatives focused on how best to educate students with exceptionalities. The description of what brings about successful practice benefit the increasing number of teachers,
support staff and administrators who teach students with normative exceptionalities. This increase is partly due to the current movement towards including more of these students in regular school settings (Stainback & Stainback, 1992).

The study also illuminated specific factors that a group of special educators saw as being critical for success. These factors can impact on how administrators plan and organize the learning environment for these students. They also serve to point out areas that need to be addressed by the administrators at the school.

Thirdly, the study generated information about how three staff groups at a school perceive their work with students with exceptionalities and what assumptions they hold about their roles and responsibilities in working with these students. As Gartner and Lipsky's (1987) study indicates, special education teachers have adhered to a medical tradition by seeing their students as having a disability which is based on the pathological makeup of the student. This pathological way to look at students have been described by Wilson and Silverman (1991) as "restorative." The focus is medical or clinical in nature and carries with it assumptions about the dominance of the disability in shaping educators' responsibilities in working with them.

Another way to look at the issue, however, is through an inclusive approach as outlined by many researchers (Daniels, 1990; Graden, Casey, & Christenson, 1985; Hahn, 1989; Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997, pp. 52-60; Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar, & Diamond, 1993; Lipsky & Gartner 1997; Stainback & Stainback, 1995; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1987). This approach views student problems as resulting from the interaction of the student with their learning environment. This view is also known as the ecological or inclusionary perspective, which focuses on what can be done to the learning environment to remove barriers to student learning and participation.

Finally, findings of the study can help to shape curriculum guidelines and influence the development of mission statements for those who work with students with normative exceptionalities. This information is crucial to the effective leadership of school administrators. The themes identified can be used to highlight areas within the school organization that are critical to the success of these students.

**Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is comprised of eight chapters: Introduction; Review of the Related
Literature; Design and Methodology; Case Study - The School Site; Research Findings; Discussion of Results; Summary and Conclusions. In Chapter One, Introduction, a general background of Special Education in Ontario is given. The research questions directing the study are presented. The strategy of Critical Success Factors is described and the significance of the study is outlined.

In Chapter Two, Review of the Related Literature, a comprehensive examination of related material is presented in order to assist in working through the problem for research. This material is divided into four sections: A Historical perspective of Special Education in Ontario, Special Education Programs for students with normative exceptionalities; Effective Schools and Educational Indicators of Success, and Critical Success Factors in Special Education.

Chapter Three, The School Study Site, provides a detailed overview of the school being studied. The school's community, students, staff, programs and philosophy are presented as a narrative.

Chapter Four, Design and Methodology has two main sections. The first describes the research design; the sampling procedures; and interview selection and process. The second section describes the Interview Guide, focus group meetings and the treatment of data based on the research questions.

The fifth and six chapters are based on the results of findings from the interviewed respondents. Chapter Five presents the results of a qualitative analysis of classroom teachers, support staff and administrative personnel. Chapter Six includes findings of a procedure that elicited Critical Success Factors. This chapter also includes results based on a "focus group" meeting about critical success factors.

Chapter Seven provides discussion and analysis of the findings. References are also made to current related literature. Major themes that emerged from the thesis are discussed in relation to areas of differences among and within the three groups of participants.

The final chapter, Summary and Conclusions is a consolidation of the research the findings from the perspective of the original research questions. Conclusions are provided, implications for practice are suggested and further areas of research are identified.
Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

This chapter is divided into four sections: An Historical Perspective of Special Education; Special Education Programs for Students with Normative Exceptionalities; Effective Schools and Educational Indicators of Success; and Critical Success Factors in Special Education. These sections provide a frame of reference for responding to the research problem and questions. Patterns, categories and themes emerged from the related literature review which became central to this investigation.

An Historical Perspective of Special Education

An historical perspective provided a context for understanding the development of special education in North America. Knowing how students with normative exceptionalities were taught in the past provides background information for discovering Critical Success Factors for these students in the present special education system. In general, the related literature shows a gradual movement towards providing resources to meet the needs of these students. Several researchers and historians have documented stages of development in special education.

Kirk and Gallagher (1985) outlined four historical stages in the education of children with normative exceptionalities. They called the first stage pre-Christian. It was the period in Europe and North America before 1900. During this time, negative labels were used to describe these children. Names such as: 'idiots and imbeciles,' 'mentally defective,' 'severely subnormal,' 'severely retarded' and 'educationally subnormal' were openly used (Davis, 1930). They were thought of as unnecessary burdens on society (Scheerenberger, 1985).

This labeled group of youngsters were generally scorned and excluded from general society (Lindsay, 1935). This negative attitude caused many of them to experience neglect, maltreatment and persecution (Lindsay, 1935). Little attention was given to their human qualities or their potential for employment and community life (Gaylord-Ross & Holvoet, 1985). Schooling for these children was not seen as a reasonable option at the time.
Education at this time was viewed as being reserved for the wealthy. It was unrealistic for the majority of school-age children to attend school much less children with normative exceptionalities. These students did not receive the provisions that were eventually given to children with vision, hearing or physical handicaps in the 1800s. The medical model of care was given to those with visible handicaps and schools such as the Winnipeg School for the Deaf and the Frederick Fraser School for the Blind in Halifax were established to serve students with these handicaps.

Unfortunately, children who had other serious exceptionalities suffered a grim fate. They were often neglected or abandoned. It was common for them to be left to die (Davies. 1930, pp. 14-15). Superstitions and social satire were also factors which prevented children with exceptionalities from being educated. Many people of the day regarded these children as witches and sorcerers who were to be persecuted because their exceptionalities were seen as a result of their sins or the sins of their parents. Others saw these children as clowns or village idiots. They were used for entertainment purposes at freak shows and other venues of amusement. Fortunately, other enlightened reformers created a more humane attitude towards these children. And even though some individuals and groups viewed this as heresy, the perception of children with exceptionalities slowly began to change.

Pioneering work of doctors and scientists resulted in new ways to interact with children with exceptionalities. The psychologist, Dr. Jean Marc Gaspard Itard’s attempt to educate the ‘Wild Boy of Averyron’ in 1799 received considerable attention. The now popular story of the capture of ‘Victor’ in the Woods in Southern France is well documented. Dr. Itard was given permission to work with this 11 or 12 year old who exhibited exceptional behaviour. Itard believed that the boy’s bizarre behaviour resulted from a lack of ‘normal experiences.’ After working with the boy for five years, Dr. Itard labeled Victor to be an ‘idiot.’ Pritchard (1972), however, had a different view.

From being a repulsive creature, Victor had become an affectionate youth, who lived like a human being, and could even read a few words. If it was possible to do so much and achieve such success with such unpromising material both mentally and environmentally, then the way to the education of the mentally handicapped lay wide open (p.76).

In the years that followed, individuals such as Rousseau (1712-78) and Edward Sequin (1812-80) developed methods for teaching children who had severe
exceptionalities. They placed emphasis on observation and sensory training. In most cases, these children were taught in segregated settings. Support was given to establish special schools for these students. Maria Montessori (1870-1952) applied many of Sequin’s approaches to train these children. Even today there are several schools which promote her multi-sensory approaches to curriculum development for children with normative exceptionalities.

As society, however, became more seemingly concerned about the social welfare of children, institutions were established to provide marginal care. As the number of children grew, bigger public and private residential institutions were built. Orphanages and asylums were organized primarily in Quebec and Ontario to care for all children who had normative exceptionalities. Crusaders such as Dorothea Dix called attention to problems associated with educating children with exceptionalities. The common belief at the time was that these students were trainable but noneducable (Goldberg & Cruickshank, 1958).

The second stage occurred towards the end of the first World War (Weber, 1993). In this period, children with exceptionalities were pitied. People felt sorry for them. Many orphanages were established to take care of such a needy group of youngsters. Residential school were also established in this second stage (early to mid-1800s). The aim of these schools was to “make deviant individuals undeviant” (Wolfensberger, 1975). Segregated schools at this time met the needs of training students who were blind or deaf. The focus for these schools, however, was on “protecting” these youngsters from society (e.g., Kerlin, 1884, in Wolfensberger, 1975). The schools contained students with only severe exceptionalities and the staff at these schools tried to “care” for these students. As Wolfensberger hypothesized, the shift away from educational goals to custodial care was seen as a way of “protecting non deviant individuals from deviant people” (1975, p.33). These students were characterized as “unimprovables” (Kerlin, 1885. in Wolfensberger, 1975).

The third stage was marked by the 1930 depression and the postwar period of the late 1940s and early 1950s. A number of advocacy groups and associations surfaced to champion the rights of students with exceptionalities. In Ontario, the Orillia institution for the mentally handicapped was one of a growing number of settings that tried to meet the needs of students with severe exceptionalities. Greater effort was made to
provide more appropriate education for children who were viewed as being poor, vagrant, delinquent or having sensory exceptionalities. There was an emphasis on providing these children with skills that would give them a livelihood. For example, at the Ontario School for the Deaf in Belleville, a number of students were given the opportunity to learn printing. "Printing trades were also taught, partially under the assumption that deaf individuals would be particularly suited to working in the noisy environs of print shops" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 104).

The fourth stage witnessed a strong movement towards publicly funded schooling for all children. Egerton Ryerson was a strong advocate for public schools in Ontario. Immigrants' children and children from working class families were given the opportunity to attend schools. For students with normative exceptionalities, however, obstacles continued to prevent them from being a part of the regular education system. For example the early 20th century eugenics movement, which was led by individuals such as Sir Francis Galton, helped to prevent the start of any formal education for children with normative exceptionalities. Galton advocated that mothers and their children with abnormalities should be placed in large colonies and asylums. The fear was that the mother would produce additional children who would have exceptionalities (Tredgold & Soddy, 1956, p. 405).

The Industrial Revolution also had an impact on the education of students with severe exceptionalities. The views of previous educational advocates were overshadowed by a 'medical' model of care. Doctors became the foremost experts in the treatment of these children. Emphasis was placed on trying to alleviate the suffering and cure the disease. This view of children with exceptionalities, exempted them from any meaningful participation in society.

By the end of the first World War, some individuals, however, realized that there were a number of children with exceptionalities that did not require the confinement of public or private institutions. In Europe and North America, Education Acts made provisions which included children with exceptionalities in school programs. The legislations helped to bring about training programs for those who worked with these students. The work of Alfred Binet and Theophile Simon became important at this time because their intelligence scale was used to help distinguish between children with and without exceptionalities.
Now, the main purpose of the authors in the devisal of these tests is to furnish to the teacher a first means by which he may single out mentally backward children, who, upon further examination may also be found to have some mental defect or peculiarity which prevents them from fully profiting by the education of the ordinary school, and who probably would benefit more by being educated in a special school or special class (Binet & Simon, 1916 p. 189).

The tests were based on an Intelligent Quotient. Children who received a Quotient between 50 and 75 were viewed as being subnormal and children who received a Quotient of 50 or below were viewed as being severely subnormal. Students who were found to be at this level were given an education that focused on the development of life skills. Their programs focused on self-help, communication and socialization. The goal was to allow these students to become valued members of their community.

Canadian history traces the move from an exclusive educational system to a more inclusive educational system. Most school officials have accepted the paradigm shift that has resulted in a holistic approach to meeting the needs of all students (Stainback et al., 1989a; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Porter & Collicott, 1992). Fewer students are being placed into categories of special classes and there is a growing movement to embrace the challenges associated with meeting the needs of diverse groups of students under a unified system of education.

In recent years, legislation has guaranteed education for students with normative exceptionalities. The Ontario Ministry of Education 1975 document, Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions, stated:

Every exceptional child has the right to be part of the mainstream to the extent to which it is profitable. The child’s teacher will use the child’s strengths in group work and focus on problem areas when working with the child alone. In addition, full use should be made of all support services available to the school (p. 12).

In 1980, programs for students with exceptionalities was formalized in Ontario with the passage of Bill 82. Bill 82 amended the Ontario Education Act of 1974 and provided the mandate that made each school board in the province responsible for educating all students with exceptionalities. School Boards could no longer withhold instruction on the premise of a lack of personnel or funds (Weber, 1988).

The Ontario Bill was influenced by the American legislation, Public Law 94-142 which focused on “providing the least restrictive environment for all children.” Each state and local school system had to provide resources which would accommodate the
In Ontario, there are five main principles within the Education Act that have direct impact on this population of students:

1. Universal Access - all exceptional students have access to appropriate education programs
2. Education at Public Expense - education is at no additional cost to student and family
3. Appeal Process - exceptional students' interests must be represented, including the right of parents to appeal the identification and placement, or to request a review on behalf of their child
4. Appropriate Program - exceptional students' right to program includes plans, with specific objectives and an outline of services meeting their needs
5. Ongoing Identification and Continuous Assessment and Review - the identification, and continuous assessment and evaluation of each student's progress, and an annual review of the suitability of placement must be provided (Wilson, 1983, p.2-5).

The Ontario government passed the Education Amendment Act in 1980. Ontario school boards were given five years to implement the Act. The Identification, Placement and Review Committee is a central part of this permissive legislation. The IPRC process gave parents/guardian the right to be involved in the decision making process. Initially, many IPRC committees recommended segregated school placements or self-contained classes for students with exceptionalities. A number of advocacy groups, however, began to pressure the Ontario government for integrated placements in regular school settings. This pressure was balanced with other advocacy groups who wanted to maintain specialized school and settings for students with exceptionalities (Bothwick-Duffy, Palmer, & Lane, 1996; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). The Ministry of Education put forth a policy statement that continues to be a practical guideline for the school placement of students with exceptionalities in Ontario.

The integration of exceptional pupils into local community classrooms should be the norm in Ontario, wherever possible, when such a placement meets the pupil's needs and where it is according to parental choice. Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure parents that we remain committed to encouraging boards to provide a full range of special education placements. We recognize that an integrated setting will not be appropriate for every child (from Statement to the Legislature, 28 May 1991, by the Hon. Marion Boyd: 'The Integration of Exceptional Pupils Into Regular Classrooms').
In summary, the historical perspective provided a background for understanding the development of special education in North America. The literature chronicles the gradual movement from exclusionary practices to those which are more inclusionary. The next sub-section provides an overview of programs for these students. Again, the literature shows the progression from a separate educational system to one that is more integrated.

**Special Education Programs for Students with Normative Exceptionalities in Ontario**

Special education is often thought to be synonymous with separate education, but it is what is taught, not where the teaching takes place that makes a child's education "special" (Booth & Statham, 1982, p. 17).

A number of researchers have commented on what is taught in programs for students with normative exceptionalities (Guess & Siegel-Causey, 1985; Napier, 1995; Snell, 1982; Stanovich, 1996). Some researchers expressed pessimistic views about developing programs for these students (Femald, 1903; Kauffman & Krouse, 1981). Many years ago in Ontario, Dr. Helen MacMurchy was the inspector of the "Feeble-Minded." Upon her 1909 visit to a special school in Britain, she became a strong advocate for a similar program in Toronto.

It was not that the buildings and grounds were expensive or showy or impressive. Everything was plain, simple, inexpensive [except the ground itself]. But it was the real thing. Here I saw the seriously, even terribly, defective children mentally, the waste product of humanity, such as I have seen among ourselves in a helpless and hopeless condition, lost, fallen, outcast, criminal, unhappy, evil. But I saw them here clean, comfortable, happy and at home (Report on Dr. Helen MacMurchy's visit to England, 1907 (MacMurchy's file, the Provincial Secretary's Correspondence, Archives of Ontario).

MacMurchy believed that special schools would be able to successfully meet the needs of children with normative exceptionalities. From her perspective, these children were "the waste product of humanity" and her answer to meeting their needs was to establish a segregated special education. She believed that these students could not be successfully taught with students in regular schools. Consequently, in 1912 MacMurchy wrote in a report to The Toronto Board of Education that:
All abnormal children, therefore, should be segregated at an early age and under continuous supervision for the protection of the state, the good of the race, and for their own happiness ... These children are happier with their kind. They are a great handicap to other children in the public schools (Medical Inspector's Report", Annual Report of the Toronto Board of Education, 1912, p.20.).

It is hard to ignore the bias found in this statement. It was written at a time when there was an influx of immigrants to Southern Ontario. These “foreigners” were seen as the cause of a perceived increase in criminal and immoral activity. It was believed that a significant number of these individuals were "mentally defective" and as such would be best supervised in a segregated setting. The view of keeping Ontario “pure” is hard to miss. Dr. MacMurchy saw the need to maintain a homogeneous society. Those who did not fit were said to be happier away from “normal” children.

Dr. MacMurchy did not believe that much could be done to improve the learning abilities of these students. After the establishment of the Auxiliary Classes Act in 1914, she had the responsibility of organizing and managing them. The program focused on basic life skills. The intellectual development of these children was not seen as being important. In her book, Organization and Management of Auxiliary Classes, Dr. MacMurchy stated:

> It was once thought that mentally-defective children were so because they had been neglected, starved or abused and mental defective, alas, are sometimes badly treated but that is not what makes them mentally defective. They are born so, and if they had been well fed and kindly treated they would still have been mental defective. The brain is defective. It never had the normal power of development. We cannot develop what is not there. ... It is plainly a permanent condition (1915, p.17).

Because of these views, little was done in order to teach these students how to read and write. Instead, emphasis was placed on cultivating and developing skills that would develop their sensory and social skills. Although these views are disturbing, they help to illustrate the sociopolitical climate under which special education programs for children with exceptionalities developed in Ontario.

Fortunately, a great deal has changed in the way students with exceptionalities are educated in Ontario and other areas in North America today. There is now an emphasis on making sure these students are provided with an “appropriate” education. Many studies have found that students with even pervasive exceptionalities are able to learn (Stainback & Stainback, 1983). This relatively new attitude towards the education of these...
students has also brought about a greater sense of awareness as to why these students were not progressing. In the past, the medical model of intervention dominated the education of students with exceptionalities (Hobbs, 1975). Medical doctors were viewed as the only experts for these students. Consequently, little attention was given to their intellectual development.

People were led to believe that something medical happened which resulted in a deficit in the student. A medical approach was put in place in an attempt to restore what was missing. While it is true that genetic, chromosomal or early medical complications are factors which may have caused the student to have profound exceptionalities, emphasis is better placed on ensuring that the subsequent educational instruction for these students will result in success. Stanovich and Jordan (1998) use the terms "pathognomonic" and "interventionist" to describe two ends of a perspective that can direct the way in which students with normative exceptionalities are taught. Pathognomonic is based on the belief that something pathological has occurred within the student. Attention is given to finding out what went wrong in order to teach the student (Coles, 1987). When the confirmation of the problem is provided, 'special' resources are provided to address the prognosis. These resources are often found in 'special' instructional settings (Pugach & Johnson, 1989). At the other end, the "interventionist" believe that problems that students are having can be attributed to the learning environment. The teachers focus on providing interventions that address the learning needs of the students (Jordan et al., 1993).

It is important that parents, teachers and professional support staff, from a number of disciplines, come together to develop program strategies which allow these students to develop their skills and abilities (Orelove & Sobsey, 1991). This team of individuals collaborate in order to develop a program that will meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities (Zeller, 1990). They assess the student's needs, talk about the family's expectations, look for available resources and find strategies for delivering a successful program (Dunlap & Goodman, 1991, p.17).

The process results in an education plan for each student who has normative exceptionalities. Deciding what to teach students with normative exceptionalities is often a challenging task. Some students have so many complications that it is hard to prioritize objectives and goals. Other students may have a more specific need which can be
addressed through relatively conventional teaching strategies. Regardless of the situation, however, the team that is responsible for planning a program for a student with exceptionalities should follow a systematic process (Rainforth et al., 1992).

Rainforth's steps for identifying and monitoring educational goals are as follows:
- Plan the assessment activities.
- Collect background information.
- Identify the student's contexts.
- Collect performance information.
- Analyze data and establish priorities.
- Write an instructional plan.
- Implement and monitor.
- Evaluate the program at regular intervals.

This process helps to ensure that each student will be the benefactor of a program that promotes success. Once the educational goals are identified, the teaching staff focus their attention on organizing a curriculum. In the past, many teachers planned their curriculum with the use of the developmental model (Brown et al. 1979). This model is based on the premise that students with normative exceptionalities would acquire the same skills as students without such exceptionalities but at a slower rate. In addition, the prevailing belief was that these students needed to develop basic skills before they could develop skills that were seen as more advanced. Within the last few years, there has been a move towards what has been called a functional or community based curriculum (Ferguson & Baumgart, 1991; Orelove & Sobsey, 1991; Rainforth et al., 1992). Here are some areas where students with normative exceptionalities may receive instruction (cf. Rainforth et al., 1992.)

Domestic skills: Self-care skills (toileting, eating, dressing) home management skills (food preparation, laundry, housecleaning), and related skills needed to function within a home (e.g., communication and social skills)

School skills: Those abilities related to functioning in schools such as interacting with peers, working in groups, participating in regular routines, communicating, complying with schedules and adult requests, and many others

Community skills: Skills related to mobility within the community (e.g., transportation) and use of community facilities (e.g., making purchases)

Recreation and leisure skills: Skills related to occupying time in socially acceptable and enjoyable ways
Vocational skills: Abilities related to securing and maintaining employment that is not demeaning

As a result of the recent trend towards inclusive education practices, more teachers are becoming more knowledgeable about the needs of these students. They view teaching from a holistic perspective.

Teachers must also familiarize themselves with a range of assistive devices such as wheelchairs, canes, crutches, and walkers, as well as hearing aids, Braille books, voice synthesizers, catheters, braces, standing tables, artificial limbs, and a plethora of other materials and equipment (Valletutti & Sims-Tucker, 1984 p. 9).

These teachers may have also received training in behavioural management. They are often in an instructional situation where the goal is to encourage an appropriate behaviour by eliminating inappropriate ones (Repp & Singh, 1990). In some cases, a decision might be made to use behavioural intervention strategies to reduce or change the inappropriate behaviour (Peacock Hill Working Group, 1991; Walker et al., 1995). For example, students who pinch, bite and frequently injure themselves and others may be placed in a “time-out” area. Kerr and Nelson (1989, p. 107) have put a list of approaches together that can be used to help develop appropriate school behaviours and reduce inappropriate behaviours. They point out that the following list is a hierarchy that moves from less to more restrictive or intrusive interventions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enhancement Procedures:</th>
<th>Reductive Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
<td>Differential reinforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reinforcement</td>
<td>Extinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modelling</td>
<td>Verbal aversives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracting</td>
<td>Response cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity reinforcement</td>
<td>“Time-out”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Token reinforcement</td>
<td>Over correction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tangible reinforcement</td>
<td>Physical aversives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edible reinforcement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactile and sensory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reinforcement</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kerr and Nelson (1989) also encourage teachers and school staff to implement strategies that will help to prevent inappropriate behaviours. They use the term “structuring” to focus on things like physical space, daily scheduling, rules and routines that can influence student behaviour.

Teachers also need to use age-appropriate curricula and materials because there was a tendency in the past to “baby” youngsters who had normative exceptionalities.
Most teachers realize that using juvenile materials is demeaning and also educationally harmful (Bates, Renzaglia, & Wehman, 1981). Morsink, Thomas, and Correa, (1991) point out the need for staff to work as a team in order to meet a common goal. It the case of students who have behavioural disorders it is important for the team to work together effectively. Also, since many of these students are medically fragile and chronically ill, teachers and other individuals who work with them need to become familiar with a variety of health related procedures (Hayden & DePaepe, 1991). It is common for the teaching staff to monitor seizures and a number of other medical issues within the school day (Izen & Brown, 1991; Mulligan-Ault, Guess, Struth, & Thompson, 1988). Many of these students are alive because of recent medical and technological advances. These students' programs would reflect the need to focus on procedures that help to maintain and improve their health.

After determining what to teach, special educators and other members of the programming team have to then decide on how best to reach objectives and goals. This decision is made by taking into consideration the needs of each student. A variety of instructional approaches can be selected once the need is identified. If, for instance, there is a need to focus on skills pertaining to domestic living, staff have a variety of instructional resources from which they can choose (Crump, 1987; Orelove and Sobsey, 1991; Venn, Holcombe, & Wolery, 1991). The other functional skills can also be taught by using a variety of instructional resources. The primary goal when teaching these skills is to allow the student to become as independent as possible. The use of a systematic assessment procedure helps to determine where and how best to meet student needs (Salvia & Hughes, 1990).

In Ontario, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) is the document that outlines the program for students with exceptional needs. This IEP is based on the collection of information and recommendations that follow formal and informal assessments. Weber and Bennett (1999) draw attention to the issue that education is not based on an "exact science." They refer to the assessment as 'loose probability.' Recognition, however, is given to the importance of assessment.

An assessment provides information gathered in an organized way that, at the very least, confirms in a presumably unbiased way, the view of the people working with the student. At the very best, it may reveal factors that no one had known or possibly even suspected (p.152).
The main feature of the IEP is the delineation of student's strengths and needs. Goals and expectations are documented and information regarding resources are formally recorded. Everyone who has a role to play in the IEP has access to it. Teachers, students, parents/guardians, support staff and administrators use this common plan in order to address the needs of the student. Do these individuals, however, address the IEP from common perspectives or beliefs? Pajares (1992) draws attention to the issue that successful implementation of plans for instructions are predicated on the beliefs of those responsible for the work. For effective instruction to occur it is crucial that those who are teaching are operating from similar beliefs.

Few would argue that the beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgments, which, in turn, affect their behavior in the classroom, or that understanding the belief structures of teachers and teacher candidates is essential to improving their professional preparation and teaching practices (Pajares, 1992, p. 307).

Within this context, teachers are all of the people who interact with these students. Other researchers in the field have also talked about the influence of beliefs on the delivery of programs for students with normative exceptionalities (Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar, & Diamond, 1993; Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997; Knapp, 1995; Ysseldyke & Thurlow, 1984). They too articulate the challenges associated with individuals who have "differing perspectives about their roles and responsibilities in working with students who are exceptional ... " (Jordan et. al., 1997). The principal in the school has a significant role to play in order to ensure that staff at the school are meeting the needs of the students in an effective manner. The identification of CSFs and providing staff with an understanding of their roles and responsibilities are steps that can be taken to support these pupils. The next section will review related literature on effective schools and educational indicators of success.

Effective Schools and Educational Indicators of Success

In the 1960s and early 1970s, concern was expressed when it was discovered that students' backgrounds was the key factor to determine student success (Young & Levin, 1998). Individuals involved in the effective school movement investigated schools that had better results than expected given their student population. The aim was to find factors that educators could address rather than focusing on student
characteristics. Studies that examined effective schools found specific factors that contributed to the success of these schools (Austin, 1979; Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Rutter, 1981). These findings encouraged those who believed that educators can and do make a positive difference in schools. Can these changes be found in schools that meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities?

Advocates of special education have moved their focus from achieving access to determining the quality of program that students with exceptionalities are receiving. Are these students receiving effective educational services? How will they know? Schools whose program is geared to meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities can also utilize the main factors which characterize effective schools. Many researchers identify the principal as having a key role in the promotion of an effective school (e.g., Andrews, Basom & Basom, 1991; Fullan, 1991, Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1992; Richardson, Short, & Prickett, 1993; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Purkey and Smith (1983) in their “critical” review of the literature on effective schools, refer to Ronald Edmonds’ (1979) listing of five factors that constitute an effective school. They are: strong principal leadership, a pervasive instructional focus, orderly and safe climate, high expectations for students, and continuous assessment of student achievement. Other researchers have come up with different factors, although there is considerable overlap (Austin, 1981; Hersh et al., 1981; Tomlinson 1980). Levine and Lezotte (1990) reviewed the growing body of literature and identified “29 factors in 8 overarching categories” (David & Shields, 1991, p.5). With the exception of adding the factor “parent involvement,” however, their factors appear to be based on the five which were first outlined by Edmonds.

One of the central issues surrounding the effective school literature is the definition of criteria for effectiveness. While many schools have relied on standardized achievement tests, other schools use multiple measures in order to determine effectiveness (Cuban, 1983: Madaus, 1988; Levine & Lezotte, 1990). As a result of the different criteria used to determine effectiveness, it is not possible to find a generalizable measure of effectiveness. In spite of this limitation, many educators believe that all characteristics of “effective” schools provide them with some insight into how well students are learning.

For example, David and Shields (1991) cite four intertwined areas which can lead to more effective schools. They are: changing school culture, creating problem-solving
capacity, leading and managing improvement, and implementing challenging curriculum and instruction. In each situation, the concept of “change” is the critical factor. The issue of change is well documented in the literature (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Fullan, 1982; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977;). Ronald Edmonds (1979, p. 23) may have summed up the situation best when he wrote:

(a) We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us; (b) We already know more than we need to do that; and (c) Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.

Teachers in effective school environments are encouraged to develop and maintain a collaborative school culture (Hargreaves, 1990; Little, 1982). They talk, plan, observe and plan together. These teachers also help one another how to teach better because of the development of collective expectations that push them towards continuous improvement. The principal in these schools engage in activities that clarify and prioritize shared goals. They ensure that everyone connected to the school have opportunities to understand the schools’ purpose. They provide teachers and other staff with joint planning time so that they are not working in isolation. Norms, values and beliefs are communicated because they help to maintain the school culture (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). The school administrators share power and responsibility with others (Dunlap & Goldman, 1991). Staff decision-making matters are delegated through committees that focus on school improvement. Time is taken at meetings and assemblies to celebrate and recognize the work of staff and students (Rosenholtz, 1989). The principals in these schools also foster teacher development through practices which encourage teachers to pursue professional growth (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Dart, 1991). The results of these steps have led to positive staff changes in attitudes towards school improvement and in their instructional behaviour. Staff in these schools also focus on finding tools that can be used to monitor student progress.

In order to further accentuate the need to determine how well students are doing, attention has been given to the development of tools that measure and assess key elements of an educational system. Educational Indicators can be viewed as one possible tool. “An educational indicator either assesses or is related to a desired outcome of the education system or describes a core feature of that system (Smith, 1988, p.487).
There are challenges, however, in establishing a means of assessment. Smith (1988) points out that the challenges result from technical and political factors. The technical issues are caused by an inadequate knowledge about indicators and political issues stem from trying to agree on standardized indicators for an educational system.

Selden (1988) on the other hand approaches the issue of educational indicators by looking at the difficulties of using a particular indicator in a variety of settings. Since each school setting may develop different criteria for success, it is difficult to employ a standard measure. Selden, however, supports a move towards establishing a standard which could be used to measure educational factors from a comparative perspective. He supports the use of a test which could be used at a national level.

Webster, Mendro and Almaguer (1993) view of a test is similar to Selden. Their test would involve the use of statistical techniques which would adjust outcomes based on expected student performance. From this perspective, the student with normative exceptionalities would be expected to perform differently than a child who does not require the services of a special education program. In adopting this flexible and adaptable testing procedure, it may be possible to develop a test which could be used to compare schools and school districts. The challenge is to arrive at a common understanding of what needs to be monitored.

This challenge invites a cautionary view of indicators from David (1988) and Porter (1988). David is concerned about whether indicators will be used as an aid or a threat to improvement. He points out that there are risks associated with indicators because they could lead individuals to focus on the wrong things. One way to minimize this possibility "is to be certain that we use indicators of learning outcomes that match our learning goals" (David, 1988, p. 500). This objective can be met by including the multidisciplinary team and parents in the planning and organizational stages of developing indicators. The inclusion of these individuals will also ensure greater use of indicators in schools.

Porter (1988) takes the issue of using indicators further by questioning whether indicators will be used to produce objective data or as a political tool. The information could be used to justify a government directive which may ignore the complexities of a particular school environment. In order to circumvent this problem, it may be necessary to use several indicators to provide a comprehensive picture of student progress. This strategy, although difficult to implement, will yield statistics which might answer summative...
and formative questions relating to how well students with exceptionalities are doing in their program (Porter, 1988, p. 503). The identification of Critical Success Factors in another technique that can be used to determine areas that staff see as important for student success. The information gained from this technique is particularly valuable to school administration for planning purposes.

**Critical Success Factors in Special Education**

The term "critical success factors" is often used in business and other areas of the public sector to define what is necessary in order to achieve success. According to Bullen and Rockart (1981, p.3), CSFs are defined as:

> The few key areas of activity in which favourable results are absolutely necessary for a particular manager to reach his goals. Because these areas of activity are critical, the manager should have the appropriate information to allow him to determine whether events are proceeding sufficiently well in each area.

It is important to note that these critical success factors are constantly changing as a result of internal and external factors which influence education. What is critical now may not be critical in the future. One example of critical success factors used by Rockart is from the computer industry. The following were seen by managers as being critical success factors: choice of market niche, technological leadership, orderly product development, service and stability and the attraction and retention of quality personnel. Rockart (1979, p. 217) also provided the following examples from other business industries:

- In the automobile industry, styling, an efficient dealer organization, and tight control of manufacturing cost are paramount.
- In food processing, new product development, good distribution, and effective advertising are the major success factors.
- In life insurance, the development of agency management personnel, effective control of clerical personnel, and innovation in creating new types of policies spell the difference.

The concept of critical success factors is also being included in the current educational trend of developing strategic plans at the school level in order to become more effective as a school. Herman's (1989) series of articles, which focus on school-based management, includes the identification of CSFs as one of the keys to successful strategic planning. The principal and other stake holders are encouraged to identify "those key factors that are critical to the school's success" (p.25). These factors should coincide
with established school goals. They also help to focus the school staff's resources towards meeting the needs of those few factors identified as critical. Herman points out, however, that individual schools may possess CSFs that are different as well as common among members of a school staff.

In other school settings, CSFs are being used to help define measures of accountability. In response to a legislative mandate, the North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges developed a list of CSFs (Smith, 1989). The CSFs were designed to measure how well the colleges were meeting goals which were set by the State Board and how well the colleges were following mandates proposed by law. Staff at the colleges compiled data for five years on six identified critical success factors:

(1) quality of teaching and support services; (2) access/serving and under served; (3) strong partnership with public schools and universities/transfer performance; (4) helping business and industry/economic development; (5) community service related programs, courses, and student participation; and (6) accountability and flexibility in funding (Smith, 1989, pp.3-10).

Staff at Midland Technical College (MTC) also utilized CSFs in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs they provide (Hudgins, 1990). The college's administration wanted to find out "How effective is our institution in providing on going programs and services that encourage student success and support our mission?" To answer this question the staff identified six critical success factors which they saw as vital to the success of the college and its students. They were: accessible comprehensive programs of high quality, student satisfaction and retention, post education satisfaction and success, economic development and community involvement, sound effective resource management and dynamic organizational involvement and development (p.5). The staff then developed specific indicators in order to measure and evaluate the factors.

In their study on defining critical success factors for school superintendents, Padro and Scane (1991) followed the CSF procedure to describe and prioritize factors that Chief Education Officers (CEO's) viewed as critical to the success of their school boards. The study came at a time when attention was being given to defining the role of superintendents (Wolf, 1988). They elicited critical success factors from the superintendents. This was done to determine where superintendents needed to spend most of their time.
When Padro and Scane (1991) applied this method to an educational setting, they were able to elicit factors that would help schools to meet their prescribed goals. As Lewington and Orpwood point out in their book *Overdue Assignment* (1993), schools need to find ways to arrive at the goal of excellence in education. They view the situation in this way:

Excellence in education has always been a challenge, although it has usually implied rewarding winners and leaving losers behind. Now a much greater challenge confronts Canadians: to strike a better balance between the important goal of educational excellence and the ambitious goal of equity, with its implicit commitment that no one be forgotten by the school system.

Padro and Scane’s CSF study allowed school superintendents to focus on what was definitely crucial in order to achieve agreed upon board goals. The method provided a way to highlight what the school system valued.

Four Ontario school boards were involved in their study. Two were urban boards and two were a combination of urban and rural factors. The superintendents were asked to complete a questionnaire which focused on goals, objectives and external and internal critical success factors. A brief explanation of critical success factors was included in a covering letter which summarized the purpose of the questionnaire. Padro and Scane’s quantitative analysis identified CSFs from each respondent by school board. Attention was also given to how the respondents ranked ordered their CSFs. During their analysis, it was clear that some common patterns were evident. In order to better organize the CSFs in a standardized way, the researchers took the total number of critical success factors and organized a thesaurus which resulted in a clearer understanding of the categories. The CSFs that were identified by the superintendents at the time were:

- administration/leadership
- budget allocation
- collaboration/morale
- communication (within the system)
- community relations
- corporate responsibilities of trustees
- culture of the system
- labour relations
- level of provincial funding
- physical accommodation
- planning
- professional development
- evaluation procedures
- program and staffing/personnel (Padro & Scane, 1991).

When all four boards were taken into consideration, “collaboration/morale, budget allocation and community relations” were identified as being the most highly ranked CSFs. Within the conclusion of their study, Padro and Scane stated that “… the development of monitoring CSFs can assist CEOs in determining which areas require
immediate attention and which do not" (p.2).

Since Rockart's (1979) article, there has been some attention to using the approach in special educational settings. Johnson and Burrello (1987) adopted the concept in their study which focused on CSFs of rural and urban special education administration. They surveyed 71 special education directors in America about critical factors in their personal and organizational success. The highest ranking factors were instructional effectiveness and regular/special education integration. The authors believed that "intergroup" differences in some rankings were attributed to urban versus rural demography and single versus multiple school district configurations.

In a similar study, Burello and Zadnik (1986) surveyed a nominated group of 124 effective local special education administrators and a random sample of administrators. Their general finding "supported the premise that the effective administrators were more concerned about how they and their programs were a part of the larger cultural context of the school than the random respondents" (p.367). Their study found that the following CSFs were listed by both random and effective administrators:

the establishment of rapport, communication, and coordination with regular education personnel, demonstrating program efficacy and quality, managing conflict, and integrating special education into the school system in terms of planning, problem-solving, and decision-making structures of the district(s) (Burrello & Zadnik, p. 374).

It was noted that effective administrators put these CSFs within the context of school values and goals. The leadership of effective administrators also placed greater emphasis on following current and best practices than did the random administrators. They realize that it will always be necessary to review critical success factors in order to ensure that they reflect emerging demands and future educational issues.

**Summary - Chapter Two**

The historical perspective of special education, special education programs for students with normative exceptionalities, effective schools and educational indicators of success and critical success factors in special education were the four areas of focus for this review of related literature. The review was able to provide a context for responding to the research problem and questions. In that it provided a background context for describing how special education programs were developed. The history of special education shows a movement from exclusionary practices to inclusionary practices.
Changes occurred that reflected the beliefs and attitudes of individuals that worked with students who have normative exceptionalities at various points in history.

In the early nineteen hundreds, individuals such as Dr. Helen MacMurchy was a strong advocate for providing a separate educational system to meet the needs of these students. Their schooling would be different because it was thought that they did not have the capabilities. The focus of their schooling was on developing basic life skills. There has, however, been a change in the way these students are educated. A greater emphasis is being placed on providing educational programs that meet the individual needs of each student. People who work with these students are moving away from a 'pathognomonic' perspective to an 'interventionist' perspective. Rather that looking for the deficit in the student, focus is placed on providing interventions that allow the student to successfully interact with the learning environment. The general goal is to support these students with the acquisition of skills that will lead to successful community participation. The Individual Education Plan is used to map out the path each student will take. In order for the plan to be successful, there is need to ensure that those who work with these students have similar beliefs and understandings about their role. The principal has a central role to play in setting a clear direction for the school organization.

The review of the related literature on effective schools and educational indicators of success, point to factors and indicators that are required to maintain a successful learning environment. The principal plays a key role of ensuring that staff support the goals and objectives for student success.

The last area of related literature review was critical success factors. The concept has been used in both business and educational settings to help individuals identify areas that are necessary for success. While it is clear that each setting may have different critical success factors, the concept helps to generate themes that can support or help change the goals of an organization to better reflect a particular desired mission. These factors provide the underpinnings for the current study of critical success factors of educators who teach students with normative exceptionalities. The principal of the school can use this information to develop strategies that will meet the needs of students, teachers, support staff and members of the school community. The next chapter provides a detailed profile of the school study site.
Chapter Three
The School Study Site

Introduction

The site for this study is a special education school which opened in 1973 under the auspices of a large urban school board in Ontario. It was selected because all students at the school have normative exceptionalities and staff were willing to participate in the research topic. The administration was particularly interested in exploring critical success factors within this setting.

In this chapter, background information is provided about the study site based on school documents, field notes and observations. The first section of this chapter has a description of the school site, the students, staff and the programs offered. The second section illustrates the school’s operating principles for students with normative exceptionalities through guidelines and policies provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training and the policies of the school board.

Description of the School

The school was formally opened on December 13, 1973 to meet the needs of students who are severely developmentally handicapped. The school is situated in a working class neighbourhood on a quiet residential street. The two storey school has a warm welcoming atmosphere. It is obvious that the caretaking staff take pride in making sure that the school is kept clean and that things are in order. The newly painted white walls provide an eye pleasing background to the many murals and pieces of art that are visible throughout the school. A practical feature of the school is the number of large open areas. During periods of free play, students are able to use a number of modified equipment in these areas. Students in wheel chairs also use the space to work on gross motor skills. An obstacle course is set up and students find it challenging and fun to move around the obstacles.

The design of the school rooms indicate that consideration was given to this population of students. Cupboards and windows have been designed in a user friendly manner. There are sinks with hot and cold running water in each class. There is an elevator which help students in wheel chairs to move around the school in a convenient
There is a park close by which many of the students like to visit. They also frequent many of the stores which are within walking distance from the school. Most of the merchants are very welcoming to these students. The staff at the school appreciate the support the students receive from the community. Students are given ‘real life’ opportunities to interact with people in the community. At one of the local banks, students are invited to practice filling out deposit slips. A Canadian Tire store takes some of the older students for a job training program.

Periodically, the school gets involved with regular schools from the community. At a recent open house, students from the neighbourhood school had an opportunity to help these special needs students with a gym lesson. The staff believe that this kind of interaction is important for establishing and maintaining good community relations.

For Education week, many of the teachers decorated their classes to look like a store in the community. One teacher did admit that some store keepers see the kids coming and say, “Oh please don’t come in here with the kids.” But the majority of store keepers continue to see these students as positive members of the community. Their attitude helps to support the students’ efforts towards being more independent.

The staff and students at the school receive educational support services through area wide programs and close involvement is maintained with parents, staff in group homes, and social agencies. Required nursing care procedures are provided through local health departments. A great deal of special equipment is necessary to meet the needs of these students, for example, mechanical lifts, touch plates, switches, customized seating and standing devices.

The Students

Staff at the school provide programs for students with Normative Exceptionalities who are 4 to 21 years of age. Many of the students have additional unique needs in the areas of physical disabilities, autism, behavioural disorders, vision, hearing and/or communication impairments. At the time of this study, 80 students were enrolled at the school. A majority of the students live in group homes. The students are also supported by area wide programs. These community agencies provide support for the students when they are not in school. Required nursing care is also available to students at the
Students who attend the school are usually referred by their parents, outside agencies or other school boards. They are considered for placement by an Identification Placement and Review Committee process. When students are admitted, they are annually reviewed through the Identification, Placement and Review committee. An annual Individual Education plan is required for each student, as well as a Transition Plan for students 17 years of age and older. These plans delineate each student's program and serve as a valuable point of reference.

Table 1 outlines the student profile of the school. The following factors were taken into consideration: Gender, ESL, Home Language, Country of Birth, Year of Arrival (foreign-born only), and Student Origin (place of transfer). The school board provided this information.
Table 1

**Student Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESL</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ESL</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English only</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country of Birth</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year of Arrival</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Foreign-born only)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one year ago</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started at this school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other city school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other school</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Province</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Country</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All students born in a non-English speaking country who have been in Canada for five or fewer years; or students who were under nine years of age and whose Home Language is not English (including Canadian-born students).

The student population reflects the multicultural and multiracial composition of an urban city. English is a second language for 50% of students who currently attend the school even though 75 of 80 students were born in Canada. The diversity, while noticed, is overshadowed by the fact that all of the students at the school have been identified as having exceptional needs. Staff are, however, mindful of the students' backgrounds and want to ensure that the cultures of all students are reflected positively within the school.

**The School Staff**

The staff consists of teachers, educational assistants, health care assistants, noon hour assistants, consultants and an administrative team. Students from secondary schools,
co-operative education programs, faculties of education, community colleges, universities and nursing institutions, as well as volunteers, are actively involved in assisting staff to execute the many varied individualized and group programs. There was a good mixture of experienced and new staff at the school. They have had a variety of experiences and backgrounds. After spending a considerable amount of time at the school, it was obvious that the staff were a dedicated group of people who were committed to meeting the schooling needs of these students.

The demographic information of the staff participants is summarized in Table 2. The information has been organized in the following manner: years in an educational setting, number of schools in which the participant has worked, years in current school, years in special education, gender and current school assignment.
Some of the demographic information from the interview schedule can be compared with the available data from the school staff profile. Fourteen of the respondents (or 70%) indicated that they were female. In the school setting, 62% of staff were female and 38% were male. Nine of the respondents (or 45%) indicated that they had more than ten years of experience in special education. 75% of staff had more than ten years years of experience in special education. Five of the respondents (or 25%) indicated that they were at the school for less than five years. School data indicated that 30% of staff indicated that they worked at the school for less than five years. Fourteen of the respondents (or 70%) indicated that they had worked in another educational setting. School data indicated that 80% of staff worked in another educational setting. Ten of the respondents (or 50%) indicated that they had more years working in the field of education. School data indicated that 70% of staff have worked in education for ten years or more.

### Table 2
Demographics of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>#Yrs in Sp.Ed.</th>
<th>Yrs in Pres. Sch.</th>
<th>No. of Schools</th>
<th>Years in Ed.</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Teacher Pr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Teacher Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Teacher Pr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Teacher Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Teacher Int.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 16</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Teacher Pr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Teacher Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Teacher Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 illustrates the total number of staff at the study site and the purposive sample of staff who participated in the study.

Table 3  
**Study Site Staff and Purposive Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Staff</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Primary teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Junior teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intermediate teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Senior teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phys. Ed. teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phys. Ed. teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Program consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Ed. consultant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech &amp; Language consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Speech and Language consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psycho-Ed. consultant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Psycho-Ed. consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Behaviour teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Nurse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>School Nurse</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Assistants</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Educational Assistants</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care Assistants</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Vice-Principal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vice-Principal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Principal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 37-2 = 35

Total 20

*During the study changes occurred in the vice-principalship and the principalship at the school due to transfers and promotions. The total number of staff in a given school year was thirty-five.*
The Specialized Programs

The goal of all programs at the school is to give students skills that allow them to be as independent as possible. All long and short term goals focus on the outcome of greater independence. Each student has a personalized plan that meets individual needs and abilities. This plan is prepared by a group of professionals and parents. The students are given support in order to learn a skill or participate in an activity. The staff also looks for opportunities to phase out support when it is no longer needed.

These students are enrolled in 14 classes with special area programs for Physical Education, Work Education, Behaviour Management, Music/Art, Home Training, Media Resource, Resource, Assessment, Diagnostic Program using Augmentative Communication and an integrated program. These programs fit well with current provincial policies which give schools the responsibility to "provide students with learning experiences that will prepare them for effective participation in the community, because everyone has the right to a full and rewarding life" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990).

The following are overviews of the specialized programs which are available at the school:

**Physical education.** Each student at the school participates in an hour per week of gym classes. The goal of the program is to develop a variety of gross motor skills (e.g. walking, running, kicking, throwing, catching) through a wide variety of physical activities. Students participate in individual and group games, movement exploration and dance. The students experience social interactions through these activities which are designed to encourage desirable attitudes and behaviours.

**Work education.** The work education program is designed to develop and strengthen skills and habits that will be required for work in a sheltered or competitive employment situation. The different work activities involve various levels of skills in areas such as sorting, packaging and counting. Social and listening skills are also stressed. The work projects allow for individual creativity as well. The students who participate in this program are between the ages of 14 to 21.
**Behaviour Management.** There is a behaviour management team at the school. The team includes a psycho-educational consultant and a behaviour management teacher. They are available to assist the teaching staff in managing the behaviour of individual students or groups of students. If regular classroom management techniques are insufficient to increase a desired behaviour or decrease an undesirable behaviour, a behavioural assessment will be done. This will lead to the development of strategies, including a planned written program description, regular and consistent data collection and monitoring of the program. Positive reinforcement techniques are always the first consideration. Before a formal behaviour management program is implemented, there must be approval from the principal, senior psychologist and teacher, and a written informed consent from the parents/legal guardians.

**Music/Art.** The Music/Art program is designed to expose students to a variety of related activities and projects. Students are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings with a sense of personal enjoyment. Long range expectations and short-term goals are based on auditory discrimination, eye-hand co-ordination, socialization, fine/gross motor development and academic skill building. The students experience music and through listening, signing, playing and creating. The students experience are through looking, listening and creating.

**Home Training.** The Home Training program is taught from a large class room with a fully equipped kitchen and laundry area, a bed making area, and a living room. Lessons are provided in food preparation and other domestic skills. There is also a nutrition and weight-watchers group for students who may benefit. In this weekly program, students share responsibilities and learn to work cooperatively with others.

**Media Resource.** The school has a teacher assigned to teach students through the use of multi-media. Multi-media is the incorporation of computers, audio-visual equipment or the technological resources required for the students to access or learn about their environment. The school team approach is facilitated by interfacing with consultants to select appropriate technology to achieve their recommended student
objectives. They co-operate with the classroom teachers to integrate subsequent programming ideas into the classroom. Some additional responsibilities include: selection and purchasing of appropriate software and computer supplies, on-the spot trouble shooting, construction of switches and modification of touch plates and battery operated toys, planning and implementing in service programs and keeping current with developments in the field and making such information available to staff.

Enclosed within the media classroom is a permanent multi sensory environment. Through the use of adaptive devices these students can participate in interactive activities. Using these experiences the students can explore, create, build, manipulate, learn, discover, imagine, imitate and pretend. A theme-oriented interactive multi-media environment enhances the learning experiences of developmentally handicapped and multi-handicapped students. The key to these multi-sensory experiences is the concept that even the most handicapped student can begin to control his/her environment.

The introduction of a variety of switches, switch activated toys, environmental controls/appliances, augmentative communication devices, and computer hardware/software, combined with lighting and sound effects, create a useful sensory experience for these students. By pressing a series of switches, the student interacts and becomes an active participant with the environment. What evolves is a playful environment for both students and teachers which provides opportunities for success. Through the integration of multi-media and adaptive devices a physically and or developmentally handicapped student can be provided with the skills and knowledge to adapt and cope in this ever changing technological world.

**Resource, Assessment, Diagnostic Program Using Augmentative Communication.** A few years ago, a number of students at the school were identified as having needs which could be best met in a class where communication and social interaction skills are the focus. An assessment, diagnostic teaching and augmentative communication program has been established at the school. As a result of this program, students have all, in varying degrees, demonstrated greater use of initiative and self reliance in completing routine tasks and in selecting leisure activities. The most notable improvement is the increase in spontaneous social interaction. More students are using the augmentative communication systems and techniques and benefiting from all
opportunities to become better communicators.

**Integrated Classes.** A few students from this school were taught within an integrated school setting. The school administration make provision for this to happen on a full or part time basis. The general principle, for integrated placements, has been to place students in 'regular' schools using chronological age, ability level and geographical location as guideline. The school policy is not to place students who have heavy and regular seizures and extreme behavioural problems in regular classes. A goal of the program is to help students develop as much independence as possible before they leave the school.

**The Parenting Centre.** A few years ago, the school established a Parenting Centre that focuses on the integration of handicapped and non-handicapped children. Approximately thirty-five parents come to the centre each school day. The coordinators of the program believe that the centre helps to make the school even more welcoming to the community. Several programs are conducted at the centre and supportive resources are made available.

**The School's Operating Principles**

Each student at the school has an individual education plan. The general focus in every education plan, however, is on learning skills that will lead to greater independence. For some students, that might translate into learning how to travel independently on the public transportation system or learning how to follow a schedule so they can successfully work in a sheltered workshop. For other students, focus might be placed on learning how to make eye contact or holding an arm up so that the care giver can put the shirt or dress on. Teaching ways to communicate is a central skill. They are taught to do anything they can to demonstrate their needs in an age-appropriate manner.

Staff at the school want them to have as much control over their environment as possible. They also want them to develop feelings of acceptance, belonging and self-worth as outlined in the Ministry of Education policy document, Planning for Independence: A Support Document for Teachers of Students With Intellectual Disabilities (1990).
Towards this end, students are taught using a functional or community based curriculum (Ferguson & Baumgart, 1991; Orelove & Sobsey, 1991; Rainforth et al., 1992). Personal care, domestic skills, social skills, community skills, recreation and vocational skills are individualized so that each student can function in a manner that is necessary for independent living. Time is given for the development of an individual education plan.

Beginning with the assessment phase, staff collect information that is necessary for making sound programming decisions. A case conference with teachers, support staff, administrators parents and at times the student is organized as a way to consolidate information. Once the profile of the student is determined, staff can design a program that addresses the needs of the student. It should always be noted, however, that the assessment phase is continual. Staff periodically review the assessment.

The development phase is the next part of the cycle. Information from the assessment phase is used to design an individual education plan. The plan outlines what will be taught and the strategies that will be used in order to promote successful experiences for the student. In some cases, special equipment would be identified at this time. Specific learning expectations are documented and specific staff are given responsibilities. The Ministry of Education and Training has recently placed greater emphasis on the expectation of school boards to provide parents/guardians with information during this phase.

Once a student has been identified as an "exceptional pupil", an Individual Education Plan (IEP) must be developed in consultation with parents. The plan must include: specific learning expectations for the student; an outline of the special education programs and services the pupil will receive; and a statement about how the student's progress will be reviewed for students with disabilities who are over 14 years of age, a plan must be developed for the transition to the time when the student has left school and is involved in other activities, such as further study, work, and community living (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, A Stronger Voice for Parents, 1998).

The third phase is called the Implementation Phase. Staff who are responsible for the student's education ensure that the Individual Education Plan can be successfully followed. A timetable is put in place to organize the student's school day. In many cases, students are also given opportunities to experience out-of-school learning that will help them to make a successful transition from school life to living in the community.

The Evaluation Phase is the last phase within this model of programme delivery.
The aim is to determine the effectiveness of the programme and find out how well the student is doing. Staff at the school and parents are involved in this phase. This kind of communication is necessary to understand the student's level of success as outlined in the IEP and the evaluation phase also gives staff an opportunity to know if there are additional factors to consider that would increase the students' level of success. In some cases, the evaluation phase may result in the need to assess the needs of the student again.

**Funding & Resources**

Successful student experiences are also determined by factors that occur outside of the classrooms and the school. The Ontario government has recently established a funding model aimed at ensuring that students identified as being exceptional, are provided with financial resources that they require to meet their educational potential.

Ontario's student-focused approach to funding will provide a Special Education Grant of over $1.2 billion in 1999-2000, to ensure that students with special needs have programs and supports that meet their individual needs (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, Student-focused approach to funding, 1999-2000 Special Education, 1999).

There are two main parts to this Special Education Grant. The majority of students at this study site would qualify for the Intensive Support Amount (ISA) Grant because of their needs throughout the school day. According to the Ministry of Education and Training, "Students who required intensive supports in the classroom for over 80 per cent of the day were eligible for an ISA grant of $27,000." The government's aim is to ensure that this funding is available to all special education programs in the province. Both integrated and segregated classroom settings are supported and each school board is given an opportunity to maintain a variety of placement options.

The Ministry of Education and Training remains committed to the principle that integration of exceptional pupils should be the normal practice in Ontario, when such a placement meets the student's needs and is in accordance with parents' wishes. However, school boards can offer alternatives for those students whose needs would be better met in special classes or resource withdrawal program (Ministry of Education and Training, Student-focused approach to funding, 1999-2000 Special Education, 1999).

In addition, a number of students at this study site would qualify for the government's Special Incidence Portion funding. This money is for students with extraordinary high needs for intensive supports. Additional staff supports can be secured
for needy students that may cost up to a maximum of $27,000. The government has also set aside grant money to purchase individualized equipment that cost more than $800.00 per student in a single school year. Since many of the youngsters require special equipment, this funding will support their progress towards greater independence. Also, parents and other advocacy groups continue to influence special education policies and procedures in Ontario. Their involvement has resulted in parents being more involved with the daily programs of these youngsters.

All school boards in Ontario are required to establish a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) in accordance with the Education Act. This committee makes recommendations to the school board about matters affecting the establishment, development and delivery of special education programs and services. The mandate of SEAC is to protect the rights of students with special learning needs. These rights include ensuring that their education develops their individual capabilities.

The school board where this study took place has developed guiding principles that influence the kind of instruction delivered to these students (Toronto District School Board, 2000). They are:

- All exceptional students, their families and staff who support them have the right to be treated with respect.
- All exceptional students have the right to reach their potential.
- A range of placements, programs and services should be available to meet the needs of exceptional students.
- All exceptional students and the staff who support them have the right to a safe, secure and encouraging environment.
- A partnership of students, school, family and support services is essential to the success of all exceptional students.

About fifty percent of the 80 students at the study site have multiple exceptionalities. Intensive support is provided in order to give the necessary resources that will help them to reach their potential. Staff at the school with support from others are able to identify student needs. They put together programs that will help the student to function better in school and in the community. Each student's strengths and needs are identified according to a profile that the school board has developed. The profile lists nine comprehensive categories that might be included in an individual program for these youngsters. Seven levels of proficiency are also listed. Level one represents students with the highest need.
and level seven represents students who may be categorized as 'gifted.' Based on the interviews with staff at the school and documents related to the students' program, the majority of them are in level one and a few are in level two. Their skills are extremely limited and they require extensive support in order to meet their needs. A former principal at this school gave this account to illustrate the program needs for a number of students at the school.

They need to be fed. They need to be diapered. Many are in wheelchairs. Some of our youngsters have extreme physical limitations. The child may never walk, they may be on G-2 feeds and that may or may not be something that will change later. So then you ask yourself, "what can you do with and for this youngster?" Can we provide some way for this youngster to have some kind of control over his environment?

The answer to this question is often yes. It usually requires creative steps to enable the youngster to learn how to use a special device or develop a particular muscle that is necessary for completing some basic task. Ted, for example, is twelve-year-old student at the school. He has been identified as a youngster who has multiple disabilities. He is non-verbal and non-ambulatory (paraplegic). He knows how to use a communication device which requires him to push picture symbols on an electronic board. He recently got an electric wheelchair. Ted's program provides him with the following opportunities to develop his capabilities:

- work with a physiotherapist on a daily basis to improve his mobility. The gym teacher at the school will also support him;
- participate in an aquatics program in order to improve his gross motor skills
- develop wheelchair mobility, using lines on the gym floor, obstacle courses;
- develop a set of symbols for his picture board that relate specifically to activities in the physical education class;
- include classroom activities that focus on helping Ted to develop feelings of self-worth and success.

Another student at the school is Amy. She is a twenty-year-old student who will be leaving school in a year. She is verbal and is able to use language to communicate her basic needs. She is obese and she dislikes physical exercise. School staff believe that Amy would benefit from a leisure education that will help her to use her time in a constructive manner. Her homeroom teacher with input from a multidisciplinary team at the school has provided Amy with opportunities to:
- keep a diary of leisure activities;
- pay admission fees to sporting events as part of the training she requires to attend leisure events;
- walk around the community on a daily basis;
- learn to prepare simple and healthy meals;
- learn to read schedules, menus, and signs in her community so that she can
- use libraries, restaurants and shopping malls as leisure options.

All students at the school have programs that help them to develop to their fullest potential. Staff encourage parents and other responsible individuals to support the individualized program of the school. The acquisition of a wide range of skills will enable these youngsters to have “a measure of control over their environment and over their lives” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990, p.18).

**Summary-Chapter Three**

This chapter focused on two areas: the description of the school site and the school’s operating principles. The description of the study site provided insight into the school community, the school building, the students, the staff and programs that are offered at the school. The aim was to provide an understanding of how these teachers, support staff and administrators meet the needs of their students. The Ministry of Education and Training has established a process that address the needs of students with normative exceptionalities. The current funding approach provide these students with needed resources. The model for school-level planning is said to provide the school with a comprehensive approach to individual programming. Resources can be accessed in an effort to realize the goal of greater independence. The next chapter will focus on the design and methodology of the study.
Chapter Four

Design and Methodology

Introduction and Design Rationale

The design of this study was based on responding to the general research question: "What are the critical success factors that school staff identify to successfully meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities?" The over-all design of the study was a case study. The case study design was chosen as an appropriate form of research to elicit answers to the research questions. Becker (1968, p. 233) states that a purpose for carrying out a case study is "to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study." This approach results in a clear plan for describing, explaining and interpreting a unique educational program. In addition, the inductive nature of case studies allow for interesting discoveries which can lead to the acquisition of further knowledge about this school environment (Stake, 1981). The participants were able to provide insights into a unique learning environment.

Yin (1994) states that the case study has a prevalent place in research. "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, ... (p.13)". Within this unique school environment, case study research has an opportunity to illuminate the educational practice of the staff. Their daily interactions occur within the boundaries of the school. Merriam (1998) claims that case study research provides an opportunity to focus on the entity. "I can ‘fence in’ what I am going to study. The case then, could be a person such as a student, a teacher, a principal; a group such as a class, a school, a community; a specific policy and so on (p. 27)."

The case study was also selected because of its special features. It is characterized by being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 1998). Staff at this school setting are working in a particular situation. The researcher was provided with an opportunity to "concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation" (Shaw, 1978, p.2). The case study approach allowed these individuals to describe their work in rich detail. The words of the respondents provided clear images of situations at the school. From a heuristic point of view, the comments and stories of the respondents gave the reader an
enlightened understanding of the school. The heuristic quality of the case study also provided explanations for why this school is able to meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities. In summary, then, the case study design provided a process that addressed the research questions, produced research findings that resulted in a deeper understanding of the way a specialized school environment meets the needs of these students. This chapter describes the methodology used in the study: design of the study, the sample, data sources, interview guide, procedures and analysis of data.

**Over-all Design of the Study**

The design incorporated a qualitative approach and a specific procedure developed by Bullen and Rockart (1981) to elicit critical success factors from each participant. The combination of these two methodologies resulted in a comprehensive treatment of the data.

A qualitative approach was selected because of the need to collect in-depth insightful data from individuals. As Merriam (1988, p. 3) points out, this approach "offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education." A study of students with normative exceptionalities brought into focus issues that must be considered within a contextual framework. Questions about successful and unsuccessful school experiences and what accounted for them would be difficult to measure within a quantitative paradigm. The responses from the participants could not be predetermined. The qualitative approach allowed for a wide latitude of responses. Participants need to be free to respond to open ended questions that were aimed at providing personal insights into the goals they have for their students. Respondents needed to be able to describe complex interactions and outcomes freely.

The qualitative approach permitted real-life situations to be portrayed in a way that illuminated personal accounts based on experiences working in the study site. Seemingly ordinary narrative stories provided a holistic understanding about the education of these youngsters. The nature of a qualitative study also allowed for ambiguity. While there were guidelines, there were few prescribed steps to follow. Within this structure, there were opportunities to adapt or pursue any direction that would lead to further meaning. Words that paint pictures of the particular phenomenon were used to talk about events and themes at the study site.
Lastly, a qualitative approach was selected because of the inherent inductive features. The emphasis in this study was not on testing a theory but rather on arriving at a better understanding of this kind of school environment (Merriam, 1988, p. 20). More specifically, the study provided the school administration with an opportunity to obtain information that is needed to successfully support and maintain organizational goals of the school. Within the qualitative approach, a strategy developed by Bullen and Rockart (1981) was adopted in order to elicit critical success factors from the respondents. This procedure was used for one aspect of data analysis. The framework of the approach was based on the conceptualization of critical success factors needed by executives in order to successfully run their company by Bullen and Rockart (1981) and related literature on the use of critical success factors in educational settings also provided valuable information.

Bullen and Rockart provided a structured approach for drawing out key information from individuals about what they required to successfully meet the needs of their jobs and of the organization (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p. 45). Critical success factors are subjective. Each participant identified factors based on a personal view of what was seen as being critical areas of activity based on their role within the organization. This approach provided a consistent way for participants to express their responses about current critical success factors. In the aggregate, in organizational terms, these factors "represent the few 'factors' which are 'critical' to the 'success' of the manager concerned" (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p. 12). This approach was used with the participants at the school site. They were asked to identify factors that were necessary for them to reach goals that promote student achievement. These were aggregated into categories and rank-ordered in order to provide an understanding of their priorities.

The inclusion of this structured approach provided the researcher with another perspective on the priorities of each participant. Use of the two approaches resulted in a more holistic view. The use of these two sources of data reflect the triangulation process. Triangulation is a procedure that uses "multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to 'confirm the emerging findings' (Merriam, 1998 p.204). Also, Shulman et al. (1988) suggest that the researcher "become skilled and experienced in at least two forms of research methodology" (p. 16). In addition, they claim that, "The best research programs will reflect intelligent deployment of a diversity of research methods"
applied to their appropriate research questions" (p.16). The inclusion of a focus group meeting during this study provided yet another source of data. The researcher selected these methods to ensure that comprehensive data would be used to address the research questions.

**The Sample**

A group of participants were selected to address the general research problem. Non probability sampling methods were chosen because of the aim to discover "what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences" (Honigmann, 1982, p. 84). A common form of non probability sampling is purposeful (Patton, 1990) or purposive (Chein, 1981). According to Patton (1990), "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned." In this instance the purpose motivating this sample selection was to ensure that the participants represented roles at the school that have a direct impact on the students.

According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993, p. 69), criteria are required for choosing participants. The following criteria were used to select the group for the study: the participants had to have a direct responsibility for working with these students on a long term basis, they had to have worked in the setting for more than one school year, they had to have been willing to be interviewed at the study site. All vice-principals, principals and the school superintendent of the school participated because of their key role at the school. These criteria provided a certain level of consistency for the selection of participants.

A purposeful sample of twenty was selected from the staff of thirty-five. The fifteen remaining staff members were given an opportunity to participate; they, declined. However, it should be noted that the sample of twenty represented most of the roles at the school. The sample consisted of teachers, consultants, educational assistants, health care assistants, noon hour assistants, nurses and administrative personnel. For organizational purposes, these individuals were placed into three categories: teachers, administrators and support staff.
The sample consisted of eight teachers, seven members of the support staff and five administrators. This group of participants were selected at the study site. The principal informed staff at a meeting that permission had been granted to carry out a study at the school by the school superintendent. Staff were told that participation in the study was voluntary and that there would be no negative consequences to individuals who decided not to participate. A teacher at the school volunteered to be the contact person. She provided the researcher with background information about the school. She also expressed an interest in the research question. A planning meeting with this teacher before the study started, resulted in the identification of likely participants. The process to select participants began with a review of teachers, support staff and administrators that was located in the school staff directory. Following Chein's (1981) example, the aim was to interview a group of individuals who would be able to talk about their work within the school setting. A list of twenty-five names was selected from the thirty-five member staff. Each prospective participant was contacted by phone and was asked to participate in the study. Twenty out of the twenty-five possible participants agreed to participate in this study. They were informed that it would be audio taped and would take approximately forty-five minutes to complete.

Sources of Data

Person-to-person interviews were the main source for data collection. The main purpose of an interview is to obtain information that address the research questions. According to Patton (1990, p. 278), the researcher wants to find out what is "in and on someone else’s mind." The interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. Copies of each transcript was sent back to each respondent for review. After each transcription, data were read and sorted into categories and themes. Critical success factors were elicited from the participants during the interviews. A subsequent focus group meeting gave participants an opportunity to discuss the critical success factors that were identified at the school.

Once all the interviews were completed, related school board documents and records were used as additional sources of data. School handbooks, brochures and archival information provided useful insights. A few of the participants provided copies of class newsletters, student protocol notices and personal lesson plans. The research staff
at the school board also shared background information that helped to explain the development of the program at the study site. Observational data were also used throughout the study. The aim was to become a good observer. Skills used included, "learning how to write descriptively; practicing the disciplined recording of field notes; knowing how to separate detail from trivia ... and using rigorous methods to validate observations" (Patton, 1990, p. 201). Before the interviews began, informal meetings were arranged with people who worked in the special education department of schools. The conversations focused on the nature of their work. Their comments and suggestions contributed to the development of the interview guide.

**The Interview Schedule**

The interview schedule (Appendix A) was designed to elicit data to answer the research questions. These questions were related to specific sub-research questions. Asking good questions is critical for achieving good data. Towards this end, three of six kinds of questions, according to Patton (1980, cited in Merriam, 1988), were used to motivate the respondents to share their views about this phenomenon. The kinds of questions selected were predominantly:

* **Experience/behaviour questions** ... “aimed at eliciting descriptions of experiences, behaviours, actions, and activities that would have been observable had the observer been present” (p.207).

* **Opinion/value questions** (that )try to find out “ what people think about the world or about a specific program. They tell us people’s goals, intentions, desires, and values” (p.207).

* **Background/demographic questions** “locate the respondents in relation to be factual information regarding the research topic” (p.209).

The interview guide was semi-structured. This format was chosen because it proved an effective way to collect information. As outlined in Merriam (1996, p.82), the interview guide comprised of “some ... open-ended questions that could be followed up with probes, and perhaps a list of some areas, topics, and issues ...” The questions were developed through conversations with special education school officials about their critical success factors. This group of individuals also were involved in the field testing of the interview guide prior to the start of the study.
Ethical considerations and Interview Procedures

Ethical considerations were put in place at the beginning of the study in order to protect the rights of the participants throughout the study. The school superintendent approved and supported the study. He provided access to the study site after receiving approval through the school Board's Research Department. Members of the Board's research department also expressed an interest in the study. They saw this study as an opportunity for an external review of the school. Their interest, however, did not interfere with the goals of this study or the procedures that were established.

Students at the school were not interviewed. The participants were informed, in writing, that the information they provided would be kept in strictest confidence. Each prospective participant was provided with a letter that explained the study (Appendix B). The letter also indicated that the researcher was a student in a Doctoral program and that the results of the study would be published at a thesis.

Prospective participants, who agreed to participate, were told that they would receive a copy of the questions that would be asked during the interview. They also received a printed copy of the transcribed interview for their records so that they could verify or modify their transcript.

The consent form (Appendix C) was read and signed before each interview. They were also assured that their anonymity would be preserved in the records and in the reporting. In addition, they were made fully aware of the objectives of the study and were told that when the study was completed they would have access to the results. They could refuse to respond to a question and they had the right to withdraw at any time with the understanding that there would be no negative consequences. The participants were made aware that their responses would have no impact on their professional performance. Participation in this study did not involve any personal risk on the part of the participant nor were intrusions made into their personal life. The data were stored in locked files throughout the study and were stored in a data archive at the end of the study.

The participants were also provided with a verbal definition of critical success factors as outlined by Bullen and Rockart. Critical Success Factors are “key areas where things must go right in order to successfully achieve objectives and goals (1981, p.9).” Examples were given of possible critical success factors from the computer industry. They were: the choice of market niche, technological leadership, orderly product
development, service and stability and the attraction and retention of quality personnel. An opportunity was given for participants to ask questions or have something clarified. They were also told about receiving a copy of the interview questions a few weeks before their scheduled interview time.

The telephone conversations were also used to set-up possible meeting times which were later confirmed or altered by mutual consent. The participants were given an opportunity to ask questions or make suggestions. Some did ask questions in order to clarify what their role would be in the study. One participant indicated that it would be interesting to add a student group to the sample. He, however, realized that communication and protocol issues could present significant obstacles. Three of the five individuals who chose not to participate did so because of work and family commitments that resulted in scheduling conflicts. The other two individuals indicated that they were not able to participate at this time.

All interviews took place at the study site. They took place in classrooms and in offices after-school. These settings provided consistent opportunities to pick up contextual information from being on site. Before each interview began, time and care were given to establishing a rapport with the participant. Chit-chat about whatever seemed appropriate occupied the first few minutes of the interview. This informal time also provided an opportunity to organize materials and make sure that the tape-recorder was ready for use.

All participants were asked the same questions. It should be noted, however, that the questions were presented in a very flexible manner. Questions were repeated or rephrased at times to ensure that each participant clearly understood what was being asked. The goal was to gather "common" data for this case study (Merriam, 1988, p. 73). During many of the interviews, the questions did not follow the printed order. Also, if when responding to a question the interviewee included comments that related to another question the next question may have been omitted. The participants became aware that the main focus was not to ask all the questions that were printed on the interview guide. The aim was for them to be able to share their views as they related to the general research question: "What are the critical success factors that teachers, support staff and administrators identify to successfully meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities?" This question was kept in mind during the preparation of the interview.
guide. Each question was carefully developed in order to unravel the respondent's thoughts on this topic. Since each respondent looked at the issue from differing perspectives, questions were written or asked in a way that promoted open ended dialogue.

The formal part of the interview began with thanking the interviewee for participating in the research study. In some of the interviews, demographic data was asked first while in others this factual information was asked near the end of the interview. The opening question was descriptive: *Tell me about a successful school experience you have had while working with students in this school.* It was then followed up with: "*What factors accounted for the success you experienced?*" These two questions addressed the sub-question: *What do school staff view as successful school experiences for students with normative exceptionalities and what accounted for the success?*

Contrasting questions were then asked: *Tell me about an unsuccessful school experience you have had while working with students in this school.* It was then followed up with: *What factors accounts for the lack of success you experienced?* These two questions addressed the sub-questions: *What do school staff view as unsuccessful school experiences for students with normative exceptionalities and what accounts for the lack of success?*

Two questions that focused on goals were asked next: *Tell me about goals you have for students in your school.*. Followed by: *What are your short and long term goals for your students?* These questions addressed the sub-question: *What are the short and long term goals of students with normative exceptionalities?* The sub-question: *Are there differences in the perception of what is viewed as successful school experiences among staff who work with these students?* provided an opportunity to use multiple sources of data to confirm the findings that emerged.

**Procedures for Critical Success Factors**

Critical Success Factors were then discussed in the same interview with the participants. Responses from the participants addressed the following sub-questions: *What factors are associated with success and what factors hindered success? and What critical success factors have been identified by the respondents to meet the needs of the school's goals and are there differences in CSFs among staff groups?*
Bullen and Rockart's (1981) procedures on Critical Success Factors were used to guide this part of the interview. They outline three major areas: objectives of the interview, pre-interview preparation and interview procedure in their section on "interview procedure and techniques." The objective was to gain a clear understanding of how each participant viewed their involvement with students. Critical success factors were defined and participants were given an opportunity to talk about factors that they saw as critical to meeting the needs of these students. An emphasis was placed on eliciting factual information from the respondents about "the few key areas of activity in which favourable results are absolutely necessary to reach goals (1981, p. 9)." This part of the interview was guided by these four steps:

1. Opening the Interview,  
2. Interviewee's Description of the school's Mission and Role,  
3. Discussion of the Interviewee's Goals,  
4. and identifying Critical Success Factors.

Opening the CSFs part of the interview began with a brief introduction of the rationale behind identifying these factors. Some respondents asked questions about the CSFs concept. After the questions were answered, the conversation was guided by the following statement.

Through our conversation about the program at your school, it is obvious that you have identified factors which you believe are necessary in order to administer an effective program for the students.

At this point, some of the respondents required a few examples to clarify whether they understood the concept behind CSFs. In some instances, it was necessary to give examples of what could be considered critical success factors. Some of the examples came from Rockart's (1979) article or from the work of Burrello and Johnson (1986). It should be noted, however, that the examples were not used to "prompt" certain responses.

The next step was to ask the interviewee to talk about school goals. Some respondents referred to "mission statements" which were developed previously while others talked about their role in the achievement of school goals. In either case, the aim was to elicit information to demonstrate the focus of the school. Some respondents identified critical success factors during this part of the interview.
When eliciting the respondent's goals, care was given to delineating goals and objectives. Rockart defines goals as "specific targets for a period of time" and objectives as "general directional statements" (Bullen & Rockart, 1981). Emphasis was placed on the respondent's goals rather than the respondent's objectives. These goals were categorized as short or long term goals. The nature of the goals also provided insight into the way each respondent viewed their work. Some goals were formal and some were informal. While the formal goals were often bound by policy, the informal goals were not overlooked because they had an impact on critical success factors.

The process of eliciting critical success factors from the respondents turned out to be challenging in a few of the interviews. Three respondents seemed unsure what to say when asked:

"Will you please tell me, in whatever order they come to mind, those things that you see as critical success factors in your job at this time?"

The question was then rephrased in the following manner:

Let me ask the same question concerning critical success factors in another way. In what one, two or three areas would failure to perform hurt the school the most? In short, are there areas within the scope of program delivery and services that you would most hate to go wrong?

Each respondent received a transcribed copy of their critical success factors interview with a note of thanks. The copy was sent to their school about a week after the interview was completed. They were given an opportunity to comment on the printed transcript in a follow-up telephone interview. Two of them included additional points while the other eighteen respondents made no additions or deletions to the information they shared during the interview. During the telephone conversation, each participant was asked to prioritize the CSFs that were elicited in the interview. Bullen and Rockart (1981) noted that this process was not essential. However, positive responses were received from the participants even though a number of them indicated that all of their factors are equally critical. A follow-up focus group meeting gave ten of the participants another opportunity to discuss the critical success factors.
Focus Group CSFs Meeting

The focus group meeting was scheduled in order to verify and validate the critical success factors that were elicited from the participants. The meeting occurred after all participants received a copy of their transcripts. Ideas from Stewart and Shamdasani's (1990) and Morgan's (1993) books were used in the planning and organization of the meeting.

A purposive sample was also selected for the focus group. A representative number from the respondent population was chosen (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal was to include respondents who were teachers, support staff and administrators. The individuals were notified of the meeting through a telephone conversation. A notice was also sent to each of them through the inter-school mail system. Ten respondents attended the meeting. During the telephone conversation, the respondents were asked to review their transcript and pay particular attention to the critical success factors that they had identified during their interview.

Before the meeting started, light refreshments were put out and the staff room chairs were arranged into a semicircle. As the respondents arrived, many chatted about the upcoming summer holidays. When all of them arrived, a brief introduction of names was provided. They were thanked again for coming to the meeting and for taking their time to be involved in the study. The definition of CSFs was reviewed. The primary research question was read and posted on a piece of chart paper where it would be visible to the group.

What are the critical success factors that school staff identify to successfully meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities?

A overhead transparency of all respondents' critical success factors was shown. The group was asked to talk about the identified factors. Their comments were recorded on chart paper and grouped according to their role at the school. Other comments made by the group were also recorded and added to the data.

The Organization of the Data

At the beginning of the study, a process to manage the data was developed. Each person interviewed was given a number code. This number was placed on all of the documents given to the participant and placed in a file. The documents included a
copy of the consent form, demographic information, a letter that introduced the study and a copy of the verbatim tape recorded transcript. The original audio-tape was also stored in each participant's file. The software program HyperQual was also used as a tool to organize data. The HyperQual program will be discussed in the following section.

**The Analysis of the Data**

True to the nature of qualitative research, this analysis was not a step-by-step process (Merriam, 1998, p. 151). The analysis of the data took place at the same time that the data were being collected. The process of exploration and discovery made a chronological approach to data analysis impossible. Seemingly ambiguous information, categories and themes began to emerge like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle after careful analysis. Field notes, "observer's comments," reflective notes, and the transcript of each respondent were thoroughly read over until a direction for the organization of the data became clear. Many strategies were then examined before the data were analyzed in a manner that would best address the general research question. At the conclusion of this inquiry, data analysis was organized by sub-research questions.

All audio-tapes were personally transcribed by the researcher. This strategy provided an opportunity to acquire a complete review of what was said during each interview. Each participant verified the transcript for accuracy. After each transcript was transcribed, a review of the purpose of the research study was done. Time was taken to write in the margins of the transcript what was thought to be interesting points. "The notes serve to isolate the initially most striking, if not ultimately most important, aspects of the data" (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1999, p. 236. cited in Merriam 1998). Questions about the data were also recorded. Different colour highlighters were used to identify preliminary themes. These visual cues helped to show patterns that were emerging from the data.

Categories began to emerged. The data were put into these categories by following a sorting process that was directed towards the focus of this study. At the end of the process, nine categories were constructed from the data. The categories were then organized according to the school role of the respondents. These groups formed subcategories. Information from and about teachers, support staff, and administrative personnel were grouped together. Analysis of this information resulted in the indexing of
recurring themes and categories as they relate to the research problem and questions. The goal of this process was to organize the information into meaningful chunks so that the situation under study could be understood within the framework of the investigation.

A narrative analysis strategy was used to elicit the data in this study. The participants were asked to “tell” about their experiences with these students and to talk about the goals that they have for them. Their stories were analyzed by organizing the information into categories and subcategories. A great deal of insight into their role at the school was gained by listening to a collective set of unique experiences. Many of their excerpts are recorded in the next chapter.

Documents about the study site were also reviewed. “Documents are, in fact, ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (Merriam, 1998 p.112). Copies of the school’s handbook, newsletters, current demographic profile and a set of lesson plans from one of the teachers at the school were sources of valuable information. These data were added to the information collected through interviews, the focus group meeting and personal observations.

The analysis of the responses about critical success factors followed two major steps that are outlined Bullen and Rockart (1981). They are reviewing CSFs and aggregating CSFs. The review process began with creating tables to help organize the information that was elicited from each interviewee (Appendix D). Each participant’s factors were in keeping with the objectives of this part of the interview (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p. 45). The pattern of sorting the information continued until patterns and themes emerged. Categories and sub-categories developed from the CSFs. CSFs by the participant roles were then compared. This information was shared with a number of the participants at the focus group meeting to further review the data. In a few instances, participants added additional CSFs.

Aggregating CSFs involved grouping the information within the categories. Additional tables were organized to chart teachers’, support staff’s and administrators’ rankings of CSFs. The participants were asked to rank their CSFs from 1 to 5 in order of priority. A ranking of 1 was viewed as the first priority CSFs. A ranking of 2 was viewed as the second priority CSFs and so on. The ranking of CSFs was used as a way to measure individual and group responses.
A computer software tool, HyperQual, was used to record and store all collected data. The program was designed to "free the mind of the researchers as much as possible from having to worry about the mechanics of qualitative data analysis" (Padilla, 1991, p. 8). HyperQual has features which record, manage and analyze text data. With HyperQual "stacks" of information can be "tagged" and then sorted to identify relevant categories or concepts in the data.

The "stacks" are information cards which recorded the responses of each participant in the study. The transcribed audio tapes were placed directly into the HyperQual data stacks. The Xview stack was used extensively. The four initial cards within this stack are especially designed for use with interview data. A detailed summary of how this computer software program organizes the data is presented in Appendix E (Padilla, 1991, p. 10).

HyperQual computer software was found to be a valuable tool in the recording, management and analysis of data in this study. The program allowed for efficient sorting of data into useful groupings, and tag data chunks in order to highlight patterns and relationships in the data. At all times, however, complete control over the data was left with the researcher who was also able to focus on emerging features of the study which surfaced during the data analysis.

**Summary Chapter Four**

The collection of data for this study was based on a process that would give each respondent an opportunity to express views in a clear and efficient manner. The over-all methodology incorporates case study and critical success factors approaches. Steps were taken before and after the interviewing period to ensure that the information collected reflected the opinions of the respondents. A description of the data collection process and the identification of categories were crucial aspects of the methodology. Bullen and Rockart's procedure was used to elicit CSFs from the respondents within each interview. The prescribed method supported the need to gain consistent data. The *HyperQual* computer software program was a mechanical application that was used to record, store and manipulate chunks of data in preparation for data analysis.
In the next chapter, results from the interview data are presented. These results are organized from interview data elicited from teachers, support staff and administrators.
Chapter Five

Qualitative Results

Introduction

In this chapter the results from the interview data are organized and presented in three sections. The organization of the data in this manner allows comparisons to be made among the respondents according to roles and responsibilities. The first section presents results based on the responses of eight teachers who participated in the study. The second section presents results based on the responses of seven support staff who participated in the study and the third section presents results based on the responses of five administrators who participated in the study. The data are presented in a way that is intended to provide word pictures of the daily interactions that respondents have with the students. Themes are then drawn out of the data as a way to consolidate the major results of this study.

The primary research question is: "What are the critical success factors that school staff identify to successfully meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities?"

The interviews specifically address the following sub-questions:

1. What do school staff view as successful school experiences for students with normative exceptionalities and what accounts for the success?
2. What do school staff view as unsuccessful school experiences for students with normative exceptionalities and what accounts for the lack of success?
3. What are the short and long term goals of students with normative exceptionalities?
4. What factors are associated with success and what factors hindered success?
5. Are there differences in the perception of what is viewed as successful school experiences among staff who work with these students?

The results will be reported under these five sub-questions. Teachers, support staff and administrators will form the three groups from which the results are elicited. The names which are used have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Themes that emerged from the interview data are presented within the summary of each sub-question. A comprehensive discussion of these themes are documented in chapter seven. The over-all theme that came out of the interview data was student
independence. However, the data indicated that respondents had a variety of perspectives about what interventions are required to support student progress towards independence. For instance, some respondents spoke about the capability of students to acquire physical independence through programs that focused on mobility while others focused on providing students with social skills that would enable them to interact with others in appropriate ways. Others revealed particular beliefs about these students which influenced expected levels of independence. For instance, one respondent talked about the attitude of some staff towards students who use wheel chairs. They see these students as having disabilities that limit more than their physical independence. These differences are not surprising given Individual Education Plans, however, the data revealed disparity in participants’ perspectives about what is meant by independence for these students. It is possible that their beliefs had an impact on the way they carried out their roles and responsibilities at the school.

**Sub-Research Question 1:**

What do school staff view as successful school experiences for students with normative exceptionalities and what accounts for the success?

**Teachers’ Responses**

The teaching sample included teachers that teach at the primary, junior, intermediate and senior divisions. They have taught for at least three years at the school. An average of eight students are in each classroom. They also work with an educational assistant on a daily basis and consultants also regularly support the teachers. The eight teachers spoke about a variety of situations that they viewed as successful experiences. These included positive changes as a result of discovering a capability, behaving appropriately, reaching a maturation goal, being integrated into a “regular” classroom, toileting, developing programs that promote greater student participation and creating a school climate that promotes self-esteem among students. The following are their stories of success.

Anna identified a success in terms of discovering a way to promote the consistent use of a child’s voice. Anna has been teaching at the school for eight years. This is the only school she has worked at. She had a student in her class who was identified as an
elective mute. She wouldn’t talk during the school day. However, at home she would pretend to be the teacher and act out her school day. The girl’s parents told Anna about this behaviour and invited her over to see what was happening for herself.

They invited me for dinner and they said that you have to try and see her do this little routine. I went into the closet that was near to the room she was in and she started doing her little routine. I stepped out of the closet and said, “Ha ha. I can hear you talking. You were talking. You were being me.” She was so stunned that she started to laugh and she started to talk after that.

Anna could not come up with a reason for experiencing this success. She however, thanked the parents for talking with her about what their daughter was doing after school. Communication between the home and the school helped to make the teacher aware of this child’s capabilities.

Anna offered to tell another story which she viewed as a successful school experience. This incident took place over a three month period and it focused on the child’s ability to feed herself in an appropriate manner. Anna shared her story about Emily. She is a six year old girl who would put up a struggle at meal times.

The first time this student sat down to lunch in the classroom, she threw a bowl full of yogurt. The yogurt landed on the head of another student and the bowl hit the carpeted floor. I decided that every time the youngster would throw something I would pull out her chair, stand the immobile student up on her feet and direct her to pick up what she had thrown. ... The next step was to set up a program where she would feed herself. At first she would spit out the food when someone was helping her to feed herself. So I did an awful lot of hand over hand. The food was picked up with the spoon and directed to her mouth. This was done to keep the behaviour under control and after about a week, the student held the spoon with little guidance from me.

Anna believes that she experienced success because of her consistency. She told the parents, “It doesn’t matter where you start, just start with one thing and be consistent.” Anna decided to video tape the classroom lunch time routine. She also talked with the parents about other inappropriate behaviours that Emily can change by applying a consistent approach. Anna pointed out that “when adults are consistent, most students with developmental handicaps will learn that certain behaviours will not be accepted.” The child will soon realize that the tantrum will not result in the adult giving in to inappropriate demands.

The second teacher interviewed, talked about integration as a successful experience for students with normative exceptionalities. Robert has been teaching at the
school for six years. He talked about an experience he had while working with a student who was informally classified as "high functioning." Within this school population, these students had the most academic ability. Jason was placed in an integrated setting twice before he returned to this school setting. He was not initially successful in the integrated setting because of his inappropriate behaviour. However, Robert believed he should be given another chance.

I just felt that it was a case where the student had a lot of potential. If we could send him out with some support, he would be successful. I went over to the school and spoke to his teachers. I also talked to the youngster and explained that his current placement was a better place for him. ... Since that conversation, there have been some flare ups but he has stayed there. This is his second full year in an integrated program. I think that he is benefiting from being with 'regular' school children. He is now more likely to develop more normal behaviours.

The teacher accounted for this success by highlighting the importance of treating the youngster in a age appropriate manner. Having consistent expectations also led to Jason's success.

The tendency with many of our students is for teachers and other adults to treat them as their mental age rather than at their physical age. Kids live up to the expectations you set for them.

This student was viewed in this school as a good candidate for integration. He was relatively well behaved. He had the ability to work independently. Robert also added that if he didn't know what to do, he would ask. There were times he would slip back into inappropriate behaviours in the integrated setting. However, he continues to be educated in an integrated school environment.

The third teacher who participated in the study, also talked about the integration of students into "regular" classroom programs as being indicative of success. Allison has been teaching students with exceptionalities for twenty-seven years. This is her third school setting. Allison talked about the gains two of her non-verbal students are making.

Last year was great. I had a group of younger kids between 8 and 11. They were high functioning and verbal. Two of them are now integrated and are doing well. Two others are still in a behavioural class here at the school. They too, however, have made improvements. I have watched the improvements they have made going from being non-verbal to making good use of the Mayer Johnson picture symbols. That was one of my biggest thrills. I know it took three years but it was worth it. One of the students is starting to write cursively.

When asked to comment on what accounted for the success of this class, Allison focused
on the grouping of her students.

They became a good cohesive peer group for each other. Originally it was a wheel chair/mobile mix. Then I got two more verbal kids, with the two that weren't coming along and that helped them. We took a lot of field trips because they were all mobile. We could use concrete experiences. As a result of their cognitive abilities, trips to the Royal Winter Fair, the zoo etc. provided learning experiences for this group of students.

The fourth teacher participant, talked about the success of a student who needed to be toilet trained. Chris has been teaching at the school for four years.

I'd like to share an experience I had recently while working with one of my students. This girl demonstrated autistic-like behaviours. She was six years old at the time. She had never successfully used the washroom in school. I was able to, by Christmas time, to have her success rate up to thirty percent fro zero. I felt that this was remarkable for her and family.

Chris believed that she was successful with this primary student because of the bond she had formed with the student and because of the communication between the child's mother and the school.

I got information from her mother about her toilet training routine at home. I found out that she wasn't any more successful at home either. I started to chart when she had accidents. She was having accidents about a half hour after she had her lunch. Another problem was that she was not inclined to sit on the potty long enough to do anything. ... I went into the bathroom with her. I waited with her and then after a few weeks she had her first success. We gave her a lot of praise. I told her mom and she followed a similar training program at home. It was important to have consistent routines between the home and the school.

Derick, Physical Education teacher, talked about success that was based on the students' ability to participate.

I have been teaching gym at this school for three years. My aim is to introduce these kids to as many physical activities as possible. When I started working here, these kids did some games but they were not really exposed to physical fitness. Things like sit-ups, stretching, etc. I started to do sit-ups with these kids. It was difficult at the beginning because when you do sit-ups you start by being on the gym floor. Our behavioural students thought that I wanted to restrain them. So it was kind of frustrating at the beginning. After awhile, however, most of the students learned to do sit-ups by themselves or with the help of assistive devices. I had to demonstrate the activity. They need to see the movements.

Derick accounted for his success by focusing on the expectations that he had for these students.
I wanted them to develop their fitness to the maximum. I was willing to learn what these students could do. You know their disabilities but I focused on their abilities. The special equipment what we use in our gym program also help our students. Without them, many of our students would not be able to participate. I also want to mention the help our educational assistants and volunteers provide. They are a big support. Many of our students would not be able to participate without their help.

A teacher in the work education program, viewed success from an affective perspective. Vanessa has been at the school for six years. This is only school she has taught at.

A successful day for me would be a very positive day. It would be a day where students feel good about themselves. I have positive days when I see lots of smiles on the faces of our students. A lot of positive group work is happening. It is important for students to work well together. For other kids, I believe I have a successful day when there is a lot of eye contact and a lot of positive feedback for the support staff. I also like to hear comments from parents about the gains that their youngster is making.

To arrive at this kind success, the teacher talked about the work incentive program that is in place at the school.

We reinforce the students with one point for fifteen minutes of good behaviour. If there is a negative situation going on, we can take the points away as well. After a number of points are accumulated, students can cash them in for things like, videos, T-shirts or other items that they would want. ... They really need an incentive for them to work well. I think this is one of the reasons why some of our students try to improve their behaviour.

Katy is one of three teachers at the school who work with students who have behavioural challenges. She shared a successful experience about one of her students whose abilities had not been recognized.

I had a student two years ago who we thought was very low functioning. He has been in our system for years. He was probably seventeen years old when I got him. Everyone in his past report cards said he was low functioning and had major behavioural difficulties. As the behavioural teacher for senior kids, he was placed in my classroom. In October my assistant and I realized that he was really bright. He could read. Through a series of testing and setting up communication boards for this none verbal student, he was able to communicate with us. All of his aggression all but disappeared. He had no more aggressive incidents.

Katy accounted for the success of this youngster by giving credit to the work of the speech and language pathologist.
The speech and language pathologist was a major reason for this successful break through with this teenager. When you have a student that can read but is non-verbal it is hard to figure out what they know. You can’t just say, “Take this book and read it for me.” It’s really hard to find out what they know and what they don’t know. So the speech and language pathologist has a lot of strategies which she shared with me. The fact that I have a “behaviour” background, taken courses in behaviour management, and have been involved in in-service programs at the school has also been really useful. You learn to spot a kid who is misbehaving because it is a frustration thing where he can’t communicate. He can’t put across what he wants. So most of his aggression came from situations where it was obvious he was trying to tell you he didn’t want to this, so from there we could start working on reducing the behaviour by giving him some kind of tools to express his frustrations.

Today the youngster continues to work on activities which focus on increasing his functional vocabulary. The goal is for him to recognize more words in his environment. An emphasis will also be placed on his acquisition of basic math skills. His fine motor skills are also developing and he is learning how to count with the aide of manipulatives. This student is also receiving instruction that will help him manage chores such as making a lunch and going to the grocery store. The tasks involved in lunch making vary from locating materials, to opening containers, to spreading, to assembly and packaging. At a local grocery store, he is taught to get a shopping cart or basket as soon as he enters the store. He is learning to match words and pictures to help him make desired selections. These goals are revised periodically to reflect the youngster’s abilities and progress.

The last teacher participant talked about a youngster’s success which led to a job in a sheltered workshop. Paul prefaced the story by discussing the term developmentally handicapped. He finds the definition of the term frustrating because to him developmentally handicapped refers to students who are profoundly retarded. The most extreme students are said to be developmentally handicapped. They are the least capable students. In this school environment, however, developmentally handicapped has become a general term. This change has caused him a great deal of confusion. He believes that a number of students are called developmentally handicapped in this school but they are not. According to this teacher, “Some staff generalize that all students in wheelchairs are developmentally handicapped. They see the wheelchair first.”

He went on to say that the assumption is made that if the student is in a wheelchair they must be developmentally handicapped.
Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. A number of students at
the school who are in wheelchairs are bright. A few of them can read and
not many of the students at this school can read.

The teacher went on to talk about a student who was successful but he wasn’t sure
if the student could be considered developmentally handicapped.

He was my highest functioning student in that class. He is the only one
who I can truly say that I had any success. This is my personal
understanding of how I would use the language. I’m not sure I
considered this student as being developmental because he could
recognize me as a distinct individual. Other kids didn’t really know me.
They didn’t recognize me as their teacher or as their friend. They had
no desire to explore or to use anything as a tool. Some of them could
mouth things or take things and drop them but none of them could
actually manipulate something to explore it. This kid was different.
He gets excited when he sees the teacher. He tries to attract his attention
by making noises as if to say, “Hi”. He would reach out and
politely grab his hand.

This behaviour is not typical of a student who is developmentally handicapped. The
teacher focused on a program that would result in the student being transferred out of the
“developmental class” and into a class that had students who were higher functioning. The
teacher believed that this student could successfully function in a sheltered workshop.
Towards this end, he has set up a prevocational or work training program. The activities
are kept on a shelf that holds shoe box size bins. The boxes contains plastic baskets
which are colour coded according to the work activity. For instance, red baskets contain
items to be assembled, white baskets contain items to improve fine motor coordination,
blue baskets contain items to be matched and sorted and pink baskets contain items
which are a mixture of the three general activities. The activities are also numbered
according to difficulty level from one to seven. Each student in this class could be working
on a different activity. For instance, one student might be working on a simple fine motor
task by putting blocks in a cart while another student who is working at level two might be
working on a peg board. A sorting activity requires a student to put crayons in boxes.
The boxes must contain a prescribed number of coloured crayons.

Other activities require the student to operate a touch plate. In one situation after
the youngster completed an activity, she touched a large area that would activated a tape
recorder that played, “I am finished.” Staff at the school are trying to introduce more
adaptive equipment for use with the students. The technology helps students to gain
access to household items such as small electrical appliances. Touch plates allow these
students to become more involved in home activities.

The sort and matching activity begins with two distinct items and ends with the sorting and matching of items according to colour, shape, size and texture. Students take about two weeks to complete one activity. They spend about two hours each day working on these kinds of prevocational activities. Most of the students work up to about level three.

After the youngster worked with the teacher for a year, he was given an opportunity to work in a sheltered workshop. The teacher said that he is doing well and wishes that more of his students could be placed within a sheltered workshop. Apparently, there has been a reduction in these placements in the last few years. This change may have been caused by the automation of many work environments and the movement of these jobs to less developed countries.

Support Staff's Responses

Seven individuals who supported the work of teachers participated in this case study. They were: one speech and language consultant, two nurses, two educational assistants, one program consultant, and one psycho-educational consultant. Their interviews followed the same procedure as the teachers. Their stories of success highlight the roles and perspectives they have in their work with these students, teachers and parents. They view success through their interactions with other staff at the school and through the progress of the students they serve. It is clear that their support is a necessary component of each student who attends the school. They implement appropriate and creative programming strategies, support classroom management, provide crisis intervention and medical support. The support staff are at the school on a regular basis. Some of the health care workers come into the school only when they are needed.

Julie is the speech and language consultant at the school. She has been there for six years and she has worked in similar school settings for eleven years. She views her successful experiences through the achievements made by students, teachers and parents. She shared an experience that she had with establishing a class for five language delayed students who needed augmentative communication. These students had previously been in classrooms where they had augmentative communication boards.
However, they were the only students in each class who were using them. Julie was able to bring the students together into one class. All of them appeared to have some academic potential and they made a fairly nice homogeneous group. Their needs were similar. A meeting was set up with the parents, the speech and language consultant along with other staff at the school who were involved in this initiative. A teacher was selected to work with these students. The aim was to improve the students' literacy levels. Focus was also placed on the ability of students to become more independent and to develop appropriate social interaction skills.

I think it worked. The kids were definitely much more out going. It was a two year pilot project and then it went on. The students' literacy skills increased. Their ability and desire to use augmentative communication increased. We used Mayer Johnson symbols, sign language and what ever else worked. The nicest thing of all was that the children's parents were also seeing the improvement.

Initially, the speech and language consultant accounted for this success by calling it a "fluke". Julie went on, however, to point out that a need had been identified.

We knew what the need was and we drew up an idea. ... I guess one of the big reasons for success was administrative support. Without that it wasn't going to happen. So with the new principal's support we drew up a proposal and we presented it to our superintendent. The teacher was the perfect match. I learned so much. Just the way a teacher looks at the situation. When we can actually say, however, that you're seeing this and that's perfectly valid. But I'm seeing this and that's valid too. Then we were able to find common ground. That's the wonderful thing. It has happened in other situations but this was unbelievable. We have done presentations together, the teacher and I. I remember at one of them during a break, a speech pathologist from another board came up and looked at me and asked, "How are you managing to make this happen?" I said, "I don't know it just happened." But her astonishment that we were so closely together underscored and reinforced my own perception of the chasm that can exist between two professionals working at the same board. This was magic. This was truly magic.

April and Mary are two educational assistants who work at the school. Assistants were frequently talked about during the interviews with teachers. By all accounts, they perform duties which enable students to participate more fully in learning experiences. April talked about her school day starting by helping the classroom teacher to prepare the room for the students.
I work with a teacher that is responsible for a group of students who are "low functioning". I get the room ready by taking down the chairs and placing them in the right position for "circle time." I prepare art materials and put out activities that students will be working on when they come into the class.

When they arrive, April helps the teacher to deliver lessons to the group or on an individual basis. This assistant sits among the students during many of the lessons. She does this in order to redirect students whose attention may wander. By sitting with the students she is also able to provide them with a model of expected behaviour. In one of her accounts of a successful experience, she recalls a student who needed to be placed in a restraining chair.

The student frequently demonstrated inappropriate behaviours. It was always a struggle to get the student in the chair and many times it would have been easier for the teacher and I to give up. They learned, however, that if they were not successful in placing him in the restraining chair his inappropriate behaviours would escalate. According to the assistant, the key was to be consistent in their effort to place him in the chair. This youngster would put up a greater struggle on subsequent attempts to place him in the chair if the adults in the classroom gave up and allowed him to have control over the situation.

Mary was the second educational assistant who participated in the study. She talked about success by highlighting the adult student relationship which she has nurtured.

There is one boy who was very aggressive at first. After working with him for a couple of years he was a lot better. He was well behaved. His parents were happy. The school was happy. I would do extra things for him like taking him to the doctors. I went with him to get hearing aids. I took him there four times. In the past he would go in and try to destroy the office. When he was with me, however, he was fine and that made me feel very important. He behaved for me. That made me feel that I was doing a good job.

Mary accounted for the success by again talking about her relationship with this youngster.

I think he behaved appropriately because he was with me. He knew he couldn't get away with it. I feel that his behaviour at home and at the school are different. I know that at home he runs the house but he doesn't at school. Like any other student, he lives up to your expectations.

In closing, April and Mary shared their love of what they do. They enjoy working with teachers in the classes and they have a great deal of respect for the way teachers care
for youngsters. "They bring out the best in them. These teachers are simply amazing."

The program consultant for the school also participated in the study. Susan has an opportunity to work with teachers on a regular basis. She recalled a successful experience that she had with a student who was diagnosed with Down's Syndrome. She quickly realized that it would be important to develop a relationship with the student in order to promote greater success.

I worked on building up her self-esteem because I believe that all good teaching starts with building relationships. This girl just blossomed. She learned how to travel independently. She's participating in a work experience program. She is exciting about her options and she has developed a sense of humour.

Susan accounted for this success by again making reference to developing a good rapport with the student. Once that relationship was in place, academic and social expectations were outlined.

I know it sounds obvious but many of us forget. Relationship building is rarely seen on a youngster's education plan. It should be there because it can make all the difference in the world.

Susan also commented that she has kept up a friendship with this student. She has been able to be a mentor for this youngster who now is successfully working in a community store.

The Psycho-educational consultant is often contacted in a behavioural emergency. Bonnie has been working at the school for over ten years. She had a number of successful stories to talk about. Every time a potentially dangerous situation is avoided, she views it as a success.

One of the youngsters in a senior class was engaging in behaviour that was injurious to others and himself.

The psycho-educational consultant intervened and suggested that the student be placed in restraining chair. The incident was analyzed and the teacher, principal and psycho-educational consultant wrote up a program that included the use of the restraining chair.

According to school policy, the youngster's parents were contacted and they gave permission to initiate the program. Staff at the school value the expertise of these individuals especially when dealing with crisis situations. The psycho-educational consultant accounted for this success by referring to the training she received and by the numerous incidents she has experienced.
When I first started I was shocked. After awhile, I got used to developing intervention programs with teachers that would help them cope with difficult students. I am most successful when teachers are able to follow through with a strategy after I have help them put it into place.

The two nurses at the school are also seen as critical resources who help teachers. Donna and Allison are nurses who usually have very active days at the school.

Our day starts with busing. We are in charge of wheelchair busing. We make sure that all of the kids are accounted for. We call students who are absent. We then start toileting. We toilet two classrooms. we are on call at any given time throughout the day.

A number of students at the school require close medical attention on a regular basis. Their involvement helps to ensure that youngsters at the school are healthy enough to learn to the best of their ability. In addition to providing some students with medication and toileting support, they provide teachers with important medical information and suggestions that give teachers a better understanding of the medical impact on the youngster's learning.

In one situation, a teacher has three young non-verbal students in her class who require daily medication. These students are prone to have seizures on a regular basis. The nurses are on call during the school day and they constantly monitor these students and regularly communicate with their parents. Also, the nurses quickly intervene when students come in contact with medical conditions which are contagious. Since many of the students are medically fragile, they are often susceptible to contracting medical ailments. On-site nurses help to reduce this potential.

One teacher talked about a student she had who has a rash on his cheeks. He had pimples all over his face. However, this teacher suspected that it might be serious. I was called to look at the rash and I believed that it was impetigo. (Impetigo is an infectious skin disease causing pimples filled with pus). After a doctor confirmed the diagnosis, the child was sent home to his group home because impetigo is contagious.

The nurses checked all other students and staff members who may have come in contact with the student. Care givers at the group home were then alerted to the diagnosis and the student was absent from school for a few days. The on-site availability of nurses is seen as being critical to the care of these students.

The nurses are also responsible for changing the dressing of students who are fed through a tube. There is a dressing around the sides of the tube. It is an open area and it is normal for some drainage to get past the dressing. Teachers have been taught by the
nurses to be aware of the dressing around the tube. They need to make sure that students don’t inadvertently pull it out of place during the course of the school day. In addition, itinerant nurses (VON) also come into the school on a regular basis. They are responsible for cauterization and bladder expression procedures that a few of the students require.

Donna and Allison believe that they are successful most of the time because they know the kids and parents well.

We know when something is medically wrong with our students. We are rarely in our office. We are always in the classroom. Our kids are always experiencing seizures. They fall down. They’re banging their heads. They’re always seeming to be hurting themselves. So we are always dealing with minor injuries too.

The physiotherapist is another individual who plays an important role in supporting student learning at the school. Physiotherapy is very important for these students because of their often restricted mobility. Although the physiotherapist was not interviewed, she did talk about her role through a brief conversation in the staff room of the school. The physiotherapist visits the school on a regular basis to provide one to one programming that focus on positioning. This work is particularly important for students who are in wheelchairs for twelve to fourteen hours a day. The therapist believes that she is successfully carrying out her duties when youngsters have opportunities to experience different positions throughout their day.

It is essential that they get out into different positions. Even able bodied individuals are not able to sit in one position for very long. Therefore, it is not reasonable for these students to stay in a stationary period for long periods.

The physiotherapist works with teachers to ensure that students are in different positions or placed on a different apparatus during the school day. The different mechanical supports, help students to move around their classroom or the gymnasium. Opportunities for movement of this nature give students a broader sense of their physical world and helps them to develop a more positive mental outlook.

Teachers follow a program that takes students in wheelchairs out of their chairs at least once a day. They are given opportunities to explore the school environment while lying on their back and stomach. Teachers are taught to be mindful of these students experiencing muscle contractions. The physiotherapist and teachers work together to provide students with appropriate stretching activities. If students sit for too long, they can
experience painful muscle contractions.

All of these resources are in place to improve the quality of life for students at the school. It is clear that staff take a holistic view for educating students within this learning environment. The collaborative roles played by educational assistants, occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, psycho-educational consultant, nurses, and physiotherapist are all seen as critical by their responses. No one activity is seen as being more important to another because they all can contribute to successful experiences for the youngsters. The teachers recognize this interrelated aspect of teaching these students. The administrators at the school are also included in this group.

**Administrative Responses**

Five administrators participated in this study. They were: two vice-principals, two principals and the school superintendent. Changes in administration occurred during the study. The principal was transferred to another school and the vice-principal was promoted to become the principal of another school. A principal and a vice-principal are assigned to the school. Their individual interviews also followed the same procedure as the two previous groups. The stories of success reflect the role or belief in the curriculum. At the time of their interviews, a new language curriculum was being implemented in the school. The administrators supported this initiative and spoke highly of staff who embraced this new emphasis. Administrators also spoke about success based on experiences they had while working with students who had normative exceptionalities. The school superintendent spoke about two placement issues that were resolved in a successful manner.

Carol was a vice-principal at the time of the interview. Her story of success focused on the implementation of a new curriculum document called *The Art of Language*. She believes that children at the school would benefit from this shift towards a more academic program. "It's like a paradigm shift in the system. Teachers are realizing that there is more to teaching than just having a focus on basic skills." These teachers are being encouraged to incorporate components of mainstream programming. When asked to share an experience of success, Carol talked about a teacher who initially had some doubts about the concept. This teacher has taught these exceptional youngsters for about twenty years.
At first the teacher was reluctant to change her focus. When she started to implement a more language based program in her class, she was surprised at the progress her students made. Since then, this teacher has become an advocate for the program.

Carol believes that this teacher experienced success because she was willing to make "a paradigm shift". She also highlighted the work that was done prior to the implementation phase of the document.

We wrote the document during a summer writing program. Then we field tested it. So we had a validation period of a few months. The curriculum consultant, her program consultant met with four or five teachers throughout the validation period. Questions were answered about adaptation of the material. This particular teacher became a natural leader out of that experience. She was definitely convinced that this was the way to go.

Kim was another vice-principal at the school. She transferred to the school after Carol was promoted to the position of principal at another school for students with exceptional needs. Her story of success focused on a class unit on clothes that culminated with a fashion show.

Let me paint the scenario for you. There are a group of six year old students with down syndrome, cerebral palsy and there was one child in a wheel chair. They chose the kinds of clothes that they were going to wear. We did all kinds of classification exercises before the fashion show. We discussed all kinds of categories of clothes; clothes you wear in the day time, night time, summer, winter, etc.

Kim viewed this experience as successful because many teachers at the school thought that activities of this nature could only be done with students who attended "regular" schools. She also believes that teachers underestimate the capabilities of these students and are reluctant to try new approaches.

I had attended a workshop where strategies for classification were discussed. The workshop was aimed at teachers who taught "regular" kids but I felt our kids could also benefit. So I tried it and it worked. I was ready to try something new.

Kim was mindful about teachers being at different levels of awareness regarding professional development issues. Other teachers may require some kind of mentoring support before they would take on a new approach.

Mark was nearing retirement when he was principal at the school. He explained that he had never actually taught students who had a normative exceptionality. He had been appointed to the principalship based on his administrative experience. Mark
became principal at the school ten years ago. He became involved in initiatives that enabled students to use community resources. In his account of a successful experience he talked about a public transportation program that not only made the youngsters aware of community resources but also helped them to become more independent. Some parents were skeptical about this program because they were not convinced that their son or daughter would experience success. Mark, however, had confidence in the training program. Students who were over sixteen years old participated in the program.

One youngster would come to school in a school van and go home using public transportation. Mark remembered another youngster in particular who was being tested to see if he could follow the routines. Paul was eighteen years old at the time.

I was on the bus with him but he didn’t know it. I watched to see if Paul was following all the routine things you do when you are on a bus. For example, paying his fare, pulling the cord to indicate that he wants to get off the bus at a particular stop and standing up at the centre doors. When it was time Paul did get off at the right stop.

Mark and his teachers spent a great deal of time teaching students like Paul these skills. Students are put through a variety of simulated experiences before they are allowed to use public transportation on their own. Parents are also informed as to how their child is progressing with public transportation training. They are encouraged to support the process that teachers follow. These factors accounted for the success that Paul and other students in the program experienced at that time.

Today, all students arrive and leave school on vans and buses that are provided through the school board. These youngsters are not able to independently use public transportation. According to Mark, “If they could use the public transportation independently they would not be attending this school now.”

Terry became the principal of the school following Mark’s retirement. This is his first principalship. He has a great deal of experience, however, with students who have normative exceptionalities. He is also familiar with students who have additional unique needs in the areas of physical disabilities, autism, behavioural disorders, vision, hearing, and/or communication. When asked to share a successful experience, he also made reference to public transportation training that he had been involved with ten years ago. He felt that the training was particularly important for the parents of the youngsters. At the time parents were quite comfortable knowing that their youngsters were taking vans and
buses to and from school. A number of parents was reluctant to have their teenagers using public transportation.

From the parents point of view, their poor darlings were handicapped. So to convince parents to allow their kids to come out and experience public transportation was not an easy task. Parents, however, became supportive when they realized that the training would lead to greater independence for their son or daughter.

Terry also talked about parent involvement as the reason for the students' success.

We shared the program with parents. They were able to support the plan by going through the routine with their son or daughter. Teachers at the school also accounted for this success by their willingness to work with these students after regular school hours.

These students had the ability to participate in this activity. Students who currently attend the school, have academic and medical challenges that prohibit this kind of learning.

Steve is the school superintendent for the study site. When asked to talk about a successful experience, he recalled two situations that came to his personal attention. The first situation focused on parents who wanted their child to remain in a "regular" school as opposed to this school for students with normative exceptionalities. It got to the point, however, where staff at the "regular" school could not manage the youngster.

The boy has autistic behaviours and is very difficult to manage. Staff at his previous school could not cope with his behaviour. They also find him to be very disruptive. The parents didn't want to take him out of his "regular" school program. They felt that their child's needs should be addressed in his neighbourhood school. The situation deteriorated and the child was withdrawn from his local school and was offered placement at this school. Needless to say, the parents were not happy with the situation. They kept the child out of school until they were encouraged to allow their son to attend this school. It's been a few months now and the young man is doing well. His parents are not totally convinced that this is the best placement but they have acknowledged that he is doing better here.

The second situation was similar in that it also focused on the placement of a youngster in a self-contained school setting. This youngster was in a "regular" class but things were not going well. When the youngster was placed in a self-contained class, the young man was involved in a serious behavioural incident with the teacher. The parents responded by pulling the child out of the school.
The youngster was thirteen years old and six-foot-two. If you are developmentally handicapped, you're thirteen years old and six-foot-two, you don't have any idea of what to do with your body or how strong it is. The boy injured the teacher and things got very legal. Fortunately, in time the boy's parents accepted placement at this school and things are starting to settle down.

Steve accounted for the success these boys experienced by pointing out the need for having different placement options. He also highlighted the benefits of having supports in place for the parents.

These two situations came to my attention because they had reached a critical juncture. The youngsters were not complying with the legislation which requires that these young people be in school. Staff at the school were supportive. The principal identified a teacher that would be a good match for the students. I also offered to provide special transportation to help make sure it was going to be successful.

**Summary of Results - First Sub-Question**

The theme of independence is particularly evident in the participants' stories about successful experiences when working with these students. They have successful experiences whenever students engage in activities that develop their individual capabilities. Staff emphasize age appropriate behaviour. Students who demonstrate such behaviour are making positive strides towards independence. Teachers see integration as a goal for students at the school. The integration of these students is an indicator of independence. Staff promote the importance of helping students to build self-confidence. Many school activities focus on allowing students to develop feelings of self-worth and success. Parents/guardians have a crucial role to play in the education of these youngsters. Staff encourage a partnership between the home and the school. They know that students benefit from their involvement. Teachers, support staff and administrators have a common perspective on what is viewed as successful experiences. Each of the groups identified activities that are indicators of different forms of development.
Sub-Question Two:

What do school staff view as unsuccessful school experiences for students with normative exceptionalities and what accounts for the lack of success?

Teachers' Responses

The eight teachers in the sample were asked to talk about situations that they viewed as unsuccessful experiences. The incidents reflect some of the challenges that are faced by these students. A few of the stories highlight the fact that these students take much longer to acquire basic life skills. The stories also highlight the important role teachers and parents need to play in the holistic education of these children.

Anna gave an account of an unsuccessful experience she had while working with a student in her class. Anna had put in place a toilet training program for Darien. He was a student who required a lot of support. Anna explains the situation this way:

I was never able to progress with toilet training in any regard. Never in the whole school year did I get a success on the toilet. Darien had no awareness of the need to use the toilet. Even when he had an accident, he would continue as if nothing had happened.

Anna believed that the reason for this unsuccessful experience was due in large part to the child's mother.

Mum thought it was terrific that I was working on toileting skills with Darien but she was not following through at home. That would be a crucial factor. Secondly, they treated him like a baby. He met mother's expectations.

If Anna could go back and work with this student again she would follow the same procedure although her expectations may have been lowered because this child was not ready.

I wouldn't be expecting so much but I still think that I would continue to follow the same routine because you never know when it's going to click with a student like Darien.

Anna went on to explain that during toilet training students are placed on the toilet at standard times throughout the school year. The aim is for the child to get use to sitting on the toilet seat. Anna and a male educational assistant would also go through the process of helping him to pull his pants up and down in an appropriate manner in order for him to make the association with toileting.
Robert recalls an unsuccessful experience that he had with a student named Andy. He was ten years old at the time and some people had said that he had autistic tendencies. He does not speak. Andy would also engage in a lot of infantile behaviours. He would suck his thumb and stamp his feet when he didn't feel like complying with the demands of his classroom activities. The unsuccessful experience focused on a communication program that Andy's mom insisted on implementing. Initially, Andy was learning to communicate through the use of sign language. He was beginning to frequently use signs that he would need regularly such as the signs for toilet and lunch. Andy’s mother, however, wanted him to use a communication board. Andy didn’t have any success using it. Robert remembered a situation which clearly showed that the communication board was not working for Andy.

Andy hated peanut butter cookies. So I thought here is a great example of when I am going to get a definite “no” from him. Using the board, I asked him, “Do you want a peanut butter cookie?” He responded by pushing the “yes” button. I then took the cookie and I put it up to his mouth and he pushed my arm away. Then I said, “Do you want a peanut butter cookie?” He signs and shakes his head to indicate “no”.

Robert believes that this turned out to be an unsuccessful experience because the school allowed the mother to try a program that staff didn’t believe would work.

I was telling her that it wasn’t working at school and that I would, however, try it when I had the time. I have never been one to pander to parents. Although that seems to be the way education is going. I flat out don’t believe in it. We should never appease parents at the expense of students like Andy.

Allison’s account of an unsuccessful experience results from not having the required resources to deal with a difficult student. There have been occasions at successfully the school where a student exhibits challenging behaviours that can not resolved at the school. Peter was one such student. Allison believed that he was inappropriately placed in the school.

He should be in a treatment centre. He needs professional psychological help. He is violent. This is the kind of kid who needs a huge chair to sit in when he is violent. Right now we are waiting for appropriate wrist restraints in order for him to come into the school. He can’t come to school until he can sit in a car without trying to open the door while it’s moving. When he gets here we don’t have the kind of equipment to use in the classroom. I have been given an extra assistant to work with me but it will not help in the long term.
Allison believes that Peter's lack of success is attributed to her limited experience with working with these students.

I don't have the background to work with this child. He needs more help than we can give him here. We don't have all the tools to deal specifically with him.

Peter's parents are also a factor in this story. They believe that the school can successfully meet the needs of their son. According to Allison, "They haven't come to terms with the help he needs. That's difficult and you can't push parents."

Chris' story of an unsuccessful experience focused on a student who showed little communication skills while attending the school. Jason is a sixteen year old student. He uses a wheel chair and he can feed himself with difficulty. He also has the ability to make use of an electronic voice synthesizer which allows him to communicate. At home and at his group home, he uses the synthesizer to make sentences. At school, however, Chris would only be able to elicit yes or no responses from his use of the synthesizer.

I always felt very inadequate in a sense that he did not use his extensive voice box vocabulary to communicate with me. Even with much prompting and eliciting on my part. I knew that he could read sentences. I made a journal for him. He pointed to the word that told him what day day it was if I had written down the date. On the voice box he showed no motivation or he perseverated on one or two symbols. ... Even with consultation with the group home staff I still did not succeed in getting this young man to live up to his potential which I knew he had based on his use of the voice box at his group home. I felt very inadequate about that.

When asked what she thought was the reason for the lack of success Chris thought that it might be due to situational factors. Jason did other things at school that he didn't reveal at home.

Apparently, they didn't know that he could drink independently from a mug. I was very surprised because he has been doing that from the beginning of the school year. The other thing is that I felt that at school he knew full well that I was not in a position to take him to recreational facilities like the staff at his group home. So why bother telling me about it?

Chris also added that she wasn't able to spend enough time with this student. They did not build up a close student teacher relationship. Jason's cerebral palsy also helped to slow down the time it took for him to communicate. The six other students in the class also competed for Chris' attention in class.
Derick's response to the question of an unsuccessful experience brought about memories of his early classes at the school. This was a new learning environment for this physical education teacher.

At the beginning I couldn't understand their limitations. I spent hours preparing for a nice class. I came up with wonderful ideas but nothing worked. I tried to read books about developmental students but what ever I picked up from those books the strategies did not work in this setting. I had to modify the activities. I had to make it simpler and simpler. I had to break the activities down into small pieces.

Derick believes that he was initially unsuccessful because he didn’t know the capabilities of these students. So the activities that were chosen did not meet the needs of these students. In Derick’s words, “The activities were not right for these kids.” Since these early experiences, Derick has been able to teach activities that meet the needs of these students.

Vanessa was recently assigned the work education program at the school. She had been teaching the class for about eight months when asked to talk about an experience she had with students that was unsuccessful. At the time, she could not recall an unsuccessful experience. In fact she was impressed with how well the students were doing. The only thing she did share were a few inappropriate student outbursts.

When that happens, you separate them from the group until they calm down. They also loose points for their negative behaviour. The longer they act up the more points they loose. This may encourage them to behave appropriately sooner.

Vanessa believes that these outbursts are caused by disagreements that students have periodically. One of her goals is to teach them appropriate strategies to help them deal with peer conflicts.

Katy’s account of an unsuccessful experience highlight one of the challenge of teaching in this setting. She told the story of Keith. He is an eleven year old student who is very aggressive.

He has been aggressive ever since he has been in this school. He refuses to walk. When he decides that he doesn’t want to do any thing he just drops to the ground. He is not toilet trained. He holds all the cards. If you want him to get up and do something, he sits down and when you have to force him to follow through you are then a target for any aggression. He loves to be involved in the power struggle of trying to get him to do something and it’s been very frustrating trying to find a way to get through to him without getting hurt.
Katy identified two factors that she believes accounts for this lack of success. Keith’s parents are not supportive because they also find it very difficult to handle his behaviour.

His mother doesn't have the tools to really deal with him at home. She avoids a lot of the behaviour at home. She dresses him while he is sleeping so she does not have to deal with the aggression while he is awake. ... This student is a puzzle. No one really knows what to do with this child.

Keith also had to work with a number of teachers while attending the school. In his first year at the school, he was almost toilet trained. The teacher, however, left after the first term. The new teacher never did achieve the same level of toilet training as he gained with the first. Other teachers came and went because they found Keith to be extremely difficult. The number of teachers that Keith was exposed to may have resulted in programming that was inconsistent with his demanding needs.

His behaviour has gotten progressively worst. Staff has not been able to focus on toileting because of the aggression involved around trying to change a diaper or a pair of wet pants. During the four years he's been here he has learned how to walk but he chooses when he will walk.

Paul’s account of an unsuccessful experience was based on a recollection of a sixteen year old youngster named Frank. The young man's mother wanted him to learn how to walk. Unfortunately, the teenager has a severe contraction of the knee. The physiotherapist was skeptical about the boy's chances of walking but Frank's mother wanted an individualized program that would promote walking.

I worked with him on a regular basis by fitting him into a high walker. He didn't progress. I tried walking him to different rooms in the school but Frank didn't experience any success.

Later that year, Frank had surgery on his knees. He was away from school for several weeks. When he returned, he had forgotten most of his mobility skills. He couldn't use the high walker because his legs were in a cast.

I think the surgery was done to appease the mother who was hoping for a miracle. I found this situation really stressful. He is eighteen now and he is learning how to use the spider walker. He is making some progress but I think the focus should have been on increasing his wheelchair mobility skills.

Paul comes to terms with this unsuccessful experience by saying, "We followed a goal that was based on the mother's unrealistic wishes." He feels that the student's needs were set aside for the parent's desire.
Support Staff's Responses

The seven support staff members were also asked to share their stories of about unsuccessful experiences and what they believed accounted for them. The stories illustrate some of the kinds of challenges and obstacles these individuals face while working in this school setting. The support staff included the following individuals: Speech and Language Consultant, two educational assistants, the program consultant, the behavioural consultant and two school nurses.

Julie, the speech and language consultant at the school, talked about a student who looked like he had good potential for the development of oral communication and emergent literacy skills. A number of speech and language consultants worked with this six year old boy.

He has just stymied us. I don't know. He gets so far and then you can't get him to go any further. ... Everything has slowed down with this student.

Julie initially believed that the boy's new teacher would be a positive change for him. She worked with the teacher and shared important background information about this student. The teacher was in her first year of teaching and was receptive to her suggestions. However, when she observed the student later in the school year, things were not progressing. Julie wondered if the lack of progress was due to the medical condition of the student or the way in which the student was being taught. When asked to comment on why she believed this situation was unsuccessful, she talked about the limited support she is able to give teachers.

I think that new teachers are not able to carry out a comprehensive individualized program. They need an incredible amount of support. I know it and that's one of the down-falls of this job. I can't give it. I give as much as I can and then I have to go on because somebody else is chomping at the bit. So that's a failure. I guess in some ways it is a system failure. Each of the students in the class is probably as needy as the one I am talking about. If things slow down, I'm going to move on and it's going to be like a self-fulfilling prophecy because once the support is gone progress stops.

April and Mary enjoy their work as educational assistants in the school. When asked to talk about an unsuccessful experience, both assistants recalled situations they had while working with difficult students. April shared the same difficult experience that Katy shared about Jason.
I have been working here for nine years and I have never met a child like him. He can walk. He can sign. He is very smart but he chooses not to comply. It's so hard to explain. We have had six teachers in the class and most of them quit because of him. He is so aggressive. He tears you apart. He doesn't like anything. You can't say if you do this, I will reward you with this. You can't.

April believes that Jason is so difficult because he chooses to be. "At the beginning of the year he was really good. He was getting up and walking. He was going to classes." April does not know why Jason is behaving in this manner. When the behavioural consultant was brought into the class, she also experienced frustration. April talked about an activity that the consultant wanted Jason to complete.

She came in here one day last week. She did one task with Jason. It took her two hours and forty minutes in order to get him to put three markers in a basket. This child can sort five colours; hundreds of them, and put them in baskets on his own. But he just fights and fights. He dislocated one of my knuckles and he tries to tear Katy's face apart.

April thinks that this student requires support that is not currently in place. Jason's parents are not able to handle his outbursts. This is an unfortunate situation which staff at the school have not successfully resolved at this point.

Mary's account of an unsuccessful experience focused on a situation where the student was not cooperating with the staff. Mary believes the problem surfaced because of inconsistent programming.

We felt we failed that student because none of the programs seemed to work. However, it became a situation where he could manipulate it so it wouldn't work. So we tried something else the next week and something else the week after. So each week we were trying something new and he was never getting that consistency because we never found something that worked which he could not manipulate.

Mary and the classroom teacher realized that they were being inconsistent. The student, however, helped to disrupt any attempt to bring about consistency.

Susan is the program consultant at the school. Her story of an unsuccessful experience revolved around a sixteen year old youngster. The boy's parents, however, treated him as if he was five.

He came to school dressed in clothes that would be appropriate for a ten year old kid. He would come to school carrying a Ninja Turtle lunch bag. His parents had no real expectations for him.
Susan spoke to the parents about age appropriate treatment of the youngster. They seem to understand that they were helping their son to remain dependent on them for an inappropriate period of time. Their behaviour, however, did not change. Susan believes that the behaviour of the parents towards their son had a detrimental impact on the success that he experienced at the school.

Bonnie is the behavioural consultant. She talks with teachers who need strategies for dealing with students who are having behavioural difficulties. Bonnie recalled working with a female student who was very aggressive and non-compliant. She would scratch and pinch other students and adults. Consequences such as separating her from the group, time out or pulling her sleeves over her hands did not reduce this negative behaviour. Bonnie wanted to put a program in place that would praise the student when she engaged in positive behaviours. She admitted, however, that the program she designed for the youngster did not change her inappropriate behaviour.

Part of the problem might be that I didn’t put a program in place that met her needs but a great deal of the failure was because the teacher didn’t follow through on the program. He didn’t really want to do it even though he said he did.

Bonnie summarized by pointing out that the lack of follow through by teachers is the reason why a number of the students do not experience success.

This teacher didn’t keep any data. When I went into the class to observe, it was clear that he wasn’t following the program. So the program wasn’t really done. It wasn’t implemented.

Bonnie understands that teachers are often overwhelmed with the job of teaching these youngsters, however, if they are not willing to put programs in place they will continue to be frustrated by their lack of progress.

Donna and Allison are two nurses who work at the school. Allison provided a candid account of a personal unsuccessful experience she had while she was caring for youngsters at the school. Donna shared her opinion on the programming direction of the school.

I was working with Donna and she had done the one o’clock meds. I came back from lunch and began to do the one o’clock meds again. Luckily I caught myself but I did administer medication to one child. I double medicated. I told the principal and I telephoned the child’s doctor. I was worried sick. If the child died it would be a direct result of my negligence. Fortunately, the child was fine.
Allison believed that this situation occurred because of a communication breakdown between herself and Donna.

We got very busy that day. We didn’t talk to each other all morning. Since the incident, we changed our system. I am responsible for the eleven o’clock medications and she is responsible for the one o’clock medications. In the past we didn’t know who was doing what sometimes. Now we have it more clearly defined. It can’t happen again.

Donna took this opportunity to talk about what she considers a general unsuccessful aspect of the school. She believes the school is unsuccessful in meeting the needs of these youngsters because there is too much of an emphasis on academic work.

I want to give a personal opinion. I don’t feel that our developmental kids or adults need teachers. I think they need a program. They should be programmed for by people who are paid less. We are trying to make them comfortable. We are trying to improve their mobility. We are trying to improve their physical abilities. I don’t think they really need conventional teachers that much.

Donna also mentioned that the focus on academic work has resulted in less attention being given to teaching them life skills with a particular emphasis on self care. She believes that rather than trying to make them “normal”, “we have to learn to accept them the way they are and I don’t think a lot of educators do.”

Administrative Responses

Carol’s account of an unsuccessful experience focused on teachers who did not implement a new language curriculum. The vice-principal was frustrated with teachers who were unwilling to allow the youngsters in their class to experience a more academic program.

They thought that it was absolutely ridiculous. They felt that their kids were special. They felt that they were special teachers. They couldn’t see how any benefits could come to these students. They said they were busy toilet training students and they talked about having behavioural kids who rip books. Why would I even think about introducing this program? ... They just didn’t believe in it.

Carol came to the conclusion that teachers did not experience success because they failed to see the point.
They wanted more concrete examples as to how they would adapt the new curriculum so that it would work with difficult kids, low functioning kids, developmentally delayed kids, and behavioural kids.

Carol also believes that success was not realized because of the mind set of a number of these teachers. According to her, many of them had not taken professional development courses in years. They believe that since their teaching situation is so unique, little can be gained by taking courses in "regular" education. Carol added that she once received an anonymous letter from teachers which said, "How dare you suggest that we try to do something that can't work with our kids."

When Mark was principal at the school, he recalled an experience that he viewed as unsuccessful. The experience focused on covering a curriculum that did not meet the needs of these youngsters. The instruction was far too advanced for this group of students.

I remember walking into a classroom and seeing one of our teacher working through a three digit multiplication problem. It looked wonderful but who was he teaching. I wanted this teacher to understand that developmentally handicap kids were not able to do these questions. In a few cases, teachers still continued to provide classroom instruction that is not appropriate.

Mark did tell the teacher that he needed to change the math program. The teacher complied but Mark understands why some of the teachers in this setting teach this way.

He wanted his environment to be as normal as possible. Teaching multiplication and other academic skills made him feel that his students were doing what other students are doing in school.

According to Mark, teachers have to remember that these kids are developmentally handicapped and although a few will be capable of doing traditional school work, the majority will show progress that reflect gaps in fundamental life skills. He gave an example to illustrate this point.

Our students leave at age twenty-one. They can't even take a key and put it into a lock to open a door. They wait seated at the dining room table and will not lift a knife and fork until they are told to do so. They rarely think for themselves because some of them really can't. They have been taught, for instance, that you only use the washroom at a specific time and as a result they are helpless when the structure is removed.

Terry, Mark's successor, talked about an unsuccessful experience that highlights the challenge associated with providing these youngsters with fundamental life skills.
This student wanted to go on a work education experience. He was very capable and we believed he could do the job. His problem was the lack of personal hygiene. He came to school wearing dirty clothes. It seems that the only time he would change his clothes and shower was at the school. His parents knew about it and said they would support the school but there was no follow through.

Terry thinks that this was an unsuccessful experience because there was no real support at home. The student also didn’t internalize the need to pay attention to hygiene. Teachers at the school are trying to help him realize that personal hygiene is a factor that will impact on his success at a work education site.

Kim’s account of an unsuccessful experience focused on an attempt to integrate students from this segregated setting with students who attended a mainstream elementary school. Kim, the vice-principal, was involved in the organization of a three day camping trip.

The idea of the whole three days was to really spend time being engaged in a program that who meet the needs of both groups of children. Although the children from the “regular” school were familiar with our children, they preferred to interact with their group. The same for true for our kids.

Kim accounted for this unsuccessful attempt at integration by pointing out that more orientation was needed in order to bring both groups together. “This kind of planning would have helped the kids to interact better. We took a stab at it but it didn’t work out too well.”

Steve, the school superintendent, pointed out that for him most unsuccessful experiences materialize from outside resources that he does not control. They are a third party that can bring about complications.

I guess I could use a recent example with a youngster who had been coming to school with a nurse. The nurse was provided through a program that was supported by the Ministry of Health. As a result of a reduction in funds, the nurse was taken away. The boy could not attend school without the nurse because of his respiratory needs.

Steve did point out that within a few weeks another nurse was found but the wait resulted in a disruption of the youngster’s school program. Since the school does not have the medical resources, they are dependent on outside agencies. They have an important role to play because a number of the students require daily medical intervention in order to attend school. Unsuccessful experiences can occur when one of the nurses becomes
sick. If the agency is not able to replace the nurse, a number of youngsters will not be in school.

Some kids are at home now because we have not been able to resolve these difficulties. Fortunately, family advocates are helping to solve the problem. They talk to the school and the agencies and try to ensure that the child's needs are met within a reasonable amount of time.

**Summary of Results - Second Sub-Question**

The theme of independence continued to emerge within the comments of the participants. Responses to the second sub-question indicated that many of their unsuccessful experiences related to working with students whose behaviour caused them to be difficult to manage. Participants shared incidents that prevented these students from acquiring skills that are necessary for independence. Teachers struggled with teaching their students appropriate self-care behaviour such as toileting. Staff talked about unsuccessful experiences that focused on youngsters who exhibited developmentally inappropriate, aggressive and violent behaviours. Some respondents are looking for more support from parents. Others understand that parents may not be able to provide the needed support. In many instances, the transcripts clearly illustrated disagreement about philosophy and purpose.

Staff beliefs was a theme that was also apparent in this sub-question. The participants all want the students to succeed, however, their beliefs and behaviour differed in how to arrive at this success. As a group, they may not be conscious of these differences. Their stories illustrate the frustration that disparity of purpose and direction can bring to a school environment.

Three teachers also wondered if they were following an appropriate approach when trying to reduce an inappropriate behaviour. Some teachers indicated that they are being asked to follow an academic program when they believe that a student needs to learn self-care and functional life skills. Their comments point to the fact that they view these academic skills and functional life skills as being two different perspectives. A consultant indicated that part of the problem was due to teachers not following through on an intervention strategy. The majority of respondents, however, didn't try to blame any one for their lack of success. They realize that while working with these students they will not always be successful. The administration has a role to play in utilizing this information to help bring staff to a common directive.
Sub-Question Three:

What are the short and long term goals for students with normative exceptionalities?

This section provides insights into what teachers, support staff and administrators view as long and short term goals for students with normative exceptionalities. Their views again illustrate disparity between and among the three groups of participants. The themes of independence and staff beliefs influence the way they understand their roles and responsibilities. A third theme of staff beliefs about the curriculum surfaced. Some of their responses demonstrate how hard it is to follow curriculum when staff have different ideas about what the curriculum should be. Some wanted curriculum to be based on "academics," "communication" or "life-skills." These terms meant different things to the respondents.

Teachers' Responses

All eight teachers talked about the short and long term goals for their students. They all included comments about nurturing independence so that the youngsters would be able to achieve meaningful integration and participation in society. In general, short term goals focused on the youngster's ability to acquire a particular skill that would bring about greater control over the immediate environment while long term goals focused on acquiring a positive role in society. It should also be noted that the goals are individualized to meet the current needs of each student at the school. They are outlined in an education plan that is set up by a team of professionals and the parents. The education plan is periodically reviewed and revised in order to monitor the progress of each student.

Anna teaches youngsters who are between the age of four and eight. Anna began talking about the goals for her students by pointing out that none of the primary children are able to walk unaided. One of the youngsters is in a wheelchair most of the time. Two of them are fed with the aid of a tube. Her vision for her students is for them to have an influence on their needs. Anna explains this vision in the following manner:

I was talking to a parent of one of my students today and I wanted her to understand that I don't want to feel that I'm acting on the student. I want to feel that they are part of the process and it doesn't matter how small but I want to feel that they are part of the process. They are not just lying there and I'm just doing all the motions and acting on them.
Anna makes it clear that the child has a part to play. She pointed out that for the youngster in the wheelchair she is still expected to stand at the sink with a lot of support. She can't do it by herself but it's important that she be able to participate in the process. With another student, Anna has set one of her short term goals to include being able to remove her own diaper and put it in an appropriate receptacle in the classroom.

This is a natural routine. I'm able to move her a little further. I'm asking more of her. When I am undressing and dressing these children it takes my assistant and me about fifty minutes to work with the five students in the class. During this time, however, I'm following through with my physio-objectives. I'm asking them to sit on a chair and for the very physically involved children, it is a lot of hard work.

In yet other situation, Anna will ask one or two students to stand up and hang onto a chair while she pushes down or pulls up a pair of snow pants. She also walks with her students over to the coat hooks and asks them to stand and stretch out in order to reach the hook. Anna, in consultation with the physiotherapist, may focus on an activity that will exercise a particular part of their body. For example, one of her students was required to work on "tall kneeling". She found an appropriate piece of equipment that allowed the student to do the activity while doing an art activity. "I'm asking a lot from them but they are all physical strategies and objectives which are aimed at helping them reach their individual goals."

Allison teaches youngsters who are in the junior division of the school. Her students are between the ages of nine and twelve. She also has goals for her students that go beyond their immediate capabilities.

I don't care how low they are. If you are positive about the kids something good is going to happen so you meet your goals. If it's a multi-handicap severe kid, you get a little finger movement which allows the child to turn on a switch. I saw it happen. It took nine month but the kid finally got to push that little thing.

This particular child could not move her fingers unless someone moved them for her. Other students in the class are able to sit in a chair and work on a task without someone assisting them. Attention is given to a couple of her students who are beginning to show that they are capable of behaving in an appropriate manner.

The focus is obviously on trying to set and meet goals that will enable our kids to be as independent as possible. That's the most important thing in this room. Just to be able to go to the washroom without going in and destroying the room because you're not being watched is a huge step in the right direction.
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handicap. The school consultant will help her implement this program. Two students in the class are not able to sit still for even a short period of time. Another student has just learned to walk and needs to develop better mobility skills. All the children have some kind of trouble eating.

They all have some sort of eating difficulty. That is something that is a long term goal for the year. Some need to work on increasing the volume of food they eat, or the speed at which they eat or the neatness of their eating. It works out well for programming. We all sit together and we all have a nice meal time and we all get right into improving eating skills.

Appropriate washroom behaviour is also an important goal for students in Chris' classroom.

I know that all of us talk about toileting and you must be tired of hearing about it. But our students need to learn and demonstrate acceptable washroom behaviour. Many need to remember to flush and leave the washroom only when they have cleaned themselves appropriately.

One boy in Chris' class is learning the names for things. He is working on naming items found in the school yard. Another is learning to recognize street safety symbols that mean, "Stop", "Go", "Walk", and "Don't Walk".

Another student is being taught to express her choices by pointing to a set of photo cards. The girl is not able to speak.

We have recently found out that this little girl recognizes a set of photo cards. Each depict people in the school, classmates, teachers and various different activities in the school. ... In order to make a choice she will point to the one she wants. This ability will help her use a communication board in the near future.

Several individuals are involved with supporting students to reach these goals. Chris finds the support of the speech and language consultant, the psycho-educational consultant, the physiotherapist, the program consultant, the vision teacher, classroom assistant and parents as necessary resources. They help her students to meet goals that are required to participate in every day life.

Derick's role as physical education teacher at the school also promotes this goal. He works with all of the students at the school. His long term goal is no different from other physical education teachers.

I believe that the goal for any physical education student is to develop their fitness to the maximum. Each student should try to reach their maximum ability.
His short term goals focus on exposing his students to different physical education equipment.

For instance, this year I'm doing a lot of endurance activities with the students. I ordered some new equipment that was unfamiliar to these students. Things like steppers and stationary bicycles. It's important that they become familiar with the equipment so they will know how to use them when they leave this school.

Derick also teaches them games that he hopes they will play during times of leisure.

Vanessa teaches senior division students in the work education program. The program is set up to give the youngsters a work experience that might reflect a situation that they will encounter once they leave the school. The long term goal for her students is for them to develop "a positive self-image." She also believes that being able to work with others is an important goal for the students. Team work is an important goal. They also need to develop the ability to be flexible.

Our students don't function well when there is a change to their routines. They can't think of alternatives. We try to encourage them to come up with things they can do instead of being upset if something different happens.

Students in the work education program participate in the operation of the school store. T-shirts, sweat shirts and other trendy items are designed by these students. They are expected to sell these products in the school store. Their involvement provides the students to meet the goal of having a better concept of how money is used. They learn how to be polite to customers. Also, a number of the students don't know how to identify colours, sizes and prices. Working at the store gives them a practical opportunity to acquire these skills.

When they are in the store they are given work sheets. They are required to answer questions such as, "How much is a sweat shirt? How much is a T-shirt? Is there a black T-shirt in the store? If there is, find it. Is it a large, medium or small T-shirt?"

Katy works with junior and intermediate students who have behavioural difficulties. When asked to identify goals for her students, she pointed out that the goals are different because all of the kids are different.

I guess the major goal is for all of the students is to integrate them into society in the best way possible. A big goal for our kids when they leave the school at twenty-one, is to be employed in a sheltered workshop.
In her classroom, however, her main goal is to improve the behaviour of her students. She has youngsters who are very aggressive and non-compliant. Her goal is to reduce that behaviour in all of her students. Katy then spoke about some short term goals that two of her students are moving towards.

For one student who has some academic ability, we are looking to increase his functional vocabulary. We want him to recognize more words in his environment. We also want him to develop math skills like counting. He doesn't know how to count yet. So I will be focusing on developing fine motor skills. Getting him to copy lines. Build dexterity with his fingers. Putting small objects together, sorting colours and stuff like that.

With another student, Katy is developing strategies that will get him to follow simple instructions. Presently, he does respond to simple instructions. She also is working on providing him with the appropriate vocabulary for naming body parts.

Paul teaches an intermediate division class at the school. He echoes the same message as his colleagues. His goal is to help his students become as independent as possible. One indicator of this goal is when students from his class are successfully placed in an integrated setting. Paul talked about one of his youngsters who has the potential of being placed in an integrated setting.

Basically the only problem he has is that he constantly annoys other people. He's always hugging people. He's always kissing people. He's a real touchy grabby person who needs to learn that his behaviour is inappropriate. If we could break that habit he might be able to do well in an integrated setting.

Paul added that the goal of an integrated setting may take several steps. A student may first be placed in a more academically based class in the school. He may then be a member of a special class in a regular school before being enrolled in a “regular” educational setting. Paul was quick to mention that many of the youngsters at the school won’t make it that far on the continuum. The goal, however, is to push them to whatever is the next step for them. All of the teachers who participated in the study were mindful of the help that is provided by the support staff. Teachers depend on them to help their students meet goals.

**Support Staff’s Responses**

The support staff play an important role in helping these youngsters to reach their goals. The teachers depend on the expertise of the consultants when deciding what are
the appropriate goals for their students. Classroom assistants and the nurses also make beneficial contributions to help students reach goals.

Julie is the speech and language consultant at the school. She sees her goal as working with these students to maximize their communication potential. She, however, is mindful of the individual and environmental challenges that can get in the way of the goal. For some of the students who have multiple mental and physical challenges, improvement is measured in “microns”. For still others the goal is to maintain a level of achievement across a number of environments.

This consultant is learning to take an environmental approach to communication. She looks at things in the environment which either supports or hinders opportunities to successfully communicate. She recalls a situation while working with physically handicapped students who were “higher functioning” than most of the students at this school.

Many of these students scored relatively high on standardized language tests and yet they are not able to communicate in a successful manner. While in another situation, a child who scores poorly on the same language skills test demonstrates a wonderful personality and appropriate social interaction skills.

Julie also believes that goals for these students are tied to the policies and philosophy of the school board. A year ago she was involved in writing a Language Arts curriculum for the board. There was to be a new emphasis on introducing literacy to students at the school. Teachers were required to read books to their students. This directive was given in spite of the many developmental challenges that they experience.

That was a board initiative; so you could have a goal because that would be part of your hopes for the child on a short and long term basis. Now the initiative is technology. So then you have to think; well there is literacy and there is technology and there is a child who can’t do very much but we really want to get this into their program as well. So we have to look at the goals from a curriculum point of view as well as a practical point of view and try to put them together.

Bonnie is the behavioural consultant at the school. She works with teachers in order to help students reach their full potential in terms of being independent and being able to have appropriate interactions with others. She tries to increase positive behaviours and decrease negative behaviours to the point where students who are having problems can learn to be a part of the community. The aim is to teach them how to interact with other people in pleasant ways. To teach them strategies that will help them develop
friendships. She spends most of her time with students who have difficult behaviours. My short term goals for these students is for them to follow instructions given by staff. Many of them engage in very aggressive behaviour. They hit, pinch and bite themselves and others. I try to change their behaviour so that they are able to interact with other people and attend to their work in a positive manner.

It is important for the behavioural consultant to establish good relations with teachers. She requires cooperation and confidence of teachers. Her classroom visits are done to give the teacher and the assistant strategies for dealing with difficult students. The teacher is also looking for help when a consultant comes in to work with a student. In one such visit, Bonnie shared an experience she had while trying to get a student to follow instructions.

Today I spent three hours restraining a youngster. This is a special situation because normally when we restrain a youngster it is because they are attacking someone. This student is often non-compliant. My goal was to get the youngster to pick up three things and put them in boxes.

Susan is the program consultant at the school. "As much independence as possible is the goal for all our students." Susan also focuses her attention on treating these youngsters with dignity. She reminds staff to shut the washroom door when toileting the students.

Their hearts aren't handicapped. They hurt and they feel the same way as you and I do. They love and they hate the same way you and I do. I mean can you imagine lying there thinking and hearing people walk by and since you are not able to talk you don't have the ability to prevent people seeing you engaged in a private behaviour.

In her role as program consultant, Susan understands why many teachers find it difficult to come up with a program that promotes the goal of greater independence. They are always looking for a creative solution to a challenge.

There is not a simple curriculum book that you can open up and you've got your lesson. There is so much adaptation which is required for our students who have so many exceptionalities. So many of the teachers don't know where to start.

In trying to help teachers find a starting point, Susan often discovers that goals for students are not being met because of the care mentality that some teachers have. According to her, these teachers pay too much attention to the student's medical condition. One of her goals is to help them move from this mind set so that the youngsters will be given more opportunities to develop independent living skills.
If our fundamental philosophy is that these young people have the same rights as other students, we need to ensure that our programming allows them to experience a more subject based curriculum. I think this focus will allow our students to be less dependent.

Susan ended her comment about goals for these youngsters by suggesting that the principal and vice-principal need to share and promote the vision that they have for students in the school. She believes that this sharing would help staff to have a clearer understanding of what they need to do to bring about more independent students.

Mary is one of two educational assistants who participated in the study. She works with a primary division class. The students have severe developmental challenges. When asked to talk about the goals for these students, Mary spoke about basic life skills being important. She supports the teacher by helping students to learn how to tie up their shoes, zip up their coats and use the washroom independently. One student had to learn how to open up his lunch. Mary talked with the boy's mother about how to pack a lunch in a way that her son could easily open the containers.

The challenge was to help him open up his lunch. Apparently, this youngster's mother would cut up items and wrap them up in foil paper. The assistant helped him to learn how to open up a can of pop and drink boxes. He was also taught how to spot edges in foil paper which could then be pulled apart to get at his lunch. These short term goals support the long term goal of independence. Mary, however, believes that this long term goal may not be reached because too much time is taken up in the early years on the acquisition of elusive academic skills.

Many times we start off with a four year old child who has little academic potential. Instead of focusing on life skills we focus on skills that children are being taught in regular schools. I think you should put together a program for what the potential of the child will be and not so much what an academic curriculum prescribes for a four year old child.

April has been assisting teachers at the school for nine years. In her current behaviour class, she helps students to follow the program that the teacher has organized. Short term goals include sorting activities, independent toileting, and reducing inappropriate behaviour. A long term goal that April believes would benefit the youngsters is the creation of a school environment where students who have behavioural challenges would receive consistent support. April becomes frustrated when staff talk about the goal of independence but resources are not in place to promote it in an
effective way.

I think there should be more support. You can get consultants but they are never here. When they are here, it is only for a short time. Often times they don't see what happens in the classroom. They come for a couple of minutes, write a program and that's it. I think they need to be in the school all the time.

Donna and Allison's goal is to "maintain the health of the youngsters by providing them with good nursing care." They believe that this goal is realized when good communication exists among staff, medical support agencies and parents. They value the interaction they have with the youngsters and they try to get to know them well. Short term goals includes activities that add to the comfort level of the youngsters. Donna put it this way:

I feel that their comfort level is just as important as them getting their meds. I don't think toileting is any less important than their meds. Both their medication and their toileting adds to the comfort of their day.

Allison had a similar focus when she talked about goals in terms of the way she rationalize the needs of these students.

Taking care of their physical needs come to mind. It is an obvious priority. Anything that threatens life is the priority. Other than that we want to provide and maintain a good quality of life for them within the school. It is a nurturing thing.

Another goal for this nursing team is ensure that the mobility needs of wheel chair students are met. They work closely with the physiotherapist to help ensure that they change their positions on a regular basis.

We are talking bout the students downstairs who are in wheel chairs for twelve to fourteen hours a day. It is essential that they get out into different positions. You and I don't sit in the same position all day long. So we can't expect them to sit either. Your world stays narrow if you are sitting or placed in the same position. If they are sitting too long they can experience contractions that if not attended can lead to urinary problems. Changes in physical positions also has a positive impact on your mental outlook.

The nurses also talked about the goals that teachers have for these youngsters. They felt that a number of the students are receiving instruction that follow a path of traditional education when these students need to realize goals that will be met if the focus is on basic self care.
They need to be more hands on instruction than a teacher who stands at the front of the room and lectures. They’re helping with toileting. They’re helping with feeding. I’m not saying that this is not teaching. It is teaching but it is not academic teaching.

**Administrative Responses**

The administrators in the sample valued a collaborative school environment. Teachers working together would result in students meeting important goals. Curriculum documents were seen as important guides to follow. However, individualized programming was seen as a crucial way to meet the needs of each student at the school.

Carol’s goals for students focused on transitions plans for senior students who will be graduating at age twenty-one. She is aware that there are few opportunities for these students when they finish school. Emphasis is placed on making plans so that they will lead fulfilling lives. For students who are in the four to seventeen age group, the goals focus on bringing about as much independence as possible. Carol would like to see the students being more accepted in the community. She believes that more of these students will attend schools where “regular” students attend.

For the type of medically fragile students we have, I think that there will always be a need for a protected environment but it doesn’t have to be a whole school. I know that some teachers feel isolated working in this setting.

Carol also shared her goal for teachers. She believes that the students would benefit if they shared their resources with each other.

We have a resource library. When things go out someone puts it on their shelf and we never get it back. Things are purchased to be shared but they are not. It’s not just equipment, it’s also ideas. Teachers hold onto their ideas.

She has even set up the schedule so that teachers and other people on staff can meet. Carol wonders how many staff members make use of this opportunity.

Kim in her role as vice-principal began talking about goals for the students in the school by repeating the implicit statement about having these students become as independent as possible by giving them skills that they need to successfully integrated in their community. In order to meet those long term goals, Kim referred to the curriculum documents.
We see where they are at through a needs assessment and see where we can take them next. We develop individual goals from there. If you are looking for program domains, they are different depending on the age of students. With younger students, you are dealing with feeding and walking and dressing. With older students we ask, “How can we make this student as independent as possible and as integrated in the community as possible?” That might mean focusing on skills needed to live in a group home. The goals would determine the nature of the program and they would vary from student to student.

Mark, the former principal of the school, agrees that having these students acquire independence is the main goal. However, he believes that programs at the school foster dependence.

I have to believe that the children in this school are here because they are severely developmentally handicapped. If they were not they would not be here. We try to teach them skills of social competence but our students rarely generalize. Some never will, so a structure of dependence is required. May be our goal should be interdependence.

When Terry became the principal, he placed an emphasis on setting goals according to the needs and potential of each youngster in the school.

Look at the situation through their eyes and ask, “What is one thing that they need to improve? It might be a social factor; for another it might be academic; it all depends on the student.

From his perspective, the students at the school have a wide range of abilities and needs. His pragmatic approach allows staff to explore practical programming strategies. Students for example, who have academic tendencies are given opportunities to develop these skills. Other students would work on skills that aim at improving their self image.

I guess I’m still talking around it but if you brought a particular student in here and we assessed that student to determine the student’s strengths and weaknesses. We could then decide what to focus on in order to make the student learn. The obvious answer is that we want the student to function to the best of their abilities at school and in the community.

In order for these things to happen, Terry identified some short and long term goals that students are working towards. They include activities such as self help strategies, learning to prepare meals and learning to shop. The focus is on developing functional skills. As the youngsters get older, further assessments are done in order to determine the goals for these young people. Their program might include skills that they need to develop in order to work in a sheltered workshop. Other youngsters would learn how to make good
use of leisure time.

This young man is going to have a lot of time on their hands so rather than gearing his program to work education activities, I would be supportive of activities that encourages the individual to have some hobbies. That may be more important to that young man because he might never work in a sheltered workshop.

Steve, the school superintendent had a similar perspective on goals for students at this school. His general view is that the school helps youngsters to achieve their potential in all areas.

I'm not just talking about cognitive areas, I mean socially and emotionally and every other domain that we want these youngsters to be able to utilize. I guess our goal is to help them discover their full potential. They may not be able to work but we will show them how to use their leisure time in a productive manner.

Steve also mentioned that he is committed to ensuring that staff at the school also has this mind set when working with the youngsters. Each student's education plan should reflect short and long term goals that aim at making them better individuals so that they can make positive contributions in society.

**Summary of Results - Third Sub-Question**

The theme of beliefs about curriculum emerged from their comments. Staff indicated a variety of perspectives in order to arrive at the goal of independence. It was clear from their comments that respondents did not believe that many of their students would not achieve this goal. They place emphasis individualized programs that teach strategies and skills that meet prescribed expectations. It is fair to wonder whether or not respondents' beliefs about curriculum had a positive influence on the achievement of these students.

Some consultants and administrators felt that there needed to be a greater emphasis on traditional academic subjects while one teacher felt that time was being wasted by focusing on subjects that will have little relevance in the lives of these students. These comments identify the need to bring the staff towards a common consensus. Presently there are contradictions, disagreements and resistance regarding short and long term goals. The challenge for the administration is to bring the staff together so that they can consistently address the needs of these students. The general hope, from all respondents, is that the youngsters will have meaningful lives in spite of the
challenges they will continue to experience in school and upon leaving school. Knowing this to be true, all staff need to provide a learning environment that harmoniously brings these goals to reality.

**Sub-Question Four:**

What factors are associated with success and what factors hinder success?

This discussion is presented in terms of the factors expressed by teachers, support staff and the administration. The results include factors based on the following themes: written policies and documents, community setting, school building, the budget, staffing and availability of assistance and influences on parental expectations.

**Teachers’ Responses**

Teachers were mindful of the broad range of students that make up their school population. In addition to them ranging in age from four to twenty-one, there is also a wide disparity between and among their physical and cognitive impairments. These differences highlight the need to individualize the schooling that each student receives.

Teachers here believe that the basis for success are factors that allow them to provide programs that nurture independence, responsibility and achievement in preparation for meaningful integration and participation in society.

In order for this goal to be realized, teachers see their ability to adapt curriculum as a critical part of their work. They need to be creative since few curriculum documents are appropriate for this student population. One teacher highlighted the need to ask a series of questions when thinking about adaptations to the curriculum.

How can we break the task down so that it is a manageable one? What's important in this student's life right now? What's going to be important in the future? Will the parent be able to support the school's program for their child at home?

The aim is to ensure that everyone is supporting the child in ways that will promote success. Periodic meetings are called to discuss programming directions. A team approach is taken and each member of the team leaves the meeting with a responsibility to carry out. An individualized curriculum is followed or revised.
Some of the teachers did not see the school board curriculum documents as meeting the needs of most students in the school. One fourth year teacher believes that most curriculum documents that arrive at the school are rarely opened. “They’re not read.” He complains that the documents are far removed from the students’ abilities in this school.

They are written for students who are much “higher functioning” than the majority of students at this school. We have to make them work for our students. For many of the students, however, the academic focus is irrelevant.

These teachers become cynical when they are told that all they have to do is adapt the material to meet the needs of the students they teach. They are asking individuals who write the documents to do so for “lower functioning” students. Some of the teachers question why they are always spending so much time adapting curriculum documents which should initially be written for their student population.

The curriculum writers should know our student population. They are supposed to have the expertise. Most of them don’t and we are then called upon to make changes which makes the original documents unrecognizable.

It is common for teachers and other members of staff to work as a team to come up with strategies that will meet individual short and long term goals. Initially, many teachers may think that the child will not be able to follow the program. However, if they were to use a piece of adaptive equipment, put the student in a different position, or offer a different incentive the youngster can experience success. It’s important for teachers to discover ways to manipulate the learning environment to minimize the obstacles.

Teachers’ beliefs and their expectations for these youngsters are pivotal factors in the process of overcoming obstacles (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Their mind set has a direct influence on the outcomes the youngsters will achieve. It is clear, however, that they view their role as different from teachers who teach in “regular” schools. One teacher commented,

I think that it’s important for teachers to have a really broad definition of education when working in this environment. A lot of our kids are not going to be involved in activities and programs that are traditionally associated with schools... Our main goal is to enable students to become as independent as they possibly can.
This belief system obviously guides a teacher's behaviour and has an impact on the curriculum for these students. This, however, is not the consistent view for all teachers. Some have come to this belief through daily experiences with this student population while other teachers are guided by another set of beliefs. Training to work successfully with these students has been identified as an important factor by the the participants.

Three out of eight teachers indicated that training is critical to their success with students who are developmentally handicapped. The teachers, however, are critical of the training that they received at faculties of education. The sections of pre-service courses and Special Education Ministry courses only provided them with a general overview of the how and what to teach these students. The individual needs of each student dictates the approach and content of the instruction. Teachers here realized that it is not until they are working with these students that they acquire strategies that prove to be successful. They say that experience teaching these students is critical.

One teacher talked about her experience. After she graduating from teacher's college, she took summer courses at the Faculty of Education. She was given the opportunity to experience a number of student placements in schools that met the needs of these students. She realizes now, however, that she learned more in her first month as a contract teacher than she did during her entire faculty pre-service experience. This teacher suggested that training for these teachers would be more effective if student teachers were given more placement time in classes that serve this student population.

I knew that I wanted to teach developmentally handicapped children. I wish the faculty provided those of us who wanted to teach these children with more in class experiences. I realize, however, that only a few students from the faculty want to teach such exceptional children.

Another teacher also believed that his training did not adequately prepare him for working with these students. It has been a “learn on the job” situation for him. He recommends that teaching faculties place students who want to teach students with severe needs in a different stream of study than other students. He believes that this would enable new students to become more familiar with the daily unique expectations and the paper work that is crucial in assessing and evaluating these students.

A sixth year teacher commented on the experience he received as an educational assistant at the school. He found this training to be far more valuable than the training he
received at the faculty. He knew what was going to be expected of him and when he was at the faculty he went through the program trying to gain as much knowledge about the students he worked with as an assistant. He too found the training at the faculty to be of a cursory nature. He said, "The program lacked depth. Most of the teachers at the faculty had little if any experience working with students in this school." Few details were included in the lectures or discussions. The special education component of the Ministry of Education and Training part one course was largely a synopsis of all handicaps. As a result, teachers at the school have learned to share their experiences with each other in order to implement effective programs for their students. One teacher commented that teachers teach each other on the job.

My first few months at the school was difficult. I had to depend on my colleagues to help me set up my program for the kids. They were very helpful and they told me that they went through the same overwhelming experiences when they started. After awhile I got used to the routines.

Once a plan is in place, teachers then look for a variety of resources that they see as being critical to student success. All of the teachers spoke highly of the role that educational assistants play. A few of the the teachers worked as assistants at the school prior to being accepted at teacher's college. These assistants do not have additional qualifications than those who work in mainstream schools. Once hired at the school, however, they are encouraged to participate in workshops that relate to their work at the school.

One of the teachers who teaches students with behavioural challenges relies heavily on the educational assistant in her classroom.

My educational assistant helps me to handle challenging behaviours. Some of my kids try to injure themselves. They bang their heads on tables and walls. Some things they need to be restrained so that they won’t hurt themselves. The assistant helps me most during these times.

Assistants do a variety of jobs in the classrooms. They help to support toileting training programs. They work with small groups of children. They help by making sure that material are ready for class activities. They help with lunch time routines and generally works with the teacher to cultivate a positive learning environment for the students.

Other teachers used words like "invaluable" when they talked about how critical their educational assistant is to the success of their program. They support all aspects of
the program and they provide teachers with individuals who can appreciate the challenges and successes that these students experience.

The physical education teacher at the school considers the educational assistants as key individuals at the school. This third year teacher's goal is to introduce these youngsters to as many physical activities as possible. He is mindful of the physical limitations that some the students have, however, his focus is on exposing them to activities that promote physical fitness. When he first introduced them to sit-ups he had to assure many of the students that he was not trying to restrain them because many of them associated being on the ground with being restrained. Some students are able to do sit-ups and other physical activities by themselves. However, many others require a lot of assistance. This teacher has an educational assistant and classes come to the gym with an assistant.

The assistants help students with warm-up activities such as stretching. In these classes, staff set the example by doing the activities with the students. The physical education teacher would work with one or two students while an assistant would work with the others. The staff may need to initiate the sit-up for the students then they would be able to carry the motion through.

Assistants also help the physical education teacher with activities which he has adapted to ensure maximum participation from the students. One activity gives students who are normally in wheelchairs an opportunity to use a scooter board. The assistants spin the students around on the board and the students enjoy experiencing a different kind of motion. One assistant said, "It's great to see our kids in the gym. For many of them it is the only time in the day that they can get out of the wheel chair and experience free movement."

Health care assistants and paraprofessionals also play critical supportive roles to the teachers. Health care assistants work with medically fragile students who are at the school. A number of students use breathing machines, feeding tubes that have to be regularly monitored. Paraprofessionals support teachers during lunch time. They help ensure that students are learning appropriate eating skills.

In addition, teachers find the support of resource staff as being critical to their work. The speech and language pathologist, psycho-educational consultant, nurses, social worker, physiotherapists and occupational therapists are heavily relied on by the
teachers. One teacher commented on the important work that the speech and language pathologist does with the students in his class. "She monitors the classroom program and frequently comes into the class to observe how things are going." When the teacher has questions, she either answers them herself or brings in resources that meet the needs of the youngsters.

Four out of eight teachers who participated in the study saw the administration at the school as being critical to their success. These teachers saw the principal and vice-principal as individuals who are supportive by being sensitive to their teaching duties. One teacher said that she would not have been able to successfully get through the school year without the "backing" of the administration.

    I wanted to set up a program to meet the needs of students who needed more practice interacting with people in the community.
    I requested a number of volunteers to assist the class during our community outings. The principal provided me with names of student volunteers and the project was a success.

Another teacher believes that the administration's support is critical when dealing with parents who have unrealistic expectations for their youngster. "A few parents still feel that their child will grow out of what ever they are experiencing and become normal." The principal and vice-principal always make themselves available to sit with teachers and parents. They do their best to be sensitive to the desires of parents while pointing out the current abilities of students.

    The administration also supports the teachers when they experience no support from the parent. In this situation the mother excepted the child's inappropriate behaviour. The teacher said that the parent " believed that God made him that way. He is handicapped. He is aggressive and no one can change him." This parent continued to believe that the teacher should simply accept his behaviour. With the support of the administration, however, the parent started to support expectations that would result in a more successful future for her child.

    Other teachers make positive comments about the "open door" policy of administration. Teachers are given opportunities to meet with the administration on an informal level to talk about their students and other school issues. The principal and vice-principal demonstrate high visibility in the classrooms, halls and playground. They are seen as being an effective leadership team.
Teachers also appreciated the support they receive from the administration when they are in need of a special piece of equipment or when they are requesting an in-service workshop. The school has placed the use of adaptive equipment as a high priority for the school. Special switches and touch-plates are expensive, however, some teachers have appreciated the efforts of the administration to acquire whatever is necessary to help a student become more successful. They are also thankful for in-school workshops that have focused on feeding techniques and non-violent crisis prevention and intervention. These teachers see the administration as following through with identified school directives.

One teacher talked about the supportive role that the administration could play. However, she was critical of their lack of awareness of what she was doing with students in her class. This teacher was looking for comments such as "you're doing a good job" from the administration at the school. While she did receive a formal evaluation every three years, she was hoping for more feedback from them. The teacher wanted programming suggestions from the principal and vice-principal. These comments were shared by only one of the teachers who participated in the study.

All of the teachers, however, talked about the role parents play at the school. Three of them identified parents as being critical to the success of students at the school. The teachers believe that parents who are involved with their child's schooling are a blessing.

I love parents who are involved in their child's school. I learn from them and they develop a better understanding of what is being done for their child. The youngster also benefits from good parent-teacher relations.

Teachers appreciate receiving notes and letters once and a while. To have a word of thanks or praise from a parent is important to these teachers especially when many of the students are not able to show that they are benefiting from the work of their teachers. Another teacher thought that parent involvement is important. However, he understands that since many of the students live in group homes it is not always possible to have regular communication with parents. When they do contact him, he enjoys talking with parents who are interested in finding out how their youngster is doing.

The kindergarten teacher talked about her experiences with parents. These parents want to know that their child will be comfortable in school. They are concerned about the care that they will receive. This teacher often talks to the parents and tries to
instill in them that it is important that parents work together with their child’s teacher. She stresses the importance of partnership and regular communication. At this point, many of her parents have questions that focus on helping the child to acquire age appropriate self care skills.

One teacher spoke highly of a parent she talked to throughout the recent school year. The parent knew that this was the teacher’s first year with a senior class of students who were in wheelchairs.

The parent introduced herself early in September. She told me a few things about her son that helped me to develop a program that would meet his needs. Throughout the year we communicated. I believe our chats made a positive difference.

As the rapport between them developed, they openly talked about the progress that her son was making and also how to help him better deal with challenges. The parent had several suggestions that helped the teacher and the teacher was able to share information she received from the physiotherapist that the parent appreciated. This teacher saw this partnership as extremely positive because she has also experienced parents who come into the school with the idea that teachers are trying to get away with something and they see it as their job to make you responsible and accountable for what happens in their youngster’s classroom. She recalled a parent who frequently made unannounced visits to the classroom and then complained to the principal about the classroom temperature. Comments of this nature, however, are the exception. Teachers pride themselves in having a school environment that is welcoming to parents.

A few years ago, staff established a parenting centre at the school. Parent who have young children at the school are encouraged to take them out of the regular program for a period of time during the school day and join in the activities at the parenting centre. A number of parents are accepting this invitation and they are also interacting with other parents from school and the surrounding community. A few parents come into the parenting centre with siblings of youngsters who attend the school. One teacher commented that “it’s nice to see an entire family participating in activities at the centre. Three or four students came to the parenting centre before being enrolled at the school when they became four.” Teachers think this is great because these students have already made the transition from home to this school environment.
Teachers also support the special evenings which bring families together at the school. Each term teachers help to organize a "fun night out" with families from the school. These social events help parents to get to know other parents. This contact is particularly important at this school because this is not the local school for these families. Most parents travel long distances to get to the school. Some also do shift work and some find it difficult to visit the school because of child care issues. Others feel uncomfortable because they speak languages other than English.

Now many families look forward to the social night out. Baby sitting services are provided, interpreters are available and parents get to know each other. Parents have commented on the informal support networks that have been established as a result of the scheduled social evenings. Teachers support this kind of parent out-reach because it also gives them opportunities to meet with their student's family in a social manner.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that teachers identified "staff" as being the most significant factor when analyzing successful or unsuccessful experiences. Seven of the eight teachers who participated in the study highlighted the contributions of staff in the school who promote a culture of success. Teachers support the comment made by one of their colleagues.

Staff at this school have come here because they care about these youngsters. It is not something they have come into because they simply needed a job. Many of us have chosen to work with these youngsters even though we have had opportunities to move into other fields. I believe staff here have a certain character. We support each other here.

The school staff continues to depend on each other. They realize that many of their school experiences would be very different from the experiences of staff at other schools. Their situations and stories are unique to the setting. It may be hard for others to understand or relate to what motivates the staff. These committed individuals have dedicated themselves to working with needy youngsters. When material resources are scarce or not applicable to the students they teach, staff come together to meet the challenges. As a result, solutions and strategies are found that help lead to successful outcomes for these youngsters.
Support Staff's Responses

This sample group placed a great deal of emphasis on team work in their responses to this sub-question. Students, parents and teachers benefited when ideas and strategies were shared. Supporting each other was a key factor in achieving success for these students. Positive interactions with all staff is required especially when members of the support staff disagrees with a program for a student. When there is a lack of supportive resources, the student's progress is compromised.

Seven individuals who support the work of teachers at the school participated in this case study. Their interviews followed the same procedure as the teachers. The speech and language consultant worked with a group of five students for two years. During that time, their literacy skills did increase. They became proficient in their use of the Mayer Johnson symbols of their communication board. Three of the five students also learned to communicate a few of their requests through the medium of "sign language." Parents also noticed the improvements. This consultant attributed a great deal of the success to working in a team teaching situation with the classroom teacher.

Both professionals were able to share their perspectives about outlining a program for these students while finding common ground. The consultant also commented on her ability to shake off the medical model of diagnostic- prognosis- treatment very quickly. She believes that the medical model promotes a prescriptive approach when it comes to working with these students. For example, she pointed out that with the medical model when child A does this the next step should be this. It doesn't matter if he's doing C and D he's got to do B. If you follow this kind of sequence, and many medical professionals do, it would be difficult to work in this educational setting. This speech and language consultant's experience with these students has caused her to question her professional philosophy because she discovered that many students who have few so called prerequisite skills in language development are able to do amazing things.

The consultant continued to say that there are many other students in classes at the school who require similar support. When she is not able to provide it progress stops. Staff at the school need constant support when dealing with challenging situations.

When asked to talk about what she believes is critical to the success of students at the school, the speech and language consultant highlighted team work. She needs to
feel that she has the support from administration, from other colleagues within her
discipline and other non-teaching disciplines.

Also, support from teachers and parents is important. The aim is that
everyone is truly working together for the enhancement of the student's
life.

Too often, however, she believes that there is a great deal of talk about team
work but not enough of it in practice. She highlights the problem of not having a formal
structure for staff to come together and talk about the progress of particular students. The
only time staff get together and talk about students is at the IPRC.

They do get together informally on occasion but most times it is without
a member of the administration present.

She believes that when an administrator is at the meeting there is a greater sense that
what is being discussed is valued. She also commented on the factor of time. There is
never enough time. This is another reason why team work is critical. This consultant is
amazed by some teachers who don't use their time wisely. For example, instead of
working together to complete the annual Individual Education Plans, she claims that a
number of them spend long hours working alone. She believes that this experience
would be much more interesting, creative and pleasant if it were done in a group.

In her comments about working with parents of students who are developmentally
handicapped, she agrees that they can have an impact of their youngster's program.

Sometimes parent expectations are incredibly realistic and that's
gratifying because there isn't the need to build up or tear down their
perspective. Sometimes, however, expectations are too low. They don't
expect anything. She believes that if parents don't expect anything they
are not going to get anything.

Other parents have expectations that are high. They do well to raise their child in
the hope that things are going to get better. In the parent's mind, better may translate to
mean "normal" and as the years go on the differential between normal and their child has
gotten wide. When they then think of the "big picture," they most likely will be caring for
their son or daughter for an extended period of time. Perhaps at one point there was
some hope that they would get into group homes, a parent relief program or a day
program. However, many of these programs are either being cut-back or there are not
enough of them to meet the demand. Some parents are getting together and developing their own programs for these young adults.

The consultant would also like to have greater control over how she interacts with students who need her services. She would like to see more speech pathologists. She also dreams of having a communication assistant but believes that the chances of that happening are nil. She is still most excited by the ability to influence positive changes in the lives of these youngsters, not by herself but as a member of a team. If this situation changed she believes she would have to find something else to do.

The two educational assistants who participated in this study also talked about the importance of team work in this school environment. They would assist with helping students develop skills that leads to independence. For some students, learning to tie their shoes and zip up their coats are important parts of their program. They will probably enter into an adult development program because it's unlikely that they will acquire the independent work habits needed for employment in a workshop. Their program focus is on self care. For other students, the assistant helps youngsters to deal with situations that will lead to possible employment in a sheltered workshop. The assistant recalls a situation where she worked with a student who had acquired pre-vocational work skills.

The two assistants believe that the teacher relies on her as much as she relies of the teacher. She also believes that a team concept is required in her work with all staff at the school. For example, one of the students she currently works with needs physiotherapy. The school's physiotherapist comes into the class and works with the student. She shows the assistant and teacher how to maintain the student's program. Since the therapist is not able to work on a daily basis with each student, the support of the assistant and teachers is critical to the student's success.

This mind set of supporting each other carries over to a number of school interactions. Assistants respond to difficult situations that occur in the halls or in another classroom. They help support staff in crisis situations and they help to ensure that classroom routines are maintained. Many of the students are aware that when the assistant asks them to do something the teacher will have the same expectations. Their good working relationship prevents any undermining of authority which can bring about bad feelings between adults and have a negative impact on program delivery.
There are times, however, when assistants disagree with a particular student's program. An assistant shared her experience of working with a kindergarten student who is "low functioning." She disagreed with supporting a program that focuses on teaching this youngster how to count and recognize letters of the alphabet. She thinks the focus at this point should be on establishing basic life skills. "Teach him how use the toilet, put on his shoes and zip up his coat instead of giving him an academic program." According to one assistant, this pattern happens too frequently at the school. The situation gets worse when the child becomes a teenager and they can neither function academically nor can they address their needs of personal care. This educational assistant suggests that more emphasis be placed on the realistic future of the majority of students who are being taught in this school environment.

What is the learning potential of the child? Most will do some work in a sheltered workshop. That is the graduation goal for most of the students. The need then is for these students to acquire prevocational skills. It's not likely that they will need the skills that are taught in a regular school setting. Rather than trying to follow a curriculum that is generically planned, focus on teaching these students life skills that will enable them to be productive and not frustrated in their community.

The outcome for students who do receive prevocational training and learn appropriate life skills is still questionable. Unfortunately there are not many workshop programs available to these students. The assistant commented on how long students have to wait before gaining access into a workshop. "It's not unreasonable for a student to wait five years." This fact is depressing for all concerned because during the wait the student has little opportunity to maintain the necessary skills for the workshop environment while being out of school.

School board curriculum documents and policies guide the program that students receive. Nevertheless, from her perspective, teachers at the school would educate students better if they shared more ideas with staff and paid less attention to curriculum that always requires adaptations. One of the assistants recalled a staff room conversation where a teacher shared a successful art activity for "low functioning" students. It is often very challenging to plan a unit of study for these students but if staff openly share their ideas and experiences everyone benefits including parents.

The educational assistant spoke highly of parents who are able to be involved in the education of their youngster. A number of parents carry through with program
suggestions that are shared with them. A few parents, however, are difficult to deal with because they are uncooperative. The assistant has never seen a teacher react negatively towards the child as a result of being upset with the parents but she believes that it is frustrating. If students are doing well at school but parents are not willing to follow through at home the success of the program is compromised. She believes that students achieve more when parents cooperate with staff at the school.

For parents who are not able to come into the school on a regular basis, the assistant monitors the communication book which is set up by the teacher. Most teachers write in the communication book each day to let parents know what kind of day their child experienced. The book is also sent to the care giver of students who live in group homes. The assistant appreciates receiving notes that explains why a child has been absent or any other information that help the student to have a good day at school.

When this assistant talked about what was required for her to have a good day she spoke about the importance of being a valued member of a team. "I usually feel supported by my colleagues. They know what your days are like because they have experienced similar challenges." She was critical of working with these students in integrated settings because she believes that staff would not be able to empathize with the kind of schooling that these students require. She knows that in this setting, staff would relate to being kicked and pinched while in a "regular" setting the support might not be the same. Also, she has heard of assistants and teachers who feel isolated in integrated school environments.

Among the pool of assistants, most have been in this setting for five years or longer. This assistant, who has been at the school for seven years, believes that a number of assistants plan to become teachers. She admitted to wanting to become a teacher in this or a similar school setting herself. One assistant has been with the school board for over twenty-five years. When she started working at the school, she saw the job as an opportunity to make a little extra money. Now, many assistants view their work as a life long career. This change may be due to the raise in pay as well as the qualifications required to become an educational assistant in this school setting.

The second assistant who participated in the study, had similar stories of successful and unsuccessful school experiences. In her account of a successful experience, she talked about a student who was very aggressive.
I worked with a youngster who had little self control. He would try to injure himself and others. The teacher had to develop a very structured program to change his behaviour. It took a long time but the youngster was taught how to behave appropriately.

The assistant was able to support this student by having an excellent working relationship with the classroom teacher. The teacher provided the assistant with lists that outlined the student’s program. The assistant felt empowered to help carry out a program for the student based on modelling the teacher and following the programming lists. The assistant attributed the success she had with this student to being able to consistently follow the program. Initially the youngster did everything to break out of the structured program. However, once he began to experience success in a few areas of his program he was motivated to comply with the directives of the teacher and the assistant. Other students remained noncompliant in spite of consistent programming. The assistant was able to recall a student who brought her and the teacher little success and a great deal of frustration.

I have been working here nine years and I have never met a child like him. He can walk. He can sign. He is very smart but he chooses not to comply. It’s so hard to explain. Six teachers have worked with him and most of them quit because of him. He is so aggressive. There is nothing he likes. Not food, not toys, not music, nothing. I just don’t know.

It is obvious that this youngster provided challenges for the assistant and classroom teacher. The situation was compounded by the fact that support staff have intervened but have not been able to improve the youngster’s behaviour. They have set up a program for him, but if he chooses to do nothing it is difficult to change his behaviour.

The assistant went on to recall another student who gave her challenges and little success. He too was very aggressive.

He bites, pinches, scratches, kicks and everything. We had a restraining chair built for him. It’s usually a struggle to get him in the chair. I try to help the teacher but sometimes we have to call the group home to take him out of the school. When our safety and the safety of other students are in jeopardy students are withdrawn from school for a short period of time.

When everything, however, is taken into consideration the assistant believes that she is making positive contributions to the youngsters at the school. “I wouldn’t be here if I wasn’t needed. I know the class routines and I am able to set up the activity centres that are required for the lessons.” In order to bring about more successful experiences, this assistant was willing to share some of her opinions.
I think our school should have more of an emphasis on behaviour management. I think there should be more support. You can get the consultants but they are never here and when they are it is only for a short time. Often times they don't see what happens in the classroom. They come in for a couple of minutes, write a program and that's it. They need to be in the school at all times.

At the time of the interviews a group of adult students who are learning English, occupies two classrooms at one end of the school. The assistant is concerned because these students are not being put through any kind of orientation to help them understand the nature of the students at the school. The assistant believes that the behaviour of these students may compromise the safety of the youngsters in the school.

I get really mad. They go through the school yard and leave the gate open. Our kids could get out onto the road and experience a dangerous situation. The administration said they wouldn't interfere with our youngster but that is not the case. They need to know how to conduct themselves in a school like ours.

The assistant also made comments about other aspects of the school that may be critical to her supportive role at the school. She said that most of the written documents she receives are not important. "They focus on kids that are very different from our students." However, she did highlight the information she received about the fire safety policy at the school which contains a procedure for the safe evacuation of students in an emergency. Fire drills are practised on a regular basis. "Staff need to know what to do because most of our students will be totally dependent on staff during an emergency."

The community stores are also seen as supportive of the school. Many students are given opportunities to demonstrate their social skills at local stores. Students are using computers more. Touch plates, switches and customized seating and standing devices allow students to have greater access. The assistant would welcome more equipment, however, for senior students at the school. "I know another a school where they have a hair dressing shop and an auto mechanic shop. A few of our students would be able to make use of these facilities."

"Teachers at the school are spending a lot of their own money on things for the classroom," said the same educational assistant. The teacher in her class is said to spend large sums of money on buying film and processing them for use in the class. The teacher also spends money to buy sorting activities. The assistant would like to see teachers being given a larger classroom budget to cover these expenditures.
Parent involvement was also an issue for this assistant. She would like to see more parent participation. According to this assistant, a number of teachers have little contact with parents. "They see us as baby sitters. Some parents don't seem to care. They rarely come into the school and when they do they spend little time in classes."

In closing, the assistant shared that she loves her job. She enjoys working with the teacher in the class and she has a great deal of respect for the way she cares for the youngsters. "She brings out the best in them. She is simply amazing." The assistant said that she used to be off work twice a week sometimes because she felt so drained. Now, she views her work as a positive experience because of the teacher

My teacher is given the hardest kids to handle. Other staff always come to her for support. She is never angry. She is never in a bad mood. She never says, "come back later". She is just amazing.

The Behavioural Consultant was another person from staff who supported the work of teachers. In her account of a successful experience she focused on an assertiveness training program that she worked on with a teacher at the school. The consultant was asked to put together a program that would enable students to stand up for their rights, find ways to appropriately express their feelings, and ask for help and clarification when needed. Through a series of role play activities, the youngsters were able to learn strategies that would give them confidence when interacting with peers, teachers and other adults. For example, one of the student goals that the consultant helped the teacher with was being able to start conversations with friends.

We work on self talk activities which are done to encourage self. Activities also focus on relaxation training so that when students feel nervous they have techniques for relaxing.

The consultant has been involved in this program for about two years. She visits the class once every two weeks to see how the program is going and to find out if the teacher or students have questions. She recalls an incident that occurred during the assertiveness training program. An eighteen year-old youngster had asked his parents for permission to come to school by public transportation instead of school cab that usually picks him up. His parents didn't think their son was ready and denied the request. The youngster, however, went off by himself and came to school by travelling on a public bus. Although his parents were upset, the boys assertive behaviour allowed him to prove to his parents that he was capable of doing something that many teenagers take
The Behavioural Consultant believed that the program was a success because the teacher was very interested and she was willing to put in the work. The teacher was looking for a way to improve her students' social skills. The students involved in the program were "high functioning." They had good acquisition of basic skills. The administration at the school was also supportive of the program. One administrator came in and observed the role play activities and he also participated in a few of them. The consultant also had the support of the senior psychologist who gave his input throughout the program.

**Administrative Responses**

The five administrators selected a variety of factors that facilitate or hinder success. An overview of their responses emphasized the need to keep up with the pace of change in education. They did not want their staff to lose site of the principles that other schools were effectively following.

Vice-Principal Carol believes that it is important for staff to have a good knowledge of what is available. Changes are being made to the curriculum and staff need to successfully implement educational documents. They are required to stay current.

There has to be resources; especially for our students. There is also the need for adaptive equipment for a number of the youngsters. Teachers should also pay attention to assessment and evaluation. They should review things and determine what needs to be changed. I realize that having the resources to keep on going is a challenge.

Carol is satisfied with the way in which the community supports these young people. Merchants in the community take the needed extra time in order for them to make a purchase or ask questions.

We feel that whatever we teach in the classroom, we have to help students to generalize these skills in the community setting. The community helps them to make that transition. It is acceptable then to use the community as a teaching area.

Carol also commented on the students' use of public transportation. A few of them are able to use public transportation when they are in the school community. Buses equipped for wheel chair access also help a number of students to get around the community.
"The school building is bright and spacious." Students benefit from the large open areas. Carol also mentioned that when the school was built, the aim was, "not to try to make the kids fit the school but rather the other way around."

At the time of the interviews, the school was joining the local school district. Some staff thought that this change would result in budget cuts to the school. Carol was concerned that the cuts would make it difficult for the school to keep up with needed specialized equipment. Fortunately, the school budget at this point has not been significantly cut.

Carol also was happy that the school was not experiencing a reduction of staff due to budget constraints. All classes have a teacher and an educational assistant.

The kids that we now have are more difficult than past students. Additional staff provides us with flexibility. If there is a crisis in the classroom, you can support the teacher for a period of time. Then you can move them around to where they are needed.

Carol meets frequently with parents at the school. She points out that initially many of them have unrealistic expectations for their child.

Even after they come to the acceptance that their child is developmentally handicapped, sometimes their expectations are not very realistic. Especially if the student is quite young. They feel that as soon as the child can talk they will be normal. Once they are in the system, they usually like what they see and they accept the fact that life skills is the focus rather than academics.

Carol also mentioned that teachers at the school develop a closer relationship with parents than they might have in another school setting because many of the students are non-verbal. Regular communication with parents promote an atmosphere of partnership. Carol thinks that this partnership fosters student success.

When Kim was Vice-Principal at the school, she agreed with the school board's move to produce curriculum documents for students with normative disabilities.

What we had was not terribly useful. In the last couple of years we have tried to make these documents more workable, more living as opposed to something you just get and put on the shelf. So I think we are on a much better track right now.

She also commented on how these documents help teachers to see their students in a new way. Teachers now had the support to focus on activities that were rarely seen in these classrooms. Books being read to children who some thought would never read made a difference. Although some teachers felt that reading to their children was not a
priority, teachers who wondered if their students could benefit were given permission to try. Kim was involved in several workshops that promoted this kind of student success.

We are constantly doing demonstrations, using videos, so that people could see that even the lowest functioning student could benefit from the voice and the rhythm of language. The youngster may have better eye contact during the activity. It is really key to remember what the goals are for each student.

To illustrate this point, Kim gave an account of a student who was given the opportunity to read a story that was loaded onto a computer. The child was not able to use the computer to access the story. As a result, other strategies had to be used to meet the literacy needs of this student.

Kim's comments about the community focused on partnerships that are being made with community agencies, students and volunteers. A few years ago a number of people in the community was not receptive to these students. Kim recalls a situation where on a class trip to a local supermarket two people came up and asked, "Why are these children here?" She felt the individuals thought that the youngsters should not be in the store because they were "dirty or contaminated." In another instance, a person threw money and candy at their feet. Things are different now in the community. People seem more aware of the challenges faced by the students. Many individuals from the community come to the school to help students with their schooling.

Parents share in this involvement. Kim believes that they are developing their own expertise. More of them are interested in what their children are doing at the school. Regular communication is important and a growing number of them are participating in their child's education. Kim finds that parents of these students have a difficult job. Most learn to accept the fact that their child may never learn how to walk or get a job. A number of parents believes that the fate of their child will change as a result of a medical or religious experience and a few hope that a positive change will occur if a particular strategy is used.

I remember working with a student who was very low functioning. His mom was convinced that her son was learning how to read by some sort of flash card procedure. She would show him two words and then ask him which one is so and so and if he looked at one of the cards it indicated that he was choosing that particular card. There was a one out of two chance that he would be always right. She was convinced that this technique was working for her son.
Rather than confronting this parent, Kim and the classroom teacher acknowledged the parent's view but focused on a program that they felt met his needs.

Kim acknowledged the need to have a school budget that is in place support the progress of these students. She highlighted the need to ensure that money was available to purchase special equipment. Many of the students require lifts to help them to get in and out of their wheelchairs. They cost a lot of money. Fortunately, the school has received needed funding.

When asked to comment on the school building, Kim said that, "It is a building which has a lot of space for our students. It is a clean and comfortable environment." She also thought that the number of staff at the school could adequately meet the needs of the students. She was, however, concerned about not having enough staff available during times of an emergency.

Our staff works with a potentially explosive population. Anything could happen in a moment and sometimes we have a hard time finding people to help. There could be a need to rush a student to the hospital at any time. The could be a student who is hard to control because of a violent outburst. Sometimes our students don't get along well with others. Some of our students have psychiatric problems and in those critical times we find that we don't have enough people on staff.

Kim, however, referred to the staff that are at the school as being the most important facilitators of student success. Their expertise and professional ethics make the difference.

I think teachers have to see themselves as professionals, life long learners constantly trying to improve themselves by reading, attending workshops, by doing anything possible to improve their practice. I think that's what makes the difference between a really good teacher and those who are just okay.

The medical staff at the school also play a critical role in the promoting successful experiences. In the last few years an increasing number of students require frequent medical attention. Medical resource staff help these students to come to school.

So we have nurses who are doing suctioning, tube feeding, cauterization and all of these other medical things just to make sure that the students are at school. We have a few students who need nursing throughout the day. They need to be monitored throughout the day just in case they aspire or something else happens to them. They have a nurse with them at all times.
When Mark was the principal of the school, he identified areas that he believed hindered or facilitated student success. He highlighted the importance of the parent community. When possible, both parents need to take an active role in raising a child who has normative exceptionalities. In cases where there is one parent, he suggests that they would benefit from being involved with a support group. The school building is adequate. Mark's only negative comment about the school is that the washrooms need to be larger. Students in wheelchairs have a difficult time getting in and out of them. He doesn't believe the architects designed the space for students in wheelchairs.

He mentioned that the budget is always adequate even during periods when other school staffs are feeling the constraints of less money. He admits that schools that meet the needs of students who are developmentally handicapped usually are the last to face budget cuts. Mark said, "It's not good politics to cut the budget of very needy kids."

Staffing has always been an issue according to Mark. In his years as principal, the school board had a formula that determined the staff this school would receive.

Students were given points. If the youngster did not have any physical handicaps, and was ambulatory he was given a 1.5 weighting. If the youngster had severe needs he was given a higher weighting. We have a population of about 86 youngsters. We have a weighting factor of 172. We get staff that is equivalent to a school that has 172 students attending. The formula is dictated by a divisor which was negotiated in our collective agreement. The present divisor is 98.5. In order to determine our teacher staffing, you take the number 172 and divide it by 98.5.

Mark believes that there should be no more that ten students in a class. A situation that hinders success arises when staff try to work with a class that includes two or three students who are very aggressive. He would like to see additional staff interveners to support teachers who work with aggressive students. These students are difficult to manage. They usually cause the teacher to pay less attention to the other students. Another adult in the classroom would be a benefit to the teacher and the students.

Mark wanted to end his comments on staffing by focusing on the changes that has happened in this school's student population.

In the past we had a lot more high functioning students. They could handle complicated machines. They had girlfriends and boyfriends. That is not the case today. It's interesting to look at how far we've come but we realize that we have a long way to go. Now we have a totally different population. These kids come to us and we accept them as long as they have an intellectual dysfunction. We have zero rejection here. We just need to have professional and paraprofessional staff
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classes that have only five or six students.

These students are much more physically involved. There are a lot more emotional problems. So a great deal of programming is done on a one to one basis. Our educational assistants and interveners are important individuals. If we didn't have them we would have to change the program we are offering.

Terry thinks that parents can hinder or facilitate student success. He has experienced situations where parents want to talk about their youngster but are reluctant to listen to suggestions given by staff at the school. He has also experienced situations where parents are understanding. They are receptive to suggestions and strategies are discussed in a positive manner. Terry ended his comments by returning to the kind of staff that help these youngsters to realize positive possibilities.

The one thing that I'm constantly amazed by, is the fact that staff here don't punch a clock. They come in and they do their jobs. They don't do their jobs because they have to pay the rent, although I'm sure that's part of it, but these people have chosen to work with these students and they are really into it. I admire their level of commitment.

Superintendent Steve, quickly focused on the value of written policies and documents when asked to talk about factors that hinder or facilitate student success. "Everybody has to be reading something from the same book that comes from the organization." Steve sees policies and documents as being necessary for staff, parents and students. He believes that there has to be a protocol that is followed. To meet the goal of consistency, it is necessary to have the information written down. This documentation provides the school with clear directions. Without them, Steve asks, "How would staff at the school know that they are doing the best for these youngsters?"

Steve reflected on the changes that has occurred in the schooling of students with normative exceptionalities over the past thirty years. They benefit from being in different communities.

They came from being institutionalized to being deinstitutionalized in special schools and in the last fifteen years there has been a move from special schools to classes within regular schools. Some students however, remained to be served in special schools. Currently, thirty-three percent of these students are taught in special schools. It is important that they interact with the community.

When talking about school buildings, Steve focused on the importance of accessibility. This school is located in a large urban centre and was built in a way that took
into consideration the needs of the students who would attend. Washrooms, counter tops and desks are appropriate for these students. Steve pointed out that "regular" schools could not accommodate these students because they are not equipped to do so. He also mentioned the need for cleanliness at the school.

I think cleanliness is something that one has to be extremely aware of. I'm not suggesting that regular schools are dirty but I do think that when you have youngsters who have to go onto a ventilator, children who are being tube fed, children who are being diapered on a routine basis you have to be particularly aware of the cleanliness and also the procedures to follow and maintain that cleanliness.

Steve is skeptical about "regular" schools being able to maintain this needed level of cleanliness. He is also concerned about the needed space that is required to diaper a young adult with an appropriate level of dignity and privacy. These factors are important when planning for the success of these youngsters.

Steve was very optimistic about the budget for this special site school. He believes that they will continue to be protected because of the unique needs of students who attend the school.

People respond emotionally to most sensory deprivation and handicapping conditions. I think that humans are such that when they see a disadvantage person they want to reach out. Practitioners and politicians have tended to take that human sense of the disadvantaged have tried to protect them. I don't see that diminishing.

Steve did, however, think that there would be changes in the level of staffing and the availability of assistance. These changes were shared by pointing out how staffing was developed for these students. "We have come from a cottage industry program of developmentally handicapped to a highly sophisticated school system." This school site has the smallest teacher to pupil ratio of any program. There is also a full time educational assistant in every classroom. Most teachers also have lunch time supervision.

We have marginally reduced the number of lunch time people. I don't believe this has disadvantaged anybody. I believe that some people think they have been disadvantaged because they have lost an extra pair of hands for a number of minutes but I think what we have done is to prepare these youngsters for the real world. They need to learn how to manage without having somebody always over their shoulder.

Steve's comments on teacher staffing centred on the need to ensure that qualified individuals were available to teach in these unique leaning environments. He was concerned about the reduced opportunities teachers had to acquire special education
training that would allow them to teach in these students. Universities were not offering many Ministry of Education courses that are required for teachers to have in order to serve this student population.

Our teachers require special training to work with our students. They will not be able to deal with all the kind of problems that you see in our school. About thirty-five percent of our kids are none non-verbal; none speaking. It is crucial that our teachers know how to teach students with these challenges.

Steve also commented about the challenges that the school system needs to address about parental expectations. He believes that parents have been taught not have a lot of expectations of their youngster’s abilities. He points to the absence of an active parent association at the school as a support for his view. Steve did, however, say that parents do become more involved when they wonder about the options available to their youngster upon leaving the school.

Parents felt comfortable. They sent their kids to school and they were satisfied with the program. Everything has been provided for them so that when the kids come to the age of twenty-one parents wonder what’s next.

Steve is supportive of the recent trend toward involving parents in their youngster’s transition plan. Starting at the age of sixteen, parents are invited to ask questions about what might happen when their son or daughter leaves school. They are given information about what to expect and what they can do in order to promote their youngster’s independence. Steve hopes that these parents will establish support groups and organize themselves in an effort to ensure that these young people experience success once they have left this school.

Steve ended his comments by focusing on the importance of introducing these students to industrial and business communities. He thinks it won’t just happen. He believes that a strong work education program that provides some incentive both to the employers and to the youngsters is necessary.

**Summary of Results- Fourth Sub-Question:**

In summary, it is obvious that written policies and documents, the community setting, the school building, the budget, staffing and availability of assistance and parental expectations are themes that can either hinder or facilitate success. Teachers, support staff and administrators identified factors within these themes that are associated with success.
The accounts of the participants illustrate that when support is given to youngsters in these themes they are able to experience learning opportunities that promote success. The opposite is true when support for these themes are lacking. There is a clear need for special resources in order for these students to achieve success. Materials, personnel, money and partnerships among and between those who are connected with the school help them to make the most out of their learning. These resources need to be reviewed on a regular basis in order to keep up with the changing population of students and the changing pedagogical instruction. The school administration need to articulate this view to all staff so that individualized programs are guided by expectations that are embraced by all staff at the school. These results indicate that beliefs about collaboration is another theme that emerged from the data. Some respondents spoke about the benefits of working in a collaborative environment while others indicated the need to create a school environment that is more collaborative. The next sub-question focuses on determining if there are differences in what is seen as successful school experiences among teachers, support staff and administrators.

Sub-Question Five:

Are there differences in the perception of what are viewed as successful school experiences among staff who work with these students?

Teachers, support staff and administrators viewed experiences that foster student independence as being successful. Each group wanted to find ways to give students more control over their environment. Their comments indicate that there are clear differences in the perception of what is viewed as successful school experiences among staff who work with these students. The teachers focused on developing individualized programs that would enable the students to participate developmentally appropriate activities. The support staff, with the exception of the two school nurses, supported the teachers in a variety of ways. The two nurses focused on the need to care for these youngsters rather than trying so hard to see them function as able bodied individuals. The administrators provided staff with resources that would help the students become more involved in their communities. Differences in the respondents' perspectives of roles and
responsibilities were also evident. In all cases, the goal was independence. However, many of the participants had different concepts and perceptions of what is meant by independence. These differences surfaced within and outside of the three groups of participants. Some of these differences may be accounted for by roles while others may indicate the need for the administration to clarify and articulate the mission of this learning environment.

**Teachers' Responses**

The eight teachers involved in the study talked about success by focusing on increasing the number of activities that the student could perform on their own. Programs are in place that teach these youngsters skills that help them function independently. The teachers all took into consideration the developmental level of each student. However, the aim was always to move their students towards greater independence.

For students in Anna's primary class, an indicator of independence was shown when one or two of the students learned how to dress and undress themselves in an appropriate manner. Another indicator of independence occurred when other students in her class demonstrated that they had acquired toileting skills. These events are viewed as being successful for these students.

In another class, Robert celebrates a student's successful integration from his class to a class in a mainstream school. The student has achieved the level of independence that warrants a change of school placement. Robert and the student see this change as a reward for achievement. Robert believes that the student will continue to move on to even greater levels of independence in the mainstream school environment. He does, however, note that this student was indeed the exception. Most of the students at this school never reach the level of independence that call for an alternative school placement. Rather, they show progress by making the kind of changes that Allison saw.

Allison talked about the success her junior students experienced as a result of being able to sit independently on a chair for an age appropriate period of time. This ability resulted in the completion of several classroom tasks. These students no longer need someone sitting with them all the time in order to make sure that they will stay on task.
In another class, Chris praises the success of a six year-old who is learning to use the toilet in an independent manner. Her ability to master this fundamental behaviour will allow her to participate more in her school program. At this point, the focus is on developing the functional skills of this student. Teaching her how to zip up a coat and put on a pair of shoes are part of the daily instruction. Chris shared the child's progress with her parents who try to carry on similar strategies at home. Chris realizes that communication between the home and the school was also part of the move towards independence.

As physical education teacher at the school, Derick's program centres on giving these youngsters experiences with physical activities that would be part of most physical education programs. Physical fitness activities such as sit-ups and push-ups were introduced to these youngsters. Derick believes that this exposure will allow these students to develop a generalized sense of the components of a physical education program. He is also hoping that these students will realize the importance of engaging in physical fitness activities throughout their lives. This anticipated result, will allow them to acquire independent recreational skills that will add to their quality of life.

Vanessa talked about helping to instill work habits that would help her students to experience success when they enter the work world. She teaches the work education program at the school. The program tries to prepare these students for work situations that they may experience after they leave the school at age twenty-one. A large part of the program involves students working in the school store. Here they have an opportunity to sort, display and sell a number of products that many of them have helped to design. The goal again is for the youngsters to acquire skills that will help them to secure a job in society.

In another classroom, a teacher discovered that a student who has severe behavioural difficulties could communicate with the aid of a communication board. It turns out that the student's inappropriate behaviour may have been caused by the frustration of not being able to communicate with his teachers and parent. The teacher believes that since the student was non-verbal, many people believed that he did not have the ability to communicate. The student is now able to have more control over his environment. He is moving towards becoming an independent member of his community.
Paul's comment about a successful student also highlight the emphasis on independence. A student in his class uses a wheel chair. He is a big youngster and his parents are finding it difficult to lift him out of his chair. The young man was shown how to move in ways that would help facilitate the lift. With practice, it became possible for one person to lift him out of the chair instead of two. He was also trained on how to make better use of his wheelchair. He has become so confident using it that he now can travel independently around the city.

**Support Staff's Responses**

The seven support staff who participated in the study also highlighted the theme of independence when asked to share their perceptions of successful school experiences for these students. The two school nurses, however, emphasized their views on student comfort in their comments about successful school experiences.

Julie is the speech and language consultant at the school. She supported a literacy program for a group of students who were non-verbal. She helped the students to make good use of an augmentative communication system. This system enabled the students to communicate in a more effective manner which led to greater independence. Julie, however, was quick to add that many students at the school are not able to improve their ability to communicate. To illustrate her point, she talked about students who are extremely handicapped, developmentally delayed, cognitively delayed, and physically delayed. She said, “When you have somebody who is communicatively impaired to almost any degree but particularly to the degree that these students are, the amount of independence is so limited.” She believes that their environment will always need to be adapted to facilitate any independence they will experience. As a result, Julie takes an environmental approach to her work as opposed to the traditional medical model.

I have worked with a number of students in this school who score high on tests but they are not communicatively independent. I have also worked with students who don't score well on tests but yet they have incredible personalities that will help them to fly through life. So I wonder about what can be done to the environment to promote this kind of success.

The behavioural consultant followed a similar theme. Bonnie helped two teachers to plan an assertiveness program for a small group of young adults at the school. Bonnie
and the teachers saw a need to show these students appropriate ways to express themselves. Some of the youngsters needed to ask for help but were too timid. Through a series of role plays, a number of the students learned to be more confident. They learned how to start conversations and ask for clarification when they didn't understand. The goal of this assertiveness training was to help the youngsters become more independent.

Susan is the program consultant at the school. In her role, she also gears her intervention to promoting student independence. She is critical of staff who have a mind set of caring for these youngsters. That view, although well intentioned, causes them to become too dependent on others. Susan talks with teachers and parents about setting up learning opportunities such as public transportation travel and buying groceries. She understands that many teachers and parents initially believe that these life skills are too risky. Susan, however, has never seen one of the students experience a setback as a result of participating in programs that lead to greater independence.

One of two educational assistants talked about a perception she had of student success. Mary recalled a story about one student in her class who demonstrated the ability to take his shoes off and put his boots on at dismissal time. He also put his shoes in the right cubby before he left for the day. She commented that, "It may seem like a small step but to us it is a big step. This is something that we have been working on all year."

Mary also talked about the importance of providing these students with a sense of independence. Teaching them basic skills will help them to achieve this goal.

We have a student whose mother would be happy if he could put his shoes on and do up his zipper. That is a big goal for him. If he were able to do these things it would help him to become more independent.

Another educational assistant shared similar experiences of working with students to help them acquire basic independent skills. April gave an account of helping a child to sort forks, knives and spoons. This basic activity is considered a step towards independence. She also works with teachers to encourage age appropriate behaviour with the youngsters. April talked about the tendency to accept infantile behaviour from teenagers because of their exceptionalities. She said that, "If the behaviour is accepted these youngsters will never reach their independence potential. It's important for adults to expect behaviour that will help others to respect them and not look down on them."
Donna and Allison focus on the student's health needs. They are the two nurses at the school and they want to provide good care. In addition to giving out daily medication they are also concerned about their general comfort throughout the school day. They ensure that toileting needs are met and they also monitor the positioning of students who are in wheelchairs.

You and I don’t sit in the same position all day long. So we can’t expect them to sit all day. Your world stays narrow if you are just sitting and looking at the same wall. If you are in a different position, on a different apparatus or having different supports to help you walk around the open area or the gym it opens up not just your physical but also your mental outlook.

The two nurses view these activities as successful school experiences for students at the school. Their emphasis, however, moves from independence to centre on care. They don’t see the need for traditional teachers. They believe that an academic program for these youngsters is out of place.

They are not going to be rocket scientists. We are trying to make them comfortable, we are trying to improve their mobility, we are trying to improve their physical abilities. I don’t think they really need teachers that much. ... They need more physiotherapy. We have to learn to accept these kids for what they are. Instead of trying to integrate them; to make them normal; or to integrate them to be acceptable to the outside world.

According to the two school nurses, the school needs of these youngsters are very different from students in traditional learning settings. Therefore, they believe that there is a need for an alternative focus.

**Administrative Responses**

Carol is one of five administrators who participated in the study. In her role as vice-principal, she places emphasis on helping these youngsters to develop self-esteem, acquire communication skills and become as independent as possible. These students need to experience success in non-traditional ways. For example, a non-verbal student can experience success by making subtle connections with the teachers.

Whether it’s a gesture or their eye pointing, it’s important that the teacher start to read what the child is communicating. There is a need to build trust. Teachers must have positive attitudes to students who behave in a negative manner.

Carol also believes that these students need to experience success in their communities. She asks, “What skills do they need to be accepted in the community?” She realizes that
acceptance is preceded by understanding. She thinks that the task is to educate people in the communities.

Lastly, Carol's perception of student success stems from the need to have a shared vision.

We have to know why we are teaching kids in a particular manner. If we don't, we are not going to be successful. Things will get too fragmented. I have seen it happen in schools. Teachers feel isolated. They may be experiencing a loss of direction. We all need to see ourselves as making a contributions to a vision that allow our students to have a role in our society.

When Kim acquired the position of vice-principal at the school, she viewed student success through the medium of independence and social integration. Individual programs are developed in order to move these students towards greater independence. Younger students may need to follow programs that focus on feeding, walking and dressing. They also may experience the benefits of being a part of a group. With older students, the individualized program focus on answering the question, "How can we make this student as independent as possible and as integrated into the community as much as possible?" Depending on the plan for the youngster, emphasis may be placed on preparing the student for independent living. That might mean learning how to manage by themselves in an apartment or how to work safely at a job.

Kim spoke at length about the need for meaningful work situations once the youngsters left school at age twenty-one. Teachers and other staff members help them to acquire independent skills but then they are not given opportunities to demonstrate them.

We are very worried about what our students are graduating to. The job placements are not available. There are few programs for post twenty-one students. We are encouraging our parents to become strong advocates for their children by petitioning the government for more programs.

Kim concluded her views about helping students become independent by giving credit to the teachers. She is appreciative of their expertise and their professional ethics. Without their dedication, these youngsters would not have as much of a chance to become successful.

Principal Mark has a similar respect for teachers at the school. He believes that teachers are the key to bringing about successful student experiences. His role is to
ensure that services are in place that support the work of teachers and other staff members. He echoes the now familiar goal of independence for his students. He realizes, however, that this goal is difficult to achieve. These students have a developmental handicap which result in their dependence on others for personal care. Mark commented on the move towards inclusionary practices when working with these students but their profile changes the focus of what is meant by successful school experiences.

When we say independence we have to down play academic skills. Our aim is to develop the student's functional skills. If we have a student who acquires age appropriate academic skills, we have to question why the youngster is in our school. Our students are dealing with severe disabilities. The goal remains independence, but it should not be seen from a traditional student perspective.

Mark went into details about the difficulties a number of his teachers face while trying to teach these students skills of social competence. The students' inappropriate behaviours cause many teachers to become discouraged.

These youngsters tax the teacher's abilities for most of the school day. I am talking about children with autistic behaviours. I'm talking about children that due to the severity of their brain damage are extremely aggressive, they are non-compliant and they have very short attention spans.

Based on this account it is easy to see why the move towards the goal of independence will be elusive. There are students, however, who do make positive gains. Teachers with the support of a team of individuals are able in some instances to teach these students skills that will lead to some aspects of independence.

When Terry assumed the principalship at the school, he also emphasized the youngster's need of developing independent skills.

For some of our students, success is measured by their ability to acquire self help skills and cooking skills. For other students, it might mean just being able to cut their own carrots for themselves.

Terry also understands the need to individualize the kind of independent program that these students will benefit from. They ask the question, "Based on this student's profile, what skills will they need?" Some students may work in a sheltered workshop while others may spend a lot of their time in a group home. If they are in a group home it will be important for them to build up a set of hobbies or a particular interest that will give them pleasure during their moments of leisure. Terry ended his interview by talking about the
dedication of the staff at the school. They are committed to helping their students realize the goal of independence even though many obstacles are apparent.

Sometimes the situation can be compared to rain that falls like steel pellets and our staff is getting pelted by it. And even though they are getting pelted quite a bit these days they still do their best for these youngsters.

Superintendent Steve, viewed student successful experiences by highlighting the need to establish programs that meet all the needs of these youngsters. He is cautious about the move to inclusionary practices when they are contrary to the needs of a particular youngster. Inclusionary practices should only be followed if it is appropriate for the youngster.

Steve also talked about the need for these youngsters to be exposed to the business and industrial community. They need to be introduced to the world of work. This exposure will not be done without the support of several individuals and agencies. Steve believes that a strong work education program that provide some incentive both to the employers and the youngsters is necessary to fully investigate the potential of each youngster. They need answers to the question of what skills are needed to be successful in a particular work environment. They want to work. They want to do positive things in their communities.

Summary of Results - Fifth Sub-Question

In summary, teachers, support staff and administrators view experiences that foster student independence as being successful. They expressed different ways to bring this about based on their role or beliefs about working with these students. Each group wanted to find ways to give students more control over their environment. The teachers focused on developing individualized programs that would enable the students to participate more in functional life activities. The support staff, with the exception of the two school nurses, supported the teachers in a variety of ways. The two nurses focused on the need to care for these youngsters rather than trying so hard to see them function as able bodied individuals. The administrators provided staff with resources that would help the students become more involved in their communities. In all cases, the goal was always independence. A close look at the responses to this question, however, reveals
major differences in perception of the meaning of independence and how to arrive at this goal. For instance some staff view their work by focusing on perceived short comings of the student while others focus on discovering environmental interventions that they believe are necessary for student success. Other staff participants advocate an "academic" emphasis while others promote the need to focus on "life skills." All of the participants support independence but it appears to mean different things to them. For some it means "mobility," and "communication" while for others it means "toileting" and being able to work in a "sheltered workshop." Knowing that this disparity exists will require the administration to develop strategies to ensure that staff are working together in order to effectively meet the needs of these students.

**Summary - Chapter Five**

In this chapter, the results the qualitative data of eight teachers, seven support staff, and five administrators were presented. The information was based on the participants' responses to five sub-questions which were asked during the interviews. A common theme throughout the sections was the expressed view of providing these students with skills that will enable them to become more independent. Towards this end, teachers, support staff and administrators focus their attention on teaching these students skills that will enable them to function with varying degrees of independence. Self-care, reaching personal milestones, acquiring life skills and interacting with people in the community are viewed as experiences that will improve their quality of life and help facilitate greater independence. Each group of respondents approached the goal of independence through the role they played and through the beliefs they have about student at the school. Their different areas of focus, however, results in the possibility of collective disparity. The administration has a central role to play to ensure that staff are guided by a school mission that allows them to effectively work together. Other themes that emerged from the data were respondents' beliefs about students with normative exceptionalities, beliefs about the curriculum and beliefs about collaboration. These themes are discussed in chapter seven. In the next chapter, the results of critical success factors that have been identified by the twenty respondents are presented. The administration can use this information to effectively plan for the these students and also to gain insight into the educational perspectives of the staff. Comparisons of critical success
factors among the three staff groups are identified and discussed. A summary is also provided of a focus group meeting that took place to talk about preliminary results of critical success factors that were identified by the respondents.
Critical Success Factors

Introduction

This chapter provides the analysis to answer the research question: What critical success factors have been identified by the respondents to meet the school's goals? The approach utilized in this analysis was developed by John F. Rockart at the Sloan School of Management. According to Bullen & Rockart (1981, p.3) CSFs are defined as:

The few key areas of activity in which favourable results are absolutely necessary for a particular manager to reach his goals. Because these areas of activity are critical, the manager should have the appropriate information to allow him to determine whether events are proceeding sufficiently well in each area.

Critical Success Factors emerged from long term goals, changes in student population and policy changes. It is important to also note that these critical success factors are constantly changing as a result of internal and external factors which can influence a school program. What is critical now may not be critical in the future. The following section describes the CSF process and results.

CSF Categorization Process and Results

These results were derived from the interviews with the participants of this study: teachers, administrators, educational assistants, nurses, a psychologist, and consultants. These individuals were given an opportunity to reflect on their work and identify factors that would result in successfully meeting the goals of students at the school. The outcome of the procedure resulted in a list of school critical success factors that can be used to influence or help to guide program delivery at the school.

Critical success factors were first determined by identifying the responses given by each respondent. These results are based on responses to the interview question which asked respondents to identify critical success factors (Interview Schedule Appendix A).

A number of stages were followed in the process of category construction. Firstly, transcripts, field notes and related documents were read after each interview. For this particular section of data analysis, notes about each participant's critical success factors were made in the margins. Secondly, after reading through each participant's critical success factors in the same manner, groupings of similar comments began to emerge. As
this process was repeated, some of the groupings were subsumed under others. For example, at the beginning of the analysis there was a category for computers and special equipment. As the process progressed, these two categories merged under the name "technology." Thirdly, the naming of the categories of critical success factors were derived from the participants. Through an analysis of the vocabulary used by participants at the school site, category names were selected (Patton, 1990, p. 393). Lastly, once the categories for critical success factors were derived from the data a computer program was used to store and sort data according to the categories that emerged. Appendix D also illustrates the kind of terms that were grouped together from respondents comments.

An analysis of the twenty interviews was conducted to extract critical success factors. These came primarily from responses to the question which asked respondents to identify critical success factors (Appendix A, Question 8). A transcript of the responses to this question was prepared from the audio taped interview.

Table 4, represents the categorization of responses into related groupings. When finalized, they became labelled as CSFs. The phrases under each of the categories are direct statements that were made by the respondents. In Appendix F, a thesaurus is presented to illustrate the underlying meaning of each category from the respondents' perspectives.

The critical success factors that emerged were as follows: educational assistants, curriculum, technology, programming, training, parent involvement, health issues, administration and staff. The nine categories were formed by recurring comments that were found in the transcripts of the respondents, field notes and observations. Each participant was asked to talk about things that they saw as critical success factors in their job. During the category construction process, the data were continually being sorted and analysed based on each respondents' comments. The criteria used for clustering the data were based on the participant's use of a particular word such as "staff" and or a narrative account of an incident. The categories were built-up from the data to reflect the focus of the study. In other words, the categories came from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
Table 4  
Critical Success Factors that Emerged from the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Assistants</th>
<th>Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Staff on hand when needed</td>
<td>- Behavioural management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Back-up support</td>
<td>- The use of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Volunteers</td>
<td>- Improved teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parent Involvement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- &quot;Art of Language&quot;</td>
<td>- Home and School partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Guidelines which are not prescriptive</td>
<td>- Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technology</strong></td>
<td>- Realistic social and academic expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Computer augmentation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Specialized equipment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programming</strong></td>
<td><strong>Health Issues</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Functional life skills</td>
<td>- Medical support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work Education Program</td>
<td>- Mobility issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Developing independent skills</td>
<td>- Special care for the medically fragile student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Supportive leaders</td>
<td>- Support from administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Curriculum leaders</td>
<td>- Sharing of ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shared decision making</td>
<td>- Team work with consultants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A complete list of Identified CSFs are presented in Appendix D

**Over-all Responses of CSFs**

In Table 5 over-all responses are presented. It was important to tabulate these responses in order to see what the participants identified as critical success factors. This table was compiled by recording the CSFs the respondents identified during their interviews. Each of the twenty respondents identified three to five different critical success factors. These numbers emerged from the CSF's identification process. The participants
were not required to identify a specific number of critical success factors. Multiple individual responses of a particular critical success factor was not weighted in the identification process. The respondents were encouraged to talk about what they saw as critical success factors within the school setting.

The researcher determined that ten individual responses (or 50%) within a particular category would be viewed as significant. This decision was based on the common view that the half way mark or fifty percent constitutes an acceptable benchmark in everyday situations (Merriam, 1998 p. 17). As the table shows, five of the nine categories were responded to by ten or more respondents.

Table 5

CSFs - Over-all Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Ed. Assist.</th>
<th>Curric.</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>Staff</th>
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<td>Inter. 1</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>75</td>
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</table>

Fifteen respondents (or 75%) identified "staff" as a critical success factor. This number was the highest recorded response. Other categories that received more than ten individual responses were: Program (12), Curriculum (12), Parents (12) and the
Administration (11). Educational Assistants and Technology received seven responses. Training received five responses and Health received four responses. The following is a discussion of the five top CSFs as identified by the respondents (See Appendix F for a definition of these categories).

**Staff**

When the respondents identified "staff" most frequently as a critical success factor, they focused on what was required to have a positive working environment in the school. The participants talked about the importance of receiving support from other staff members. They indicated collaborative activities that allowed everyone to see that their contributions were appreciated. Words such as: supportive, caring and working as a team were included in reference to "staff." A feeling of solidarity was valued because of the kind of youngsters the staff teach. They depend on each other to understand the unique situations they are experiencing with each student. Discussions with staff about the normalization of behaviour were the focus of most school conversations. Suggestions from colleagues and others were always welcomed because they provided opportunities to unravel many of the puzzling situations that required answers. In one instance, for example, a teacher was not having much success while working with a student. The eleven year-old student was aggressive. The teacher stated that he had been aggressive ever since he arrived at the school six years ago. He often refused to walk. When he did not want to do anything, he dropped to the ground. He was not motivated to do certain life skill tasks. This teacher talked about this situation with other individuals on staff. She received a great deal of support from the psycho-educational consultant and other staff members who work at the school. Even though the student is still providing unique challenges, the teacher appreciates the concern and support she has received.

Other teachers shared similar difficult experiences and point to the support they received from staff. Many teachers made specific reference to the behavioural management team. This group of individuals provide classroom teachers with strategies and suggestions when working with students who present challenging inappropriate behaviours. If there is a problem staff can call on them for immediate assistance. There is also a crisis intervention person on staff who is available when there is a behavioural crisis
in one of the class rooms. This assistance helps to prevent staff members or students from being injured.

**Program**

Sixty percent of the respondents identified “program” as a critical success factor. A number of the teachers talked about using creative strategies to help these students acquire independent skills. They expressed the need for implementing a program that would be practical and relevant to these students. For the administrators, much of their discussion revolved around a ministry document. The document placed an emphasis on the need for language to be an integral part of each student’s schooling.

The goal of the language arts program is to develop to the fullest each student’s ability to understand what others say; to speak so that needs, feelings, and ideas are communicated effectively; to read for pleasure as well as for information; and to write to describe experiences and express thoughts and feelings (Planning for Independence, 1990, p.37).

The administrators realized that teachers would have doubts about moving in this direction. They however, pointed out that once teachers accepted the change, they would see success in their students. For example an administrator commented on one of the primary teachers’ use of the document who found the strategies to be successful. She was able to adapt several songs and poems that were used to meet the goals set for her students. This programming focus was viewed by most teachers as a major shift. For although they understood the benefits of a sound language program, behavioural modifications for medically fragile students was seen as being more important. These teachers believed that the students in their classes were special. They also viewed themselves as being special teachers. They could not see how this new programming approach could benefit these students. The teachers were busy with teaching life skills such as buttoning, folding and zipping clothing.

Many of the students’ troubling behaviour included tearing up books. These students found it challenging to pay attention for even short periods of time. A number of teachers at the school viewed the new programming document as “a book of platitudes”.

It’s great but it does not apply to ninety percent of the kids that I have come in contact with. I look at it and get angry because someone spent a lot of time and money putting a document together that doesn’t meet the needs of our kids.

One of the administrators at the school, however, believed that the resistance to
One of the administrators at the school, however, believed that the resistance to the new programming document stems from a lack of knowledge on the part of teachers. She thought that many teachers have not taken any courses in regular education because they see themselves as specialized teachers. The document encourages these teachers to become more aware of programs that are developed for regular school students.

While it is true that much of the programming suggestions require modifications, some students were given opportunities to demonstrate skills that were either not apparent or not developed as a result of the new program. For example, one teacher had a student in her class which she thought was "low functioning." His report cards indicated that he had major behavioural difficulties. He was known to be a very aggressive non-verbal student. When his teacher received in-service on the new programming document, she came back to her class and tried out some of the suggestions. In the process she discovered that the student who was labelled "low functioning" could read simple words. The new programming document may have encouraged this teacher to discover that this student had skills that she did not know about. Subsequently, the teacher realized that the student's aggressive behaviour was largely caused by not being able to communicate. Once Communication Boards were introduced, the student was able to show that he had acquired a good basic vocabulary which he could use to promote his independence.

**Curriculum**

The question of "What should these students be taught?" was responded to in a variety of ways. At the centre of the responses, however, was the need to teach these students skills that they needed to experience independence. This goal is the ultimate focus of all education plans and programs. Teachers and support staff tailor the curriculum towards meeting the goal of independence. The majority of these students require a great deal of support before they can be independent participants in society. Self care activities are often the main features of a student's curriculum. For instance, it is not unusual for teachers to spend a year or two toilet training youngsters who are nearing puberty. The training is often complicated by aggressive and anti-social behaviours which interferes with the process. In other situations, students are being taught how to behave appropriately in public.
Community walks with stops at local stores, give students opportunities to practice acceptable forms of social interactions. Students from regular schools are often invited into the school to socialize with the students. Their visits usually provide models of appropriate behaviour.

Many of the respondents included comments about including integration of these students as a strategy that will assist the curriculum goal of independence. Some view integration as an important step towards independence while others see integration as an impossibility because of the behaviour and medical conditions of students at the school. A number of respondents point out that students who attended the school in the past were "higher functioning" and would have been learning in a regular school setting today. The majority of students who are attending the school now would have been institutionalized ten years ago. Some students require the use of breathing machines and feeding tubes. The regular classroom would require substantial changes to accommodate these students. In a number of cases, students at the school have been in both integrated and segregated school settings. The reason they are in their current setting is because they could not successfully function in a school environment that did not have their needed resources.

One teacher constantly referred to the label "developmentally handicapped" in order to rationalize why students are in this setting.

At this school we do not focus on traditional school skills. Many of these kids can't take a key and put it into a lock to open a door. They wait at the dining room table seated and will not lift a knife and a fork until they are told. They don't know how to generalize. They have been taught that you only use the washroom at a specific time and as a result they are helpless when the structure is removed.

In order to move towards the goal of independence, these students are taught skills of social competence. Their curriculum is based on developing skills that will allow them to function successfully in society. Some of these skills include buttoning and unbuttoning coats, feeding themselves appropriately and learning daily grooming skills. The curriculum is individualized to meet each youngster's need. Staff come together at regular periods during the school year to talk about strategies for implementing a particular curriculum for each student. The emphasis is always on addressing the skills youngsters will need to engage in meaningful activities.
Parents/Guardians

Parents play a significant role in helping the child to acquire these skills. Individual CSFs frequency responses also support this claim. In this setting, parents are defined in a very broad manner. Since a large majority of the students live in group homes, the workers there are viewed as being responsible for assuming the parental role. Other students are in foster care or residential care. The staff at the school depend on these parents to support them and these parents depend on the school staff to provide them with resources that will benefit the youngster in their care. The relationship is viewed as an critical partnership. There is often a need for establishing and maintaining a good communication system between home and school. Opportunities are created in order to develop trust between the partners. The home and school come together to set common goals for the student. Time is spent answering questions such as, "What is important in this youngster's life right now?, What is going to be important in the youngster's future? and How are we going to help the youngster meet life expectations?"

The staff at the school has also demonstrated their ongoing commitment to parents by establishing a parenting centre at the school. The centre has made the school more visible in the community. Many parents of newborns and toddlers in the school community frequent the centre regularly. They have a direct way to communicate with other parents and staff about their youngster. Since many of the parents who have a youngster at the school do not live near the school, many of them can feel isolated. The centre has organized programs that bring parents together. The result has been the development of contacts and resources that parents see as important when raising a child with unique needs.

Administrators

In the school's small staff room, teachers often talked about how to find ways to bring about greater student success. A number of staff commented on the positive support they got from the principal and vice-principal. "They have an open door policy and that means a lot when you want to share an idea or two." The administration also support staff when working with parents. Several staff members talked about occasions when the vice-principal and principal helped them to resolve challenging situations with parents. The
administration was also seen as a resource team. They were often called upon to provide needed materials or individuals who could come into the school to support the work of the staff. The administration also supported staff by leading workshops about a curriculum initiative or strategy. These workshops usually resulted from a need that was expressed by the staff or from a new initiative that the school board wanted to implement.

**CSF Responses by Role**

Critical success factors were identified somewhat differently according to the role of the respondents. This section analyses the differences based on these roles. The roles represented in the sample are teachers, administrators and support staff. Table six is an over-all presentation of CSFs organized by role. This table is then divided into the three groups of respondents.
### Table 6
#### CSF Responses by Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews Staff</th>
<th>Ed. Assist.</th>
<th>Curric.</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Admin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
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In Table 7, teacher frequency of CSF responses are presented. There were eight teachers in the sample. The teachers were assigned to primary, junior and intermediate classes. A physical education teacher and a work education teacher were also included in this sample.
Table 7
Teacher CSF Response Frequency (n=8)

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</table>

Teachers' Role

Seven of the teachers identified "staff" as being a critical success factor. All of them commented on how much they valued the support of their colleagues. Teachers who work in this setting tend to depend on each other more than teachers who work in "regular" school environments. They see themselves as working in a school that is very different. The methods used to teach these children may seem strange to those who do not work there. Further confirmation of this view is supported by five of the eight teachers (or 63%) who identified "educational assistants" as being a critical success factor.

Four of the teachers identified "program" and "administrators" as critical success factors. The gym teacher, for example, talked about his program. He had been at the school for four years. At first he was not very successful with teaching these children.

In the beginning I couldn't understand their limitations. I spent hours preparing for a nice class. I made up good lessons but nothing worked. I tried to read books about developmentally handicapped students but what I picked up didn't really work in this setting.

After a few months this gym teacher started to develop activities that enabled these students to experience different forms of physical fitness. In one of the classes he taught the students how to do sit-ups. In the beginning it was frustrating for the students but now they have gotten to the point where most of the students can do sit-ups with assistance or with special devices. He has learned how to adapt many of the activities to meet the needs of these kids.
The "Work Education" is another program that a number of teachers discussed. A key feature of the program is the work education store that is located on the first floor of the school. A number of people are familiar with the creative product designs that are done by the students.

The bulk of our program is selling T-shirts and sweat shirts. We also make designs on hats and umbrellas. The students are learning that the goal isn't just getting points. It's following a product through and really getting reinforcement. They unpack T-shirts. They produce a design and price it. They go down to the store and sell it. They then see a person in the school or around the community buying it. To me that must be self rewarding.

During this process, the students are learning colours, numbers and shapes. Each day students following a scheduled rotation to work in the store. They gain practice with working with money and they also learn how to be polite to customers. The hope is that they will carry these skills into their respective communities and make positive contributions.

The behaviour management program was also discussed by a number of teacher respondents. During the interview with the behaviour management consultant, she shared a recent experience she had with a student at the school.

Today I spent three hours restraining a child. This student was very non-compliant and we were trying to get him to do something. This three hour restraint was done to get him to pick up three things and put them in boxes. He does this activity with his regular teacher but we are trying to change his behaviour so that he is compliant with more people in his environment. It's a power struggle with this kid. It kills him to do what someone else has told him to do. So he scratches, pinches and bites.

The behaviour management program also deals with less dramatic situations. Some students, for example, are involved in an assertiveness training program. Many of the students have difficulty expressing themselves. They are often too timid to ask for clarification when they don't understand. Through role play a number of students have become more assertive.

In another situation, a small number of students choose to work on their ability to start a conversation. In consultation with the teacher, the behaviour management team helped the students to develop skills that make them relax before trying to initiate a conversation. The goal of this team is to help students increase positive behaviours and decrease undesirable ones. When this is done these students will be able to interact with
people in pleasant ways. They will have friends and they will be able to participate in their community.

Within each of the programs at the school, teachers spoke about how they developed strategies for their students to have more control over the learning process. Teachers want to avoid doing all the motions for their students. All students have a part to play. Even early primary students, who use wheel chairs, are expected to be actively involved.

I still expect her to stand at the sink with a lot of support because she can’t really support herself totally but I’m asking her to at least try and put some weight on her feet and participate in the process. Even if it’s just working on her balance. There has to be some involvement even given her low level.

Teachers indicated that students were making definite progress towards goals initially established. Parental input helped to confirm improvements in student abilities. “Students have all, in varying degrees, demonstrated greater use of initiative and self-reliance in completing routine tasks.”

One teacher commented on the success of a student in her class.

We were quite happy one day when we were successful in getting one of our students to take his shoes off and put his boots on at home time. He also took his shoes and put them in the cubby. It has been basically hand over hand every day since the beginning of the year. It’s now February and he is now actually getting to the point where he can take his shoes off, pick them up and put them in the cubby himself. It may seem like a small step but to us it is a big step.

Many of the teachers also noticed that their students had improved in their ability to spontaneously communicate in social situation. Students are learning to use the augmentative communication systems and techniques to become better communicators.

During the study, all of the teachers made comments about the administration at the school. The general consensus was that they appreciated the support of the administrators. They found the school to be an effective learning environment. The Vice-Principal commented that even with cut backs and the threat of labour disruptions, people do their best to create a good learning environment for the students. “They don’t just do their jobs because they have to pay the rent. These people have chosen to work with these students and they are really into it.”

At the time of the study, most of the teaching staff was dealing with change. They were all given new teaching assignments. Although there was some negative comments,
most staff agreed that the change would give them an opportunity to work with students who have different needs. More resistance came from the staff when a new board curriculum was introduced.

The new document was written during a summer writing program. The writers are enthusiastic about the language emphasis of the curriculum.

I think the fact that children now are getting turned on to books is very motivational for them. There is print and signs of literacy everywhere in the classroom. This has not always been the case in the past. This change has had a major effect. It's like a paradigm shift in our system. Teachers are realizing that there is more to teaching than just the basic skills. They can incorporate some of the 'regular' curriculum and make it fit our kids. Many of our kids are not all that different from the regular kids.

Three of the teacher respondents, however, believe that students at the school are a lot different. They think that because of the "low functional" levels of their students, a curriculum that focus on language will not meet the needs of the majority of this student population. One teacher participant saw the document as a "book of platitudes." He didn't think that the document could be taught to "90 percent of the kids in the school." Other teachers were more accepting but all had reservations about the usefulness of teaching strategies that only focused on developing language.

Three of the teachers identified "curriculum", "technology", "training", "parents" and "health" as critical success factors, respectively. These were the lowest frequency of responses by teachers.

In conclusion, the most frequently identified CSF's for this sample of teachers was "staff" "educational assistants" and "administrators." It is interesting to note that the results indicate that teachers gave the most frequency of responses to people that they work with daily rather than material resources or periodical support from consultants.

Support Staff Role

The support staff included staff at the school who assisted teachers in a number of ways. Most of them are in the school on a regular basis and others are called to the school to help with particular situations. This sample included seven individuals who work within the following roles: Speech and Language consultant, two educational assistants, the program consultant, the behavioural consultant and two school nurses. In Table 8, support staff frequency CSFs are presented.
support staff frequency CSFs are presented.

Table 8
Support Staff CSF Response Frequency (n=7)

<table>
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<th>Support staff</th>
<th>Ed. Assist. Curric.</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>Staff</th>
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</table>

Five (or 71%) support staff indicated that "curriculum," "program," "parents" and "administrators" are critical success factors. A number of these individuals talked about the importance of working as a team to share information ideas and techniques. They see the "team approach" as an effective way to manage the challenges of working in this school setting. These five CSF's are viewed in an integrated manner. The curriculum is what the school board requires students to team and the program demonstrates how a student is going to meet the expectations outlined in the curriculum. Parents and administrators provide support for teachers and the support staff. This support helps them to work successfully with the students.

Four of seven (or 57%) support staff indicated that "staff" are critical success factors. These respondents talked about the need to remain positively motivated when carrying out their duties. Staff who are in this field are here because they have chosen to be. It is not something that they have come in. They have specifically chosen to come into this field and a number of them have chosen to stay in this field even though they may have had options to move into other field.

Only one of seven (or 14%) indicated that "educational assistants," "technology," training" and "health" are critical success factors. In conclusion, the most frequently identified CSF's by support staff were "curriculum," "program," "parents" and "administrators." These factors were also included in the over-all responses of teachers and administrators.
Administrator Role

In this section, the responses of five administrators are presented. The administration includes vice-principals, principals and a school superintendent. In Table 9, their frequency CSFs are presented.

Table 9

Administrators CSF Response Frequency (n=5)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Admin</th>
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<th>Program</th>
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</table>

Four of the five administrators (or 80%) indicated that "parents," "curriculum" and "staff" are critical success factors. The administrators frequently mentioned the role that parents/guardians play in helping youngsters to progress. Establishing and maintaining good relations with parents is an important goal at the school for administrators. One administrator spoke at length about the need to be sensitive to what parents/guardians may be experiencing. She said, "These parents in most cases have gone through a positive pregnancy. They were looking forward to a 'normal' child. That didn't happen."

The curriculum was something that all of the administrators discussed during the interviews. They discussed the need to balance their views between the prescribed school board curriculum and what they believed the curriculum should be. Each administrator resolved this dilemma by always focusing on what steps needed to be taken in order to help the youngster acquire greater independence.

School staff were always mentioned in the most favourable light by administrators. All of them spoke highly about their level of dedication to these students. One administrator said, "Our staff are committed to serving these youngsters. I am committed to serving my staff."

Three of five administrators (or 60%) indicated that "technology" and "program" are critical success factors. One administrator talked about the benefits of recent technological
advancements and the potential impact that it could have on these youngsters. Another spoke about the value of ensuring that the "program" consistently meets the needs of the youngster. "Our aim is to make sure that individualized programs always moves the child towards more success."

Two of five administrators (or 40%) indicated that "administrators" are critical success factors. All of the administrators discussed their leadership role as being one that is focused on providing staff with needed resources.

One of five administrators (or 20%) indicated that "educational assistants" and "training" are critical success factors. During the study, rumours were being expressed about possible reductions in the number of educational assistants at the school. One of the administrators was critical about the growing number of educational assistants at the school. "We may have become too dependent on educational assistants. A few teachers have indicated that too many assistants interfere with teaching students to become more independent." He also commented that financial restraints is causing the school board to look for areas where savings can be made.

None of the administrators identified "health" as a critical success factor. The contributions of school and community nurses were, however, mentioned in some of the interviews. In conclusion, the most frequently identified CSF's for these administrators were "Parents," "Curriculum" and "Staff." These three categories were also included in the over-all responses of participants.

**Differences and Similarities of CSFs Among the Three Groups**

This section analyzes the differences and similarities among the three sample groups. The eight teachers were the only group that included "Educational Assistants" as one of their most frequent CSFs. This identification can be accounted for by the close working relationship that teachers have with educational assistants. During the interviews, several teachers commented on the support they received from educational assistants. In many instances, educational assistants help to ensure that individualized programs were consistently implemented.

The support staff sample identified different CSFs for their most frequent responses than teachers in the sample. This difference may be accounted for by the different ways in which the two groups meet the needs of these students. The support
staff pay particular attention to "curriculum," "program," "parents" and "administration." Through these four CSF categories, they provide support for the students and teachers. The teacher sample have recognized this support through their identification of "staff" as their top CSF frequency category. They view the role that these staff members play as critical to the success of students at the school. The one similarity was that both teachers and support staff identified was "administrators". For each group, however, the response frequency for "administrators" was low.

The sample of five administrators identified both different and similar CSFs frequency responses when compared to teachers and support staff samples. They identified "parents" as a high frequency response but the teachers did not. The role that administrators have in the school contributes to this response. All of the administrators spoke about the need to establish and maintain a positive partnership with parents/guardians. Both administrators and teachers identified "staff" as being a high frequency CSF. In fact, "staff" received the highest frequency responses from both of these sample groups. Administrators and support staff participants identified curriculum as a high frequency response. In many situations both of these groups were seen as leaders in the implementation of curriculum. They provided resources that encouraged teachers to rethink or continue with their individualized programming. In conclusion, the differences and similarities among these three sample groups are reflected by their roles within the school setting. The general goal, however, of the sample groups is to continue to provide resources that meet the different needs of these students.

**Prioritization of Critical Success Factors**

The next step in the process was to present the set of CSFs that were elicited during the interviews to the respondents for rank ordering. This was done to better understand each group's priorities as part of the continuing analysis. It should be noted, however, that over-all ranking of CSFs is by frequency of responses. A telephone call was made to the respondents. They were presented with their CSFs and were asked to confirm or modify them. All of the respondents participated in this process. They all confirmed their CSF's and did not modify them. The respondents were then asked to rank their CSF's from 1 to 5 in order of priority. This ranking scale was arrived at based on the number of CSF's that each respondent provided. The greatest number of elicited
CSF's were five and the fewest number was 4. A ranking of 1 was viewed as the first priority CSF's. A ranking of 2 was viewed as the second priority CSF's and so on. In Table 10, rank ordering of respondents' CSFs are presented.

Table 10

Rank Ordering of Respondents' Critical Success Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Ed. Assist.</th>
<th>Curric.</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>Staff</th>
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<td>Inter. 12*</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sup.Staff</th>
<th>Ed. Assist.</th>
<th>Curric.</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>Staff</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter. 14*</td>
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<td>Inter. 15*</td>
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<td>Inter. 16*</td>
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<td>Inter. 17</td>
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<td>Inter. 18*</td>
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<td>Inter. 19</td>
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<td>Inter. 20*</td>
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<td>G. Totals</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
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</table>

An asterisk beside the interview number indicates that less than five CSFs were ranked by a respondent. Eight of twenty (or 40%) of respondents ranked four CSFs. The analyzed results of the respondents were based on whether or not they gave a ranking of 1 or 2. It should be noted, however, that the majority of the respondents commented on the fact that critical success factors are linked and that they may best be
viewed from a holistic perspective. This concept is supported by Bullen and Rockart (1981) who expressed their views by pointing out that CSF’s are “a small high-priority set of things - all of which are critical. Quite often no one is more critical than others (p. 59).

The following analysis was based on respondents’ two top ranked categories. The researcher decided on selecting the top two rankings because a number of respondents (40%) based their rankings on four numbers. A ranking of one or two would show a priority that was at or above fifty percent. This is an established common benchmark. Also, expanding the ranking to include the top three or four would result in no opportunity to delineate the respondents’ priority ranking. It would not be possible to rank the categories.

Based on this plan, the twenty respondents gave their highest priority rankings to the categories of “Staff” and “Program.” The data indicates that eleven respondents ranked “Staff” as one or two while nine respondents did so for “Program.” Five respondents ranked “Administration” as one or two while four respondents did so for “Parents.” Two respondents ranked “Curriculum” and “Training as one or two. One respondent ranked “Technology” as two. One respondent ranked “Educational Assistant” as one or two and one respondent ranked “Health” as two.

**Rank Ordering by Role**

In the next section, this data are also presented by role of the three groups of respondents beginning with Table 11. The roles represent the sample of teachers, support staff and administrators.
Table 11

Rank Ordering of Teacher Respondents' Critical Success Factors (n=8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Ed. Assist.</th>
<th>Curric.</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Inter. 1</td>
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<td>Inter. 2</td>
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<td>Inter. 3</td>
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<td>Inter. 4*</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter. 5</td>
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<td>Inter. 6</td>
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<td>Totals</td>
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<td>3 of 8</td>
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<td>7 of 8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the results in Table 11 show that five teacher respondents ranked "Staff" as one or two, while three did so for "Program." Two teacher respondents ranked "Training" and "Administration" as one or two. One teacher respondent ranked "Parents" as one and one teacher respondent ranked "Health" and "Technology" as two. None of the teachers ranked "Curriculum" as one or two. This analysis indicates that the teacher respondents gave their highest priority ranking to the category of "staff." In Table 12, Support staff priority rankings are presented.

Table 12

Rank Ordering of Support Staff Respondents' Critical Success Factors (n=7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sup.Staff</th>
<th>Ed. Assist.</th>
<th>Curric.</th>
<th>Tech.</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Admin</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter. 14*</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Inter. 16*</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter. 18*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inter. 20*</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Totals</td>
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<td>5 of 7</td>
<td>1 of 7</td>
<td>5 of 7</td>
<td>4 of 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the results in Table 12 show that five support staff respondents ranked "Program" as one or two while four respondents did so for "Staff." Two respondents ranked "Curriculum" and "Administrators" as one or two. Two ranked "Parents" as two. One respondent ranked "Health" as two. No respondents ranked "Educational Assistants", "Technology," and "Training" as one or two. This analysis
indicates that support staff respondents gave their highest priority ranking to the category of “program” and “staff”.

In Table 13, administrator’s priority ranking are presented.

Table 13

| Rank Ordering of Administrator Respondents' Critical Success Factors (n=5) |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Inter. 9* 2 1 4 3 4 3 4 |
| Inter. 10 5 2 1 3 4 4 |
| Inter. 11 3 5 4 1 2 |
| Inter. 12* 3 2 1 |
| Inter. 13 5 1 4 3 2 |
| Totals 1 of 5 4 of 5 3 of 5 3 of 5 1 of 5 4 of 5 0 of 5 2 of 5 4 of 5 |

An analysis of the results in Table 13 show that two respondents ranked “Program” as one or two, while two respondents ranked “Staff” and “Technology” as two. One respondent ranked “Curriculum,” “Training,” “Parents,” and “Administrators” as one. No respondents ranked “Educational Assistants” and “Health” as one or two.

This analysis indicates that the five administrator respondents did not identify a priority ranking for any of the nine categories. “Technology,” “Program” and “Staff” were, however, given the highest priority rankings from this group of administrator respondents.

In conclusion, a comparison of the groups reveal a great deal of similarities. All three groups ranked “Staff” and “Program” as a priority. A difference occurred because two of five administrator respondents ranked “Technology” as a priority. In fact, only seven respondents identified “Technology” as a critical success factor. Three of these respondents were administrators. Teachers and support staff did not give the “Technology” category a high priority. Only one teacher gave “Technology” a ranking of two and “Technology” was not ranked by the support staff. Based on the priority ranking of the three groups, the critical success factors for the school are “Staff” and “Program.” This result is also supported by the frequency which respondents from the three groups identified “Staff” and “Program” as critical success factors. “Staff” was identified by fifteen of twenty respondents and “Program” was identified by twelve of twenty respondents.
Focus Group CSFs Meeting

A meeting at the study site took place after the twenty interviews were completed and after some preliminary analysis had been done. Krueger (1998) defines a focus group as a “carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive and non-threatening environment” (p. 18).

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the study’s findings of the group’s critical success factors and to validate their responses. Did the elicited critical success factors match the collective reality of the respondents? Merriam (1998) identifies six basic strategies to enhance internal validity of qualitative research. “Member checks” was one of the six strategies. This involves “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (p.204).

The purpose of the focus group was to discuss the results of the critical success factors that emerged from the interview data. When the respondents gathered in the staff room of the school, they started to talk about the critical success factors that were printed on chart paper. These factors were presented to the group for discussion.

In Table 14, focus group results are presented. The table was generated during the meeting. The nine CSFs were printed on the chart paper. The group was given an opportunity to talk about each one by responding to the question “Do you agree or disagree with these CSFs?” A sentence summary of the groups’ comments are presented under the heading “Focus Group Statements”. The “Validation” column indicates outcome results of the discussion. Agreement was arrived at by group consensus. The focus group was not presented with the ranking data of the respondents.
Table 14

Focus Group Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSFs</th>
<th>Focus Group Statements</th>
<th>Validation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ed. Assistants</td>
<td>Educational Assistants are a crucial part of our program</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>The new curriculum still does not meet the needs of our students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>No comments were made at focus group meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>We modify commercial program materials to meet each student's need</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>The training really starts when you start teaching</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>It's important for us to have a good partnership with parents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>The nurse said, &quot;My job is to take care of their health concerns&quot;</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin.</td>
<td>No comments were made at focus group meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>If you have a supportive staff you can deal with almost anything</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of Table 14 reveals that the focus group generally agreed with the results of the respondents. The data was validated through group consensus by the ten people who commented on all but two CSFs. "Technology" and "Administration" received no comments. This omission was realized after the one hour meeting ended. The meeting, however, did provide an opportunity to reaffirm and validate the process. A complete transcript of the notes taken at the focus group meeting is presented in Appendix F. Consensus was reached when the group showed agreement by raising their hands after each CSF category was discussed.

Summary Chapter Six

In this chapter, the respondents' critical success factors results were presented. The data came from their responses to the eighth sub-research question (see Appendix A). Background information was included in order to provide a related context for the critical success factors approach. Information was provided about how the nine categories developed out of the respondents' transcripts. The data was presented by first discussing the collective responses of all respondents and then by discussing their responses according to their roles at the study site. "Staff," "Program," "Curriculum," "Parents/Guardians" and "Administrators" were identified as critical success factors that are required to meet the school's goals. These four categories received the most responses from the respondents.
Fifteen respondents identified “staff” and also gave this category its highest ranking. Twelve respondents identified “Program,” “Curriculum” and “Parents”. Eleven respondents identified “Administration.” These results were discussed with reference to comments made by the respondents. They focused their attention on factors that would enable these youngsters to acquire meaningful participation in society. When CSFs were analysed by role (teachers, support staff and administrators), the same CSFs were revealed.

A focus group meeting took place to validate the findings. Ten respondents attended the meeting. All three respondent groups were represented. Their mostly general comments supported the critical success factors that they and their colleagues identified. Unfortunately, the rank ordering of CSF’s were not discussed at this meet as planned. In the following chapter, findings of the results are presented. They will be organized through the six sub-research questions.
Chapter Seven

Discussion and Analysis of Results

Introduction

In this chapter, results are presented within the broader context of the literature. The aim is to address the central research question: *What are the critical success factors that school staff identify to successfully meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities?* The results were analyzed in two parts. The first within the framework of the six sub-research questions. The following are the topics: Successful School Experiences; Unsuccessful School Experiences, Long and Short Term Goals; Factors Associated with Success and Factors that Hinder Success; Staff Perceptions of Success; and Critical Success Factors.

The second part of the discussion and analysis focused on the following themes that emerged from the interviews: Independence, Beliefs about normative exceptionalities, Beliefs about what to teach and Beliefs about staff collaboration.

Successful School Experiences

The findings from interviews of respondents indicated that successful experiences occur when students take steps to develop their capabilities. The interviews indicated that this behaviour took place in the following situations: when students displayed age appropriate behaviours; when they were integrated into a regular classroom program; when they have good self-esteem and when they were supported by their parents or care giver. A number of respondents commented on the need to promote age appropriate behaviour for students with normative exceptionalities. A few of them gave accounts of parents who tend to ‘baby’ their youngster for an extended period. Others talked about the need to ensure that these students are dressed in an age appropriate manner. Some of the respondents also commented on students who wear clothing that are better suited for younger children. In the literature, age appropriate behaviour is addressed through the principle of normalization. An emphasis is placed on ensuring that all individuals who are exceptional should be provided with resources that move them towards a living environment that is as close to normal as possible (Wolfensberger, 1975). For a number of respondents, rather than focusing on
the exceptionalities that these youngsters have, they focus on the capabilities of these students. This view is said to encourage successful outcomes for these students. In recent years, there has been a conscious shift from considering these students as having a deficit to focusing on what adaptations need to take place within the school environment to promote student success (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman & Schattman, 1993; Stainback & Stainback, 1992). Whether or not teachers have a positive belief about successfully working with these students will have an influence on the amount of success that they realize (Pajares, 1992).

A similar perspective was expressed by some respondents about using labels to describe students. A few of them did use labels to describe their students. One that was frequently used was “high functioning” and “low functioning” students. It is obvious that the use of these labels create expectations that have a valued effect on the way staff relate to students.

Field, Hoffman, St. Peter, and Sawilowsky, 1992; Kagan, 1990; Ysseldyke and Algozzine, 1990 focused on similarities rather than differences by advocating that educators be aware of the labels that are applied to their students because labels impact on teachers’ expectancies and can affect the self-esteem of youngsters. Kagan (1990) illustrates how labels can have an impact on students.

The labels that teachers assign to students affect how the teachers [perceive] classroom events and how they respond to students [e.g., gifted, average, at-risk]. Once a label is firmly attached to a student, a teacher tends to adjust his or her recollections and anticipations of the students’ behaviour so they are consistent with the label (p.109).

This perspective demonstrates the importance of ensuring that these students are viewed as youngsters who have different needs. As Bogan (1986) points out, the social construct of labels cause our interactions with an individual or group to be different. That is why he believes labels should be avoided.

The respondents at the study site see integration as an important indicator of success. A few of them commented on integration being a sign of student independence. However, because of the profile of a majority of their students, other participants believed that an integrated learning environment would not be an appropriate option. Researchers such as Fuchs and Fuchs, (1994); Kauffman and Hallenbeck (in press), Kauffman, Lloyd, Baker and Riedel, (1995); Kauffman, (1995)
and Walker and Bullis, (1991) provide reasons for why some students with normative
exceptionalities would benefit more from an specialized setting, while other researchers
are advocates for teaching these students in an integrated setting (Alper & Ryndak, 1992;

In this study, respondents indicated that some students were given opportunities
for integration when it has been determined that an integrated setting would be better
able to accommodate their needs. This change would be based on recommendations
made at an IPRC meeting with a multidisciplinary team in attendance.

Some respondents addressed the area of long term self-esteem for these
students. They hoped that resources would be in place that would be support students
after they leave the school. Their comments are supported by the work of Halpern
(1993) who identified three quality of life domains: (1) physical and material well-being;
(2) performance of adult roles (e.g., employment, leisure, personal relationships, social
responsibility); and (3) personal fulfillment (e.g., happiness). Within each student’s
Individual Education Plan, it is crucial that attention is given to these quality of life domains.

The respondents were also aware that many of the youngsters at the school
would never be able to participate in a competitive employment work place. They were
concerned that there was not enough sheltered workshops available to provide them with
work. Rusch and Hughes (1990) have researched this obstacle to independence. They
are advocates of what is being called, “supportive employment” which is defined as “a
method of integrating people with disabilities who cannot work independently into
competitive employment.” Supportive employment initiatives provide these young
people with a “job coach” to assist them with on the job training. Parents and care
givers also have support roles to play as they advocate for their youngster’s successful
participation in everyday life.

The partnership between parents and schools has been well documented in the
literature (D’Angelo, & Adler, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Henderson, 1987; Robinson, 1994).
These researchers believe that parent involvement has a significant influence on student
achievement. “If school improvement efforts are judged successful when they raise
student achievement, the research strongly suggests that involving parents can make a
crucial difference” (p.149). Epstein (1995) suggests six main types of partnerships
which can prove to be beneficial for students. They are: parenting; communicating;
volunteering; learning at home; decision making; and collaborating with the community. Parenting suggestions focus on helping parents to establish home environments that encourage student learning. At the study site, the school assisted families by providing them with suggestions of materials found at home that could support learning. Communication with parents was seen as a crucial aspect of home and school partnerships. The school tried to maintain communication practices that met the needs of diverse groups of parents. Parents who volunteered were also valued in this school environment. They were able to provide both students and other parents with a number of important services. Their visibility in a school also added to the successful outcome of school initiatives.

"Learning at home" involves teaching parents strategies which they can use to help their child with at home. At the study site, a number of respondents provided information and materials on how to help their child develop skills that were being addressed in school. One teacher video taped a lesson and gave it to the parent as a way to demonstrate how she could approach appropriate meal time behaviour. Decision making is another area where parents can get involved with schools. Recently most schools have established school councils made up of parents, staff, community members, students and the principal. This organization is consistent with the direction on school councils which the Ministry of Education and Training has set out for school boards through its Policy Memorandum 122. At the study site there was an active school council. The school council has many roles. It provided an opportunity for information-sharing and community discussion, for organizing activities of benefit to the school and community, for consultation and advice to the principal, superintendent, trustee and the Board, and for advocacy for the needs and issues that affect the students, the school community and the Board. The school council at the study site had a positive influence on the programs and the community.

Collaborating with the community supports parent school involvement. At the study site a number of students spend time in the school store that is supported by the local community. The school in this study has established a parenting centre in the school. In the centre, people from the community can get information for students and families on a variety of community programs.
In conclusion, the provision of these services, in addition to steps taken by staff, promote successful experiences for these students. The related literature explains the findings of the respondents. The comments of the researchers typifies trends and beliefs within special education at this time. They may define success in different ways. However, the general sentiments focus on developing and enhancing the capabilities of these students. The next section deals with the respondents' unsuccessful school experiences.

Unsuccessful School Experiences

The findings from the interviews of the respondents show that they have experienced unsuccessful experiences when working with students who display developmentally inappropriate behaviour, aggressive or violent behaviours; when staff do not follow through with a suggested individualized program; when resources do not meet the needs of these students, and when there is little support from home. The main issue that emerges from these experiences relates to the emotional or behavioural disorders of some of the students at the school (Forness & Knitzer, 1992). Doworet and Rathgeber (1990) completed a Canada-wide study and found that large numbers of these students are not getting the help they need. They are seen as a difficult group of students to serve.

The conduct of these youngsters could be a source of frustration as was explained by several respondents at the study site. Researchers have completed studies that indicate that a common issue for a number of students with emotional or behavioural disorders is engaging in aggressive acting-out behaviour (Hallenbeck & Kauffman, 1995; Kauffman & Pullen, 1996). Their behaviour makes it hard to implement programs that will help them to interact in appropriate ways. Some youngsters who exhibit aggressive and violent behaviours seem to be out of touch with reality (Prior & Werry, 1986, p.156). A few of the respondents struggled to teach these students toileting skills while knowing that they were oblivious of the need to be trained. Other staff became frustrated because the youngster's parents were not supporting the school-initiated programs at home. Some of the respondents tried to find out the cause for such difficult behaviours.
Hallahan and Kauffman (1997) have indicated that there was not a single cause that could account for these behaviours. They have identified, however, four "contributing factors" that have been associated with the youngster's behaviour. They are: biological disorders and diseases, pathological family relationships, undesirable experiences at school and negative cultural influences. Having an awareness of these factors, however, did not cause staff at the school to give up on these students. The respondents were continually seeking ways to put programs in place that addressed disruptive or inappropriate behaviours. They also wanted to know whether or not they were contributing to the behaviour. According to Kauffman, Mostert, Nuttycombe, Trent, and Hallahan (1993) "teachers must ask themselves questions about their expectations, instructions, and approaches to behaviour management" (cited in Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997, p. 222).

Staff at the school worked together to design behaviour management programs to help students conduct themselves in a more appropriate manner. Some of the respondents also addressed the need to follow through with individualized programming. One of the consultants at the school talked about the need for teachers to maintain a prescribed program. When this did not happen, she became frustrated. It is important for staff to work together to help minimize the difficulty of working with students who exhibit aggressive and violent behaviours.

The multidisciplinary team meet to help form an educational program for each student. Occupational and physical therapists, speech and language consultants and behavioural consultants are often involved in producing an integrated program. Snell (1988) discussed the need to have a team of individuals involved to provide needed services for these youngsters. In addition, Bates et al.,(1981) wrote about involving parents in the youngster's education program. In many situations, they can be a crucial means for ensuring that the program is being carried out in the home.

A number of teachers and support staff at the study site provided a structure for their students but they became despondent when some parents/guardians were not able to support their strategies. Most of the respondents, however, did not blame parents for the inappropriate behaviour of some of these youngsters. In fact many were very empathetic to the difficult situations that many of these parents faced on a daily basis.
Jordan, Goldberg and Goldberg (1991) also note that parents require support and not blame for the behaviour of their youngsters. They are dealing with very difficult circumstances. In many instances parents already think that they lack good parenting skills as a result of their youngster's behaviour. As mentioned earlier, causes for severe emotional or behavioural disorders most likely result from a variety of complex factors. Blaming parents does not address the needs of the youngster.

The mother of a nineteen-year-old son with emotional and behavioural disorders made this comment about raising a child who displays inappropriate behaviours: "when systems blame parents for causing their child's emotional or behavioural disorders, the focus is no longer on services to help the child learn better adaptive skills or appropriate behaviours, but on rationalizing why such services may not work (DeStefano & Wermuth, 1992)." School staff will continue to provide service for all students regardless of the level of support from parents. To do this successfully they need to make good use of the resources that are available and or develop resources that will benefit each of these youngsters. School staff are also learning to work with agencies outside of the school setting in order to obtain required services for these youngsters.

In conclusion, these behaviours were challenging for staff at the school. Staff recognized the need to ensure that resources were in place in order to maintain a program that was aimed at reducing inappropriate behaviours. They also required support from their colleagues. They looked for support from parents/guardians. However, they understood when that support was not available. In the next section, long and short term goals are discussed.

Long and Short Term Goals

The respondents of this study identified the development of independent skills as key long and short term goals for these students. Their responses were addressed through a discussion on activities that promoted greater independence.

As noted earlier, a majority of respondents identified success by talking about the development of their students' capabilities. Some respondents shared stories about how their students acquired skills that were important for self-care, communication and mobility. Skills like reading and math were taught from the perspective of what the student needed to learn in order to participate in the community. Using public
transpartation and going into local convenience stores were some of the examples given by respondents that support community-base instruction. Experiencing these natural settings was seen as the most appropriate way to use or practice skills that they were learning.

Some of the teachers at the study site used an applied behaviour analysis approach. They emphasized breaking a skill down into its component parts. Wolery, Bailey, and Sugai (1988) have broken down this analysis into six steps:

1. The identification of a goal which usually consists of the development of a skill area.
2. A baseline measurement is taken in order to document where the youngster is currently functioning.
3. A specific learning objective is identified. This objective is directly related to the overall goal.
4. Teacher begins the intervention that is designed to develop a needed skill or decrease and inappropriate behaviour.
5. Progress is monitored by measuring frequency
6. Evaluation of intervention. Teacher may decide to continue, modify or end the intervention.

Three of the teacher respondents used these or similar steps to move their students toward the goal of independence, while the remaining five teacher respondents used other approaches for programming. There were also instances where teachers used a combination of approaches to help students develop to their fullest potential. Three of the eight teachers indicated that a variety of approaches was often necessary because of the diverse needs of each student. Weber (1993) has outlined strategies which reflect the programs being carried out at the study site. He points out that strategies vary but all teachers “require patience, resilience, and a never-ending willingness to try again” (p.63). Teachers have the major task of implementing the program that is outlined for a student. Within their repertoire of effective teaching practices, teachers at the study site tried to make sure that students were being appropriately challenged. Some teachers were supportive of a move to involve these students in more traditional school activities while others believed that these students required less of an emphasis on these skills. These differences were found within and among all three groups of respondents. This finding reflect the opinion of researchers like Delpit (1995) who is concerned about teachers who underestimate the capabilities of these youngsters. If students are being taught to be more independent, then they require work and activities that will stretch their capabilities without causing them to experience frustration. The approaches and teaching practices

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should result in frequent success while at the same time promote the growth of needed skills. Teachers at this setting held different beliefs about their role and responsibilities when working with these students. As a result, differences exist in the way these students were taught. These differences do not seem related to individual student characteristics but rather to the perspectives of the educators. For instance, some teachers may provide adaptations where none are necessary while others fail to provide them when they are necessary. Jordan, Lindsay and Stanovich (1997) have documented similar findings.

This issue of roles and responsibilities for teachers was further compounded by similar differences that may exist among other members of staff. So while the long and short term goals were to develop student capabilities, the beliefs that school staff have influenced the progress of each student. This finding is discussed as a major theme that emerged in the second part of this chapter. The next section address staff perceptions of success.

Staff Perceptions of Success

The interview data revealed that staff have different perceptions of success. These differences were found within and outside of the three groups of respondents. Questions surfaced about the roles and responsibilities that they had towards these students. The respondents all had the common goal of greater independence for these students. However, they disagreed on the direction to take to realize this major goal. The differences surfaced during interviews with some of the respondents. For example, the two nurses disagreed with the academic emphasis that the administration was placing on these students. They thought that more time should be spent on ensuring that their basic needs were met. This would involve an emphasis on medical care and student comfort. The nurses were critical of staff who were focusing on programs that were created for students in 'regular' schools.

Another example of a disagreement occurred between some teachers and administrators on the implementation of a new language program. Some teachers thought that the program was out of touch with the needs of their students while others accepted the skills their students were acquiring. Some of the administrators thought teachers needed to change their custodial attitudes towards their students while others
were concerned that staff were not promoting the acquisition of functional skills. Another example resulted from differences of opinion regarding educational assistants. The majority of teachers saw educational assistants as an important support while none of the administrators identified them to be critical to program delivery. Jordan-Wilson and Silverman; Pajares, 1992; Stanovich and Jordan, 1998; explains the prevalence of different beliefs among educators. These differences in perception are discussed and analyzed with implications for the administration of the school in the second part of this chapter. The next section outline critical success factors of the respondents. Links are also made to earlier special education studies that utilized CSFs.

**Critical Success Factors**

Bullen & Rockart (1981) defined critical success factors as “key areas where things must go right in order to successfully achieve objectives and goals” (p.9). The identification of these factors focused on areas that influence programming practices that administrators can use for planning and decision making behaviours. Utilizing the methodology outlined by Rockart (1979), the twenty respondents identified the following nine critical success factors that were required to meet school goals. The identified factors, ordered by frequency, were: staff, program, curriculum, administration, parents, educational assistants, technology, training and health services. When asked to prioritize these factors, respondents placed them in the following order: staff, curriculum and program, parents and administration, educational assistants and technology, training and lastly, health. There was a close relationship between CSFs that were ordered by frequency and the prioritized list. This indicated a level of support for the two sets of identified critical success factors.

These findings resulted from attending to the respondents’ comments rather than being derived by testing or confirming a hypothesis. The findings then are not broadly related to all normative exceptional students who are taught in a specialized school setting. Comparative data, particularly related to staff perceptions, are unlikely to be available. This is because the views of teachers, support staff, and administrators are likely to vary, not only between schools catering to students with similar exceptionalities, but also between year groups in the same school. Therefore, these critical success factors are bounded by the contextual school experiences of the respondents.
These findings were discussed by grouping the factors into the following two categories: Human Resources and Material Resources. School staff, educational assistants, parents, administrators and health services were placed in the human resources category (Parents also include guardians and care givers who support these students at home and in group homes). Curriculum, program, technology, and training were placed in the material resources category. Both categories were given similar importance. This was also confirmed by frequency and priority ordering of CSFs by the respondents.

**Human resources.** Within the factor “school staff”, the teacher has a key impact on student success (Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Mercer, 1998; ). In this study, teachers were critical to helping these students meet their individual goals. They engaged their students in a variety of activities which were intended to develop and enhance capabilities. An example would be teaching a youngster how to cross the street safely. As pointed out by Lieberman (1988, cited in Stainback & Stainback, 1996) these teachers involved themselves in “activities, strategies, and interventions that will prevent a handicap from developing into an individual with a disability” (p. 23).

Four of the teacher respondents commented on the support or lack of support they received to help their students succeed. One of them was critical towards what she perceived as a lack of support from her principal and vice-principal. “I would feel a lot of support if I felt they knew what I was doing and why I was doing it.” This teacher also expressed similar comments about not being supported by her colleagues. Support and collaboration is particularly important in this setting because it is a factor of success. In this context, success refers to the rate at which the youngster understands and correctly completes the task (Borich, 1992). Success is critical because a lack of success can lead students to experience anxiety, frustration, inappropriate behaviour, and poor motivation. On the other hand, success can influence motivation, attitudes and classroom behaviour (Rieth & Everton, 1988).

Five teacher respondents spoke about the invaluable support that paraprofessionals and volunteers gave to them. In many instances, these individuals provided the teacher with diagnostic support, instruction, behaviour management, classroom organization, and clerical support (McKenzie & Houk, 1986). Educational assistants provided similar support and they also had an appreciation for school practices
and routines. Support also came from itinerant staff. These teachers and consultants visited the school periodically to talk teachers about teaching strategies and resources. In addition to these supports, one of the most critical support came about through the collaboration between teacher and parent.

Teachers and parents work in partnership to facilitate a youngster's progress. Teachers and other staff members empathize with the stressful demands that are often placed on families of students with normative exceptionalities (Bailey, McWilliam, Winton, & Simeonsson, 1992; Covert, 1992). The impact of the student on the family is a factor that is important to keep in mind. Teachers try to support each family by focusing on the individualized needs of each student (Bailey, in press; Dunst et al., 1988). The teacher respondents also spoke about the importance of communicating with parents and caregivers on a regular basis. Open communication between teacher and parent about a youngster's program is a tremendous benefit to the student (Jayanthi, et. al 1995). This kind of communication has become increasingly more difficult for some teachers because of the linguistic diversity of parents (Wilson & Hughes, 1994). At the study site, a growing number of parents speak languages other than English. These teachers did provide interpreters during parent conferences and some materials were sent home in the language spoken by parents. They recognized the need to understand the perspective of parents in order to effectively teach the youngsters in their classes. This information was shared with all staff in order to help ensure comprehensive programming.

Respondents also made reference to parental expectations in their identification of factors that promoted or hindered the success of these students. "Parents" were also identified as being critical success factors for eleven of the twenty respondents. McNair and Rusch (1991) see parents as being particularly important to these youngsters in their transition from school to adult life. The respondents' expectations of parents take into consideration the partnership between the home and the school.

The respondents indicated that these parents usually experience a great deal of stress as a result of having to raise a child with normative exceptionalities (Drotar, Baskiewicz, Irvin, Kennell, & Klaus, 1975; Dumas, Wolf, Fisheman & Culligan 1991;). Some of the stress is caused by personal feelings of guilt (Featherstone, 1980). In other cases, parents experience stress when dealing with the public (Hockenberry, 1995), when dealing with their child's feelings (Pierro, 1995) and when making parental
adjustments to accommodate the daily demands of child-care (Beckman, 1991). It should also be noted, however, that not all of these parents experience stress as a result of their child's exceptionalities (Bronicki & Tumbull, 1987).

School staff and parents are expected to work together to lessen the stress of raising a child with normative exceptionalities. Unfortunately, however, parents and school professionals rarely experience the benefits of working together (Goldberg & Kuriloff, 1991; Michael, Arnold, Magliocca, & Miller, 1992; Thornin & Irvin, 1992; Todis & Singer, 1991). Hallahan and Kauffman (1997) account for this poor working relationship by pointing out that these parents are trying to cope with a great deal of stress and the professionals "may be frustrated because they do not have all the answers to the child's problems" (p. 519).

Twelve of the respondents commented about the commitment to maintain a close partnership with parents. In most situations, respondents found that parents/guardians were more likely to be involved if their child were of primary school age. Communication between parents and school officials was one of the keys to avoiding negative relations. There was a need to establish good rapport early in the school year. School staff encouraged parents to attend parent-teacher conferences. They also invited them to participate in all programs that led to better communication. Open communication between parents and school staff was likely to improve the educational efforts of these youngsters. The principal and vice-principal had an important role to play in the daily operation of the school.

Eleven of the twenty respondents identified the administration as a critical success factor. Burrello and Lashley, 1992; Osborne, DiMattia and Curran, 1993; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; address this issue in their research. The teachers and support staff valued the administrators' ability to support their work by providing them with resources. A major role of the administrators is to ensure that resources are in place to meet the needs of students. They are in a position of leadership and they have a responsibility to understand the special education characteristics of their school population (Mayer, 1982). They are also responsible for ensuring that due process is met. As a member of the multidisciplinary team, the administrator is primarily responsible for coordinating Individual Education Plan meetings. They make sure that all information is brought forward in order for the team to make good decisions (Pasanella, 1980).
At the study site, another responsibility of administrators was to oversee the administration of medication to students. A number of students required medication on a daily basis. The school board had a policy/procedures memorandum that instructed principals to have a procedure in place so that medication is administered in an organized manner. The two on site nurses are responsible for the administration of medication. Dispensing and storing medication was a procedure for which every precaution was taken to ensure the safety of students. The principal required parents/guardians to fill out detailed forms in order to authorize the administration of the medication. The completed forms were kept in the school office and they were regularly updated.

In addition, the administration is responsible for putting in place a health management plan. Certain students require a management plan for their health and safety. The following are examples of areas of concern: dislodging of G-tube, seizure management, respiratory distress and anaphylactic reactions. The principal at the school ensured that teachers who had contact with these students were aware of the protocol in emergency situations. The literature addresses the need to ensure that appropriate medical provisions are in place (Best, 1991; Best, 1992; Bigge, 1991; Levine, p. 577, 1999; Sirvis, 1988). Within each school year, one of the administrators indicated that one or two students die from medical complications.

The school administration supported grieving family members, friends and staff at the school by doing what they can to help celebrate the life of the youngster. In addition to these operational roles, the administration was also responsible for directing effective leadership at the school. Many of the themes that emerged from these finding had a direct relationship to the effectiveness of the principal. This role is discussed in the second part of this chapter as a theme that emerged from these findings.

Medical staff at the school made up another group of human resources at the school. During the time when this research took place, twenty-five of students at the study site were classified as youngsters who are medically fragile. They depended on ventilators and other medical technology. Some of these youngsters had conditions which were episodic, chronic and progressive. Bigge (1991) provided a definition of these terms:
These students include those with special health needs who are having a temporary medical crisis, those who are consistently fragile, and those whose diseases are progressive in nature and will eventually lead to a fragile state. The concept that must be remembered is that any student with a special health need can be fragile at times, but only a small portion of those who are fragile will remain fragile (p. 71).

The two on site nurses at the school followed prescribed health care and emergency plans for these youngsters. They understood the nature of their roles and did what was necessary to communicate with all who participated in the youngster's treatment, care and schooling. The school board has established policies and procedures regarding the administration of medication to these students. Parent consent and doctor approval was required on a number of forms that indicated the medical needs of these students. A few of the youngsters at the school have life-threatening conditions. They made use of support equipment such as feeding tubes and breathing monitors on a daily basis (Fraser, et al, 1990).

One of the nurses at the school talked about a child who was dependent on a ventilator to assist with his breathing. He has been able to participate in his school program as a result of daily suctioning and maintenance of tubes which were connected to his ventilator. Staff at the school were sensitive to the stress that families of these youngsters faced. They did their best to empathize with the constant care which can cause family members to experience a range of emotional responses. Teachers, in partnership with medical professionals and parents, did what they could to support the highest quality of life for these youngsters. One of the administrators at the site mentioned that "in the last five years there has been an increasing number of students who are medically fragile." Advances in medical technology has been a significant factor in the explanation of why these youngsters are in schools today (Bartel & Thurman, 1992). Teachers and other staff were trained to help these youngsters, and other students who attend the school, to function with these disabling conditions. They were often supported by external critical success factors which were identified by the respondents.

**Material resources.** Within the special education literature, there are three well known approaches to curriculum for students with these exceptionalities. They are called the developmental approach, the functional approach and the ecological approach. Based on comments from the respondents, all of these approaches are used with some
degree of success.

The developmental approach is based on following a program that replicates the linguistic developmental sequence of normally developing children (Bloom & Lahey, 1978; Chapman & Miller, 1980; Gesell & Amatruda, 1947; Miller, 1977). Teachers who practice this approach would need to have a sound understanding of 'normal' child development. A number of researchers, however, have discovered weaknesses in this approach particularly if it is the primary approach being used (Orelve & Sobsey, 1991; Reichle & Karlan, 1985; Reichle & Keogh, 1986). They point out that since these youngsters are not following the 'normal' developmental sequence, the approach is flawed. Many teachers who following this approach are never able to move on to the next prescribed sequential step. Researchers have discovered that youngsters follow a variety of sequences and patterns (Loria, 1980; Van Sant, 1988). One of the strongest arguments against this approach is that teachers have a tendency to "baby" students because of their intellectual limitations (Bates, Morrow, Pancsofar, & Sedlak, 1984). At the study site, one of the teacher respondents talked about this developmental approach. She used it when carrying out a toileting program for one of her students. She recognized that many of her students did not follow a developmental sequence before being successful.

The functional approach is based on providing students with age-appropriate functional skills. For example, if a 10-year-old boy with a developmental exceptionality is able to shake an object for several seconds, the teacher may use this behaviour to teach him how to brush his teeth or mix a glass of juice. In other instances, the functional approach may be based on skills that have been identified for independent living (Breines, 1984; Klien & Bell, 1982). These are skills that would be used by people who do not have these exceptionalities. As a result, these youngsters may not be able to acquire these skills. The weakness with the approach is that functional skills does not always take the youngster's individual needs into consideration. There is a possibility that what is functional for one student is inappropriate and non-functional for another (Brown et al., 1987). At the study site, respondents talked about activities that came under this functional approach. Some found it successful while others talked about it when they shared an unsuccessful experience.
According to Williams, Fox, Thousand, and Fox (1990), the ecological approach addresses the shortcomings of the functional approach and the developmental approach. The approach places an emphasis on how the youngsters will relate to their environment. "With many years of use and refinement, the ecological approach to curriculum is considered a "best practice" in educating students with severe disabilities" (Rainforth, York, & Macdonald, 1992, p. 72). The approach allows teachers to deliver programs that are age appropriate and relevant to the student’s life style. The development of an ecological curriculum also supports the work of the multidisciplinary team (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1990). They come together to design an individualized education plan that takes into consideration the desired future for the youngster. The agenda for their discussion would include how the youngster will participate within the following environments: domestic, school, vocational, community, and leisure (Ford et al., 1989). Priority activities are then identified for the youngster within each of the environments. Sensorimotor and communication skills are also components of the youngster’s educational activities. The team then begins to work out an individualized program that reflects the ecological needs of a youngster. The aim is to design an integrated program that spans the youngster’s learning environments (York & Vandercook, 1991).

Some of the respondents used this approach with the students. For example, teachers engaged their students in community tasks such as greeting people in the community, crossing streets, using money and riding public transportation (Bigge, 1991; Snell & Browder, 1986). Others youngsters, who had neuromuscular challenges, were provided with programs that focused on their need to acquire basic self care skills. Of the three approaches, no one approach is used consistently at the school.

In addition to support staff, technology is playing a significant role in the education of these students. Teachers at the school saw the use of technology as a way to maximize the independence of some of their students. Youngsters used special technological equipment, for example, mechanical lifts, touch plates, switches customized seating and standing devices to meet their needs. Peck and Dorricott (1994) see technology as a tool that will improve the abilities of these youngsters. The computer was also seen as a technological tool that both teachers and students used in this setting. Teachers were better able to efficiently manage individualized programs and records.
"Computers can store sequences of instructional objectives and student performance information, track student progress, and generate proper forms and required record keeping data" (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hamlett, p. 430, 1989).

Students benefit from computer-assisted instruction. Existing software programs enable students to develop and practice skills in a manner that is multisensory and motivating (Lindsey, 1987; Peck & Dorricott, 1994). Access to this technology will help these youngsters to participate in the Information Age. "The computer is one of the most liberating and empowering technologies to come along in a long time for people with a variety of handicaps" (Wilson, p. 18, 1992). Teachers of students with exceptionalities require training to not only make use of computer-assisted instruction but also to become effective teachers.

Three teachers, one support staff and one administrator at the study site identified "training" as a critical success factor. In general, they did not see themselves as being well prepared to teach students with multiple exceptionalities. There was a desire to receive field-based experiences that would provide them with instructional methods and curricula that would meet the needs of these exceptional youngsters (Rosenberg, O'Shea & O'Shea, 1991). Instead, these prospective teachers received few pre-service practicum experiences that were related to the students who they are responsible for at study site. As a result, many respondents adopted the term "on the job training" to describe where their training took place. Skills needed for both survival and success were acquired within the school setting.

Staff at the school received in-service training in: the use of adaptive equipment, feeding techniques, back education (e.g., strengthening, lifting techniques and injury prevention) and non-violent crisis prevention and intervention (CPI) workshops. They also continually received training from being a part of a multidisciplinary team of professionals. The staff realized that they were facing a number of challenges related to the education and treatment of their students. They thought "team" rather than individual. Collaboration and assistance from a variety of sectors within the school system enabled the multidisciplinary team to move students towards goals associated with greater independence (West & Idol, 1990). In many cases, the team is directly involved in the instruction and management of these youngsters. Training for teachers and other members of staff was also provided through partnerships with many agencies outside of
the school setting. This training often provided insight into a new instructional procedure or demonstration on the use of newly purchased equipment. At the study site, parents were also included in these sessions. Teachers encouraged their participation because the training sessions gave parents skills that were coordinated with the school program.

Another important training area was knowledge of special education procedures and policies. Staff at the site were expected to attend training sessions that focus on rules and regulations about special education. The rights and responsibilities of these youngsters were presented in considerable detail. Staff also needed to be aware of legal changes that impact their practice. Special education personnel from the school board, provided staff with information that helped them to advocate for these youngsters.

Much of the related literature address the nine critical success factors that were identified by the respondents. The identified CSFs relate to the themes of "program effectiveness," "human resource management," "community relations" and "leadership" that were generated by Burrello and Johnson (1986). Other studies that were identified earlier in the literature review also reflect some similarities. Burrello and Johnson (1984) study identified fifteen factors that were then categorized into the following four themes: program effectiveness, human resource management, community relations and leadership. These categories, when compared with factors found in this study, are similar. In this study, program effectiveness were identified through the factors "program" and "curriculum." Human resource management can be aligned with "staffing," "technology" and "educational assistants." Community relations and leadership can be related to "administration," "training" and "health services". Parent involvement is directly similar to the identification of "parents." However, the intent of this study was not to compare it with previous ones but rather to elicit CSFs from these educators as a way to identify areas that they saw as critical to the success of their work. This information could then be used by the principal and vice-principal for school planning and organization.

All of the respondents identified factors in some of the following areas as being associated with success: school documents, the community setting, the school building, the budget, staffing, the availability of assistance and parental expectations. When these factors were compromised they hindered the success of students who attended the school. While there is considerable research about special education, there is little on these contextual factors that the respondents identified. The identified factors were
discussed within the theme of expectations. Staff at the study site expect these factors to be in place in order to nurture students towards independence. Staff at the school expect that curriculum documents were in place in order to help them work successfully with students.

Three of the teachers expressed frustration about the curriculum materials that they were given. They thought the materials should be more related to the needs of the population they are educating. Nieto (1997), however, expect teachers to view curriculum not as something that is to be “delivered” but rather as a tool to accommodate individual student’s needs. Nieto sees curriculum as process rather than a product (p. 193). For these three teachers, however, the prescribed curriculum would require a great deal of adaptations and modifications to address the needs of their students.

Kauffman (1997) identified four areas of expertise that special education staff must attain in order to meet the needs of students: academic instruction of students with learning problems, management of serious behaviour problems, use of technological advances and a knowledge of special education law. The respondents’ comments support the need for expertise in these areas. They would also agree with Zigmond and Baker (1995) who state that “special educators have the responsibility to offer not just good instruction but instruction that is highly individualized, intensive, relentless, urgent and goal directed” (p. 249). The respondents reflected this responsibility according to their perceived roles at the school. Their comments show that they had different interpretations of these roles.

At the study site, the participants had different perspectives on what a relevant curriculum meant. It was also interesting to note that none of the respondents in this study mentioned the diverse cultural backgrounds of students at the school. In their expressions for an appropriate curriculum, it would be beneficial to their students if consideration was given to the development of more inclusive curricula. Since there is often an over representation of minority youth in these schools, there is a need to be culturally sensitive (Chinn & Hughes, 1987). Grant and Sleeter, (1986) and Poplin and Weered, (1992) also add another area of responsibility to staff who are involved with special education. They advocate the need to ensure that the curriculum has relevance to the lives of these students.
The community setting and the school building were also factors that the respondents identified as factors that had an impact on the success students may or may not experience. Staff at the school engaged in a number of out-reach activities to maintain a positive community presence. They realized the importance of community partnerships because a great deal of their programming revolved around student excursions into the community to give these youngsters practical experiences. In-reach activities were also seen as a necessary way to maintain a positive school culture. Staff at the school all work with an unfamiliar population of students. They have developed self-defining characteristics that can "effect a more thoughtful, informed competent and caring human community" (Paul, 1997). Respondents looked to this school community for support and understanding as they went about their daily duties.

The physical organization of the school also had an impact on the staff. Many of the respondents made comments about the way the school is laid out. They saw it as a "user friendly" building. They were satisfied with the special equipment available to the youngsters and they were supportive of the routines which were in place that organized the movement of students in the building.

Respondents also talked about factors that they felt impeded their success. For example, one of the primary teachers became discouraged when she was not allowed to organize the physical space of her classroom. This teacher wanted to create a "total environment" for her students. At the school, it is referred to as a "switch environment." Windows are covered and lights are placed in certain areas. Items hung from the ceiling that were brightly coloured. The idea was to set up a stimulating environment for the students. The teacher became upset when a representative from a health and safety committee ordered her to take down the items because they were seen as a safety hazard. The teacher complied, however, she felt that this outside agency had no appreciation for what she was tried to create. The situation was resolved a few months later when the Board allowed her to purchase materials that were non-flammable. Other respondents talked about obstacles that resulted from professional activities that they felt were not relevant. They also spoke about working with agencies that operated with a great deal of bureaucracy. Other situations that effect the working environment of staff who work in special education environments are documented in the literature.
Weber (1993) described the situation of teachers who worked with these youngsters. They often go beyond traditional teacher roles in an attempt to bring out the "human" potential of each student. Usually, the teacher identifies the need to do extra but is then subject to the bureaucracy that is associated with working in a special education environment. These teachers often do not have the flexibility of "regular" teachers because a large number of individuals are responsible for the youngster's program (Tomlinson, cited in Christensen & Fazal, 1996). As a consequence, many teachers are not able to make decisions autonomously. This issue is further compounded by the current remnants of the medical model and the increasing involvement of parents (Weber, 1993, p. 33). Special education teachers often yield to the decisions of medical professionals and some parent advocates cause teachers stress. Others who are involved with the education of these youngsters have taken a different approach. They emphasize the need for collaborative consultation. Teachers, support staff, administrators and others are given the "opportunity to participate in problem identification, discussion, decision making, and all final outcomes" (West & Idol, 1990, p. 23).

Teachers, support staff and administrators are, however, subjected to the views of well established lobby groups (Young & Levin, 1998, p. 70-71). Their views can shape the programs at the school. These stake holders have an increasing amount of influence on the politics and policies of an educational system. For example, The Association for Children with Learning Disabilities has an impact when policies in special education are being developed. Other advocates come from business groups, labour unions and community groups. They have influence in the education of these youngsters. In recent years, the media has also played an influential role. Teachers, support staff and administrators are often working under the scrutiny of the media. Members of the public who may or may not have children in the public education system are helped to form their views based on media reports.

The budget, staffing and the availability of assistance were also factors that were commented on by the respondents. The administrators at the study site indicated that the school did receive adequate funding. The school was also utilizing the Special Education Grant that the Ontario government has recently put into place. The students at the study site qualified for Special Education Per Pupil Amount of $362.00 for each elementary pupil and $229.00 for each secondary pupil. They also qualified for Intensive
Support Amounts that ensure individualized equipment and staffing supports required by students with very high needs (Ontario Ministry of Training, 1999, p. 3). The next section discusses the themes that emerged from the interview data.

Emerging Themes From the Interview Data

Four themes emerged from the interview data. The themes were derived from the methodology outlined in earlier in the study. The first theme centred on independence which all participants see as the most important goal for these students. Second was their beliefs about students with normative exceptionalities. Participants spoke from two opposing perspectives which influenced how they viewed their work. Third was their beliefs about the curriculum. Ideas were expressed about providing curriculum based on “academics,” “life-skills,” and “communication.” The fourth theme that emerged from the interviews demonstrated different beliefs about school collaboration. These themes draw attention to disparity between and among respondents about how they conceptualize their work with students who have normative exceptionalities. The differences can provide the school administration with important information for planning, intervention and mission.

Independence

Independence was the first major theme that became evident from the interview transcripts. The acquisition of independent skills is at the centre of programming for these students. Data from the respondents indicate different interpretations of what is meant by independence. They describe independence in a variety of ways. Teacher respondents talked about toilet training, physical mobility, communication, and the ability to complete daily chores. Support staff talked about correcting inappropriate behaviours, improving a students’ self-esteem and tending to issues from a medical perspective. The administrators talked about independence by sharing experiences that were related to trying something new. For example, some of the respondents spoke about a new approach to a lesson or using different materials. At this point, it is unclear whether these differences surfaced as a result of their roles or as a result of their beliefs (Pajares, 1992). There is also the possibility that the respondents acted either on the advice of the multidisciplinary team or on their own personal judgment (Clark, 1988). The school
administration is able to use this information to gain an overall picture of what staff see as a direction for independence. There is the possibility of a need to discuss these differences with staff not necessarily with the goal to bring everyone to look at independence in the same way but rather to ensure that an interpretation of independence successfully meets the needs of each student.

Towards this end, the insights expressed in this study about independent skills is a clear endorsement of the commitment to provide these students with skills that are necessary for the transition from childhood to adulthood. All of the respondents echoed this theme throughout each of the interviews. This finding has also been noted by Kavale (1990) as a factor in effective programming for students with multiple exceptionalities:

The content for independent living skills is seen as limitless and can include any skills necessary for integrated home and community living. For the severely handicapped, independent living skills involve environmental demands and a student’s access and participation in daily living activities (p. 46).

Respondents view independent living as an integral part of an appropriate education. They are eager to find ways and situations where students can engage in activities that promote successful independent living. Some respondents identify a particular curricular approach as a way to teach independent skills. Others indicate that there is a need to use a number of approaches. All respondents, however, agree on some general skill areas that most students with multiple exceptionalities need to learn as they move towards greater independence. Motor skills, self-help skills and communication skills are recognized as being important underlying features of independent living. The challenge is to determine how to develop these skills in students who have individual needs.

Respondents also recognize the need to determine priority skills to be taught to a given student. They valued the opinions of a multidisciplinary team that make decisions about what goals are to be included on a student’s individualized education plan. Parents have a key role to play within the team. Their views about independence must be taken into consideration. For example, parents may have a different time period for student independence than professionals. Toilet training, self-feeding and care are more successful when parents/guardians support the timing. Cultural factors must be considered by the multidisciplinary team (Harry, p. 167, 1997). Care is also taken in order to ensure that age-appropriate skills are emphasized. Once a decision has been
made to include the necessary skills for independent community living, a number of instructional methods are used. For the students at the study site, teachers and support staff focus on the behaviour of their students. They want to help them acquire behavioural characteristics that will allow them to successfully fit into their community. Strategies used may involve prompting, shaping and praising approximations to encourage a particular behaviour.

Some of these students find it difficult to transfer the skills taught at the school to an independent living community experience. Teachers and support staff are, however, making strides by using simulation activities and settings. Also, a number of school staff do a great deal of their teaching within a community setting to prepare them for the transition. However, the respondents pointed out that a large majority of students graduate from the school to live at home or in group homes. They do not participate much in outside-the-home activities. They don't have jobs. A number of researchers have also investigated this pessimistic conclusion (Hendrick, MacMillan, & Balow, 1989; Wolman, Bruininks, & Thurlow, 1989). These students have greater difficulty making the transition from adolescence to adulthood and from school to work. Many of them remain dependent on their families or are supported through social assistance programs (Heal & Rusch, 1995; Rusch, Szymanski, & Chadsey-Rusch, 1992).

There is a strong indication from the respondents that this situation results partially from differing home and school goals. They point to the way many of the parents and care givers acquiesce to the present demands of the youngster without inculcating principles that are necessary for future independence. For example, many of the respondents commented on how these young people are dressed. Many wear clothing that is not age appropriate. They often come to school in styles of clothing that would be worn by someone who is much younger than them. Hobart (1995) commented that parents of these youngsters consciously or unconsciously thwart attempts at independence by being overprotective to the point of promoting childlike behaviours and dependency.

Other respondents commented on the lack of emphasis by parents and care givers about encouraging the development of adult roles such as self-care, personal relationships and social responsibility. It should be noted, however, that they realize that a number of these students may not acquire skills that are necessary for independent
functioning. They also see the need for more comprehensive programming at the school which is aimed at increasing the quality of life for students with these exceptionalities.

Even when effective approaches are used and a set of critical success factors are identified by professionals, a student may not acquire independence. This realization is not necessarily a concern. Parents/guardians often have different views of independence than professionals. Interdependence is a valued goal by many families who have youngsters with normative exceptionalities (Correa, 1989, Harry, 1997). They accept the life-long support that may be required to assist their youngster. These parents may not embrace the professional relative goal of independence, however, through family and community supports their youngster is likely to find a place in society.

In summary, the respondents expressed a clear endorsement of the commitment to provide these students with skills that are necessary for the transition from childhood to adulthood. Experiences shared by respondents indicate differences in how they interpret independence. These differences may be due to the roles they have or the beliefs they hold. The principal and vice-principal can use this finding to help develop strategies that will ensure that each member of staff is interpreting “independence” in ways that move each student towards this goal. The next theme address the beliefs that respondents have about this student population.

**Beliefs About Students With Normative Exceptionalities**

The second theme focused on the beliefs of the respondents. The interview data indicate that respondents hold different beliefs about students at the school. Some see students as having a deficit or a problem that prevents them from acquiring certain goals while others focus on what can be done in the learning environment to permit the students to realize their goals. For instance, a teacher respondent spoke about the need to have a “broad definition of education” because students at the school are not expected to participate in regular school activities. On the other hand, a support staff member spoke about the need to shake off the “medical model of diagnostic-prognosis-treatment” because it does not work with these students. This respondent believes that this prescriptive approach prevents students from demonstrating their capabilities. Another school site example came from looking at the beliefs of a vice-principal and the one of the nurses at the school. The vice-principal has the belief that more of the students in the
school can benefit from a program that promotes activities and strategies which are found in 'regular' schools. She became frustrated when some of the teachers were reluctant to try the program because they did not believe in it. The nurse openly shared her belief that staff at the school was trying to make these students “normal” rather than accepting them as students with exceptionalities. Other respondents expressed beliefs that are somewhere along the continuum of the two positions.

Jordan and other researchers (Jordan Kircaali-Iftar, & Diamond, 1993; Jordan-Wilson & Silverman, 1991; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998) have described these opposing beliefs as “pathognomonic” and “interventionist.” An educator who holds a pathognomonic belief view students with normative exceptionalities as having a problem that lies “within.” Teaching can only bring about a certain amount of success because of inherent limitations. In extreme instances, little is done to promote student progress because of the students' nature. At the other end of this position, Jordan et al, have identified the “interventionist” beliefs. These educators believe that despite the disability, their role is to reduce barriers to participation and learning. They see the students as people first rather than students with disabilities. (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). An emphasis is placed on finding interventions and adaptations so that the student will be achieve success. Jordan, Lindsay and Stanovich (1997) have found that teachers who subscribe to the “interventionist” perspective involve students in more academic interactions. They did more to realize the goals associated with educational success.

The discovery that this disparity exists at the study site has particular implications for the principal and vice-principal. In their role of transformational leaders, they have a major part to play in addressing this fundamental difference (Hargreaves, 1990; Leithwood, 1991; Short & Pickett, 1993). Students at the school would benefit if the principal and vice-principal ensured that all staff are provided with a focus that move them towards the “interventionist” perspective. This can be done through leadership. As Roberts (1985) explains:

This type of leadership offers a vision of what could be and gives a sense of purpose and meaning to those who would share that vision. ... In essence, transforming leadership is a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their system of goal accomplishment (p.1024).
A suggested starting point for the principal and vice-principal is to engage staff in a discussion of this finding. Following the discussion, there may need to be a further discussion about what the schools' statement of philosophy means when it states:

All individuals are entitled to an education that strives to fully develop their capabilities, attends to their personal needs and enables them to participate in the mainstream of society.

In summary, it is crucial that school staff to have a consistent understanding of this statement. The present disparity may result in obstacles being placed in the way of student success. Should there continue to be opposing beliefs there may be a need to rethink the philosophy. The principal and vice principal may address this difference through their leadership at the school.

The next major theme that emerged were beliefs about the curriculum.

Beliefs about the Curriculum

The third theme that emerged from the interview data was the disparity about the curriculum. Many respondents identified different beliefs about what these students should be taught. Some were supportive of teaching traditional academics while others believed that emphasis needed to be placed on what were called "life skills." Others expressed strong beliefs that the school board curriculum did not meet the needs of these students. Still others disagreed with what teachers should expect from these students. Were their expectations too "high" or were they too "low"? There were also those who had different beliefs about communication skills.

One of teacher respondents talked about a student in his class that was placed in an integrated setting once it was discovered that he could participate in a 'regular' classroom setting. This teacher believes that this positive change came about because he treats all of his students in an age appropriate manner. He uses the school board curriculum before making a decision that something may be too difficult for a student. Another teacher respondent expressed an opposing belief towards teaching the curriculum. He believes that the prescribed curriculum does not relate to his students. Instead this teacher spends a great deal of time teaching teenagers how to button and unbutton their coats. He was critical of those who think that these "kids are ever going to lead normal lives." From his perspective, to believe that they might be able to do so is being disrespectful to the student and their parents. For him and other respondents, "life
skills" and "academic skills" are very different. Their beliefs expressed little if any relationship between the two skills.

A support staff respondent expressed another belief about the curriculum. She was excited about the school board's new curriculum because of the emphasis on technology. She believes that technological devices will allow more of these students to engage in age appropriate activities. Another respondent believes that staff at the school pay too much attention to the medical condition of these students. As a result, academic expectations are low. This respondent believes that these students should be receiving a curriculum that is delivered in 'regular' schools.

In addition to disparity among respondents about what to teach, the interview data also indicated differences about defining communication. For some respondents, communication meant acquiring skills that enabled students to use picture symbols. Other respondents talked about communication by making reference to students who were verbal or non-verbal. Still others discovered that a student was behaving inappropriately because he did not have a way to communicate with his teachers and other students in his class. Once he acquired this skill, through picture symbols, his behaviour dramatically improved.

These data illustrate the respondents' different beliefs about curriculum. The focus appears to be on the inclusion of certain aspects of curriculum while excluding others. In the role of instructional leaders, the principal and vice-principal can use this information to help staff arrive at a more consistent and comprehensive approach to curriculum delivery.

The literature supports the need to ensure that curriculum for these students reflect all areas of development (Lane, 1996; Notari-Syverson & Shuster, 1995; Winzer, 1999). Language development, visual and auditory training; mobility training, self-care skills are areas of development. The development of communication skills is done simultaneously. The acquisition of communications skills is crucial. It can take place in structured environments, however, greater success is achieved when these skills are taught (Owens, 1991; Reickle, 1997).

Ouvry's (1987) curriculum model for these students incorporates the following core areas: physical, perceptual, intellectual, personal and social development, movement and perceptual motor, sensory awareness, cognitive skills and communication; and independence. McConkey (1981) paid particular attention to 'understanding' as being
more valuable than the acquisition of facts and skills for these students. His perspectives influenced Glenn, (1988) Smith, (1988) and Watson (1990) whose work focused on the need to organize the learning environment in such a way that would support self-directed learning and cognitive processes.

A compartmental approach to curriculum is not advocated in the literature for these students. All students require both educational and psychosocial development that is coordinated through an individual education plan. Students who have a variety of normative exceptionalities will require greater support. One or two people cannot provide these students with a comprehensive curriculum to address their needs (McCollum and Thorp, 1988). A team of individuals from different disciplines is required. This approach to curriculum enables everyone to see the student as a total being.

In summary, the interview data showed that respondents have different beliefs about curriculum. These differences resulted in staff working at cross-purposes. The literature advocates that a comprehensive team approach be used with these students. The principal and vice-principal are in a position to use this data to bring about more complementary staff beliefs about curriculum so that these students will have opportunities to reach their full potential. At present there appears to be little consensus about their purpose which results in contradictions, resistance and disagreements. The next theme is about staff collaboration.

Beliefs about Collaboration

The fourth theme that emerged from the interview data was beliefs about collaboration among staff at the school. Some respondents believed they were working within a collaborative environment while others did not. They spoke about receiving support and indifference. This disparity is a concern given the need to work as a team in this school.

A support staff respondent accounted for the success she had with a communication program by making reference to the support she received from the principal. Others spoke about how working with colleagues made a positive difference in student achievement. Opposite beliefs about collaboration were also expressed. Another support staff respondent believes that there is a great deal of talk about team work but not enough of it in practice. She spoke about the difficulty of not having a formal
structure for staff to talk about the progress of students.

Other interview transcripts revealed different interpretations of collaboration. One of the respondents believed collaboration would improve if she was able to acquire an assistant to support her in her role of speech pathologist. While two educational assistants saw collaboration from the perspective of being relied on by the teachers in the class or around the school. They collaborated when they work with students who are behaving inappropriately.

One of the teacher respondents believed that collaboration did not exist at her school. "You always want to know that you are doing a good job and that you are being supported." She was critical of not having many opportunities to discuss her program with other members of staff. She also mentioned that she feels as if she is working in isolation.

There is strong support in the literature for collaboration (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1991; Morgan & Morgan, 1992; Rosenholtz, 1989). When genuine collaboration occurs schools become better places to learn. The challenge is to implement a collaborative environment. This process is often difficult because people have different beliefs about what collaboration means. Some see collaboration as information sharing or consultation. Others believe it to be involving people in a decision process but one or two people make the final decision. Still others believe it to be a process where issues are explored and the collective group is involved in the decision.

Hargreaves (1990) defines collaborative cultures in the following way:

In such cultures, staff often talk, observe, critique and plan together, they also teach one another how to teach better because of norms of collective responsibility and continuous improvement (p.5).

To bring about this understanding will require the principal and vice-principal to examine the data and direct staff towards a culture where everyone has a responsibility for everyone in the school. No one affiliated with the school should believe that they do not have a valued voice among colleagues. No one should believe they are working in an isolated environment. Everyone is a part of the in advocating for the success of these students (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991).

In summary, the data indicates disparity of beliefs about collaboration. Respondents also have different interpretations of what collaboration means. The literature also points out that collaboration means different things to different people. A common understanding is necessary to promote a collaborative school culture. This
administration has an important role to play in helping to bring about collaborative practices that is supported by staff.

**Summary- Chapter Seven**

This chapter discussed and analyzed the results within the broader context of the literature. A response was given to the central research question and the results were analyzed within the framework of the six sub-research questions. Successful experiences of these youngsters always related to the goal of independence while unsuccessful experiences related to the management of challenging emotional and behavioural displays. School staff at the study site used a variety of strategies to address the behaviours. Parents are not to be blamed for their youngster's challenging behaviour. School staff and parents need to work together to help these youngsters. When parents are not able to help, staff need to be sensitive to the demands placed on these parents.

Long and short term goals for these students always focused on independence. Staff at the school emphasized that a great deal of the youngsters' program was geared to teaching skills that will enable them to successfully function in their communities. A variety of approaches were used by staff in order help these youngsters acquire needed skills. Time was taken to individualize the strategies in a manner that promoted frequent success. Staff also identified the following factors as being associated with success: school documents, the community setting, the school building (physical layout), the budget, staffing, the availability of assistance and parental expectations. Positive responses to these factors help to facilitate success. Staff expected these factors to be in place in order to nurture student independence.

The respondents' perception of success was also addressed. Again, the aim was to develop the capabilities of these youngsters so that they can successfully participate in society. Teachers, support staff and administrators appear to have different views on how to realize this goal. External and internal factors impact on a common perception of how to prepare these students for society. Similar factors surfaced when respondent's were asked to identify critical success factors. They identified the following factors as being critical to working successfully with these youngsters: staff, curriculum and program, administration and parents, educational assistants and technology, training and then health care. These factors were grouped into internal and external categories. The discussion
that followed emphasized the need for these factors to be in place so that staff can work together to meet the diverse needs of these youngsters. Four major themes emerged from the interviews. They were: Independence, Beliefs about disabilities, Beliefs about curriculum and beliefs about collaboration. These themes reflected disparity in participants' perspectives and understanding of their work with these students. The themes are particularly important for the administration at the school for planning, intervention and mission. The final chapter will review the study and present conclusions. Recommendations for future research of this population of youngsters are also brought forward.
Chapter Eight

Summary and Conclusions

Study Overview

Major findings of this study are summarized in this chapter and conclusions are presented. Limitations, implications for practice and areas for further research are also presented.

This case study examined the views of a school staff whose program is geared to meeting the needs of students with normative exceptionalities. The critical success factors of teachers, support staff and administrators who work in the school setting were also examined. Critical Success Factors are "key areas where things must go right in order to successfully achieve objectives and goals" (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p.9).

The four year study consisted of interviewing twenty respondents from an urban school in a large school board in Ontario. The over-all purpose of the study was to identify and analyse critical success factors to provide the administration with planning data for a school that meet the needs of students who have normative exceptionalities. There has been much research on "effective schools" and factors relating to effectiveness but not much about critical success factors for the education of students with normative exceptionalities. This study made a contribution in this area.

The study sought answers about what this school staff saw as being necessary to meet the needs of these students. What are viewed as successful experiences? What are viewed as unsuccessful experiences? What are long and short term student goals? What factors are associated with success and what factors hinder success? Are there differences in the perception of what is viewed as successful school experiences among staff? What did the staff identify as critical success factors? Answers to these questions were meant to provide insight and direction for the administrators of the school.

Students at the school ranged in age from 4 to 21 years-old. Many have physical disabilities (e.g., require wheelchairs) in addition to their cognitive impairments. All students have been identified as exceptional, developmentally handicapped, through the Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process.
The perspectives of schooling for these students were examined through the expressions of teachers, support staff and administrators. All participants responded to a set of interview questions which were answered at the study site. Each interview was about one-hour in length. Data from school documents, field notes, observations and a focus group meeting were also included.

**Special Education**

The 1980 Education Amendment Act and subsequent regulations under the Act ensures that all students with exceptionalities will have access to appropriate educational programs through the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process. The term “normative” exceptionalities is introduced and defined. Based on the definition, it was discovered that students in this study make up a very small percent of the school-age population in Ontario.

There is a debate as to whether or not these programs should or should not occur in segregated settings. A resolution to this debate was not sought in this study. Rather, attention was given to eliciting critical success factors from a group of individuals that work with these students. The focus was always on acquiring insight into the education of students with normative exceptionalities. The views of teachers, support staff and administrators provided an opportunity to better understand the schooling of these students.

**Literature Review**

The literature review focused on four related themes. The historical perspective demonstrated a steady move from segregated institutions to the development of a range of local instructional settings. The literature revealed that in previous centuries, students with normative exceptionalities were seen as social outcasts. Today, programs are in place to meet the needs of these students.

The literature also revealed that there are a variety of special education programs for students with normative exceptionalities. These students are both different and similar to the 'average' child. Teachers in these programs work with a team of professionals help these students achieve success. Recent literature demonstrates the
benefit of providing interventions for these students rather than focusing on their exceptionalities. The goal of these programs is to prepare these individuals for success and a high quality of life in mainstream society. A number of approaches is used to arrive at this goal. The literature supported programs that placed an emphasis on teaching these students skills that they will need to live independently.

The literature also addressed what staff do in effective schools, and what administrators of students with exceptionalities do to promote a effective learning environment. Indicators of their success pointed out that strategies that are successful in general educational settings are also appropriate for students with normative exceptionalities. The literature did, however, reveal differences as they related to the curriculum needs of students with special needs. In addition to a review of the effective school literature, the fourth theme focused on the use of critical success factors in special education. A limited number of sources was discovered that related to this study.

**School Study Site**

A description of the school site, programs and operating principles was presented. The two storey school is located in a downtown area of a large urban centre in Ontario. The special education school provide programs for students with multiple normative exceptionalities. The majority of students had additional unique needs in the area of physical disabilities, autism, behavioural disorders, vision, hearing and/or communication. The 26 year-old school operate at near full enrolment and serves approximately 80 students from a large metropolitan catchment area. These students range in age from 4 to 21 years-old. All of the students were transported to and from school by contracted carriers.

It was discovered that staff and students at the school received support services through area wide programs. Close partnerships were maintained with parents, staff at group homes and social agencies. Required nursing care procedures were provided through on site staff and through local health departments. A great deal of special equipment is used at the school to meet the needs of students. For example, mechanical lifts, touch plates, special switches, customized seating and standing devices are used extensively at the school.
Students are admitted and annually reviewed through the Identification, Placement and Review Committee process. An annual Individual Education Plan is required for each student as well a Transition Plan for students 17 years of age and older. The staff consist of teachers, educational assistants, health care assistants, paraprofessionals, administrators and an administrative assistant. Students are enrolled in 14 classes with special programs for Work Education, The Arts, Physical Education, Family Studies, Behavioural Management and Math/Science/Technology. A Parenting Centre opened in the school year 1995-96. Parents from the school community are invited to visit the centre and interact with children at the school. Based on school documents, observations and field notes, programming emphasizes the empowering of students to become as independent as possible. Responsibility and achievement are nurtured in preparation for meaningful integration and participation in society.

Design and Methodology

The study used qualitative methods and a technical procedure was used to elicit critical success. The interviews with twenty respondents who were comprised of teachers, support staff and administrators utilized qualitative methods. Critical success factors were elicited from respondents as part of the interview. The study used documents, field notes, interviews and observation as sources of data.

All interviews with a purposeful sample were tape-recorded and then transcribed. Copies were sent back to each respondent for review. The data were read and sorted into categories and themes. Findings from the data were then presented. The qualitative analysis focused on the narrative responses to the interview questions. Critical success factors were elicited within the interviews using Bullen & Rockart's approach (1981, P.45). These factors were also ranked by each of the respondents from 1 to 5 in order of priority. A focus group meeting took place after all of the interviews were completed. The purpose of the meeting was to verify the critical success factors that were elicited from the respondents and to validate them by arriving at a consensus. HyperQual was used as a tool to aid in the data analysis.
Results

The results from the respondents indicated that the focus was always on providing these students with skills that would enable them to become more independent. The study found that teachers, support staff and administrators prepared these students for independence by teaching them self-care skills, by providing them with opportunities to reach personal milestones and by creating situations where they learned to interact appropriately with people in their community. The study found that the general aim was to give students experiences that led to an improvement in their quality of life.

The study found that all respondents experience success whenever students were able to develop their individual capabilities. Staff emphasized age appropriate behaviour and encouraged parents to do the same. This behaviour was viewed as a positive step towards independence. Parents/guardians was seen to have a crucial role in the education of these youngsters. Staff encouraged a good partnership between the home and the school.

It was also found that an indicator of success for these students was to be integrated into regular classrooms. However, respondents also expressed reasons why few of their students were given that opportunity. In addition, the responses indicated that staff promote the importance of helping students to build self-confidence. They realized that the development of feelings of self-worth would translate into positive experiences.

The second question asked respondents to identify unsuccessful experiences for these students. The study found that many of these experiences focused on working with students whose behaviour was difficult to manage. Respondents told stories about unsuccessful experiences that focused on youngsters who showed developmentally inappropriate, aggressive and violent behaviours. Other unsuccessful experiences related to self-care behaviours such as toileting.

In some situations, the respondents questioned their strategies when trying to work with students who were difficult to manage. Others questioned the administration's promotion of subject-based programs when they believed that these students needed a program that focused on self-care and functional life skills to prepare them for participation in their communities. This disparity of beliefs among respondents surfaced
several times in the data. The study also found that some staff accounted for unsuccessful experiences by claiming that some staff did not follow a particular program.

The third question asked respondents to identify their short and long term goals for their students. Long and short term goals for all students focused on the development of independent skills. Staff at the came together to arrive at and individual education plan that is geared to teaching skills that will help these students to function successfully in society. Life skills are taught in a variety of settings and a number of strategies are used by teachers and suport staff. These individuals try to challenge their students by giving them work that stretch their capabilities without creating feelings of frustration.

"Independence" was found to be the one word that all respondents used to express goals for these students. However, it was discovered that respondents have different interpretations of independence. The data also revealed that the respondents focused their attention on providing individualized programs that teach skills that aim to give students greater independence. The data also indicated that respondents have different beliefs about curriculum. Some respondents promoted a stronger emphasis on traditional school skills, while others believed that an emphasis on traditional academic skills would have little if any relevance in the lives of these students. The respondents often summarized their comments about goals by concluding that they hope these students will be able to lead meaningful lives upon leaving school.

The fourth sub-question asked respondents to identify factors that were associated with success and factors that hindered success. The respondents identified written policies and documents, the community setting, the school building, the budget, staffing and availability of assistance and parental expectations as factors that either facilitated or hindered success. The results of the study indicated that when support was given to youngsters in these areas they were able to experience learning opportunities that promoted success. The opposite was true when there was not support in these areas. Staff expect these factors to be in place in order to work successfully within the school. However, respondents have different beliefs about their roles and responsibilities when working with these students. Staff in this setting may be influenced by stakeholders who have influence on the policies and procedures within special education. Business groups, labour unions, community groups and politicians have a say in how best to reach the common goal of greater independence of these students.
The respondents indicated that materials, personnel, money and partnerships with all stakeholders are important factors for these students. The study also found that it was necessary for these resources to be reviewed on a regular basis in order to address the changing population of students at the school and their changing pedagogical instruction.

The fifth sub-question of the study asked if there were differences in the perception of what was viewed as successful experiences among the three groups of respondents that work with these youngsters. Each group of respondents searched for ways that would give their students more control over their environment. The data showed that respondents did have different expectations for these students. They focused on different skills based on what they thought was "best" for each student. They separated learning by paying attention to "academic skills" or "life skills". In some instances it was not clear whether or not the respondents thought that these skills could be integrated. Others only paid attention to what the student had difficulty doing rather than emphasizing the capabilities. Some also believed they were doing what they could given the medical circumstances of the students. This disparity resulted in staff having different expectations for these students.

The final sub-research question of the study asked respondents to identify critical success factors. The respondents identified "staff," "program," "parents," "curriculum" and "administrators" as high frequency critical success factors. A focus group meeting took place to validate these results. Half of the respondents attended the meeting and there was representation from the three groups of respondents. The general discussion ended in support for the critical success factors that were identified. The factors were divided into two categories, human resources and material resources. Educational assistants, staff, parents, administrators and health services were seen as human resources. Curriculum, program, technology and training were grouped within the material resources category. Staff at the study site were committed to providing resources in both categories to help students achieve the goal of greater independence. A variety of approaches were used to meet this goal based on the perspective of teachers, support staff and administrators.

The identified factors from respondents can be compared with earlier studies that used critical success factors in special education settings. When these findings were compared with a study done by Burello and Johnson (1984), similarities were noted.
This was particularly apparent when “Program Effectiveness” was identified in their study as being necessary to ensure student growth.

This study identified four major themes that emerged from the interview data. The themes were: independence, beliefs about students with normative exceptionatilities, beliefs about the curriculum and beliefs about collaboration. These themes draw attention to disparity in the participants' perspectives and understanding about their role in working with these students. A discussion of these themes revealed differences of purpose among respondents. A lack of consensus resulted in contradictions and disagreements. These findings have particular relevance for the administrative team at the school. In their role as leaders, these data can provide them with information that pinpoints critical areas of school improvement.

The literature points to the principal as being a key component of effective schools (Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990). They can have a tremendous impact on the achievement of students (Andrews et al., 1991; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Based on the themes that emerged, the administrative staff may need to take on activities that have been found in effective schools. Smith and Andrews (1989) include the following activities of a principal to promote school improvement: Resource provider, instructional resource, communicator and visible presence. As a result of the themes that emerged, the principal's role as "communicator" is crucial. The disparity among respondents indicate a need for the principal to share his or her vision about the school with staff, students, parents and members of the community. Andrews, Soder, and Jacoby (1986) include the following suggestions for principals to share:

1. all students can learn and succeed
2. success breeds success
3. schools can enable students to be successful
4. clearly defined learner outcomes determine instructional programs and decisions

There is the possibility that if the administrative team at the study site communicated these points the degree of disparity that emerged from the interview data could be overcome, and school effectiveness increased. The CSF process has significant management implications for school leaders. It results in the emergence of factors which are identified by staff to provide these leaders with important information for planning. Since CSFs are not "fixed" but can change over time, the process also can be done at
different points in time to reflect the changes within a school. School leaders can again go through the process to identify factors that staff view as critical to the success of students.

Limitations

Some limitations were associated with this study. The sample of respondents included teachers, support staff and the administration. A more comprehensive sample may have included parents, staff from the group homes and students. The sample may also have included a larger number of respondents. The interviews were done at one school. Critical Success Factors were not ranked in a holistic manner by the respondents. They were asked to rank their own CSFs but not the entire nine factors that emerged from the data. There were also limitations to the generalizability of the study. However, the intent of this investigation was not to generalize, but to understand the case.

Conclusions

This study was designed to address the central research question, "What are the critical success factors that school staff identify to successfully meet the needs of students with normative exceptionalities?"

The study provided an opportunity to look into the schooling of students with normative exceptionalities through the eyes of teachers, support staff and administrators. The stories they told were captured through individual interviews, school documents, field notes, observations and a focus group meeting. Their critical success factors were elicited to pinpoint areas that were seen as crucial to meet the needs of these students. Nine factors emerged from the data provided by the twenty respondents. They were: Staff, Parents, Program, Curriculum, Administrators, Educational Assistants, Technology, Training and Health.

These factors are particularly useful to the administration at the school. They know which areas within the school organization are critical to their students' success. This information gives them strategies for planning, decision making and problem solving. Also, through the process of factor identification, it became obvious that participants defined and interpreted the factors in different ways. In other words, staff used the same words but they meant different things to them. This discovery accounted for disparity among the respondents about their role and responsibilities. The principal and vice-
principal can use this revelation to bring about a more common understanding of what staff need to focus on when working with these students. This point cannot be overstated by the administration at the school. They now have an opportunity to “pinpoint” identified areas within the school that require attention. They also know what areas do not require concerted attention, but need to be reinforced. Since CSFs may change in time, it is necessary to periodically apply the process again.

The findings of this study have implications for students with normative exceptionalities. The interview data point to the critical role the administrative team has in making everyone aware of the vision and mission of the school. When this does not happen, people develop a variety of perspectives that may negatively impact on the success of these students. By providing a school staff with the opportunity to identify critical success factors, respondents used similar terms but the data indicated that they meant different things to them. Clear communication is required to make sure a common understanding of words such as “independence” are held by staff.

The data also brought to the forefront the impact that a person’s belief can have on the kind of education these students will receive. When staff have the belief that these students can only reach certain levels of success, they are directly influencing the amount of success they will achieve. The data indicated that when staff believe that these students are capable of being educated in an age appropriate manner they often meet or exceed expectations. The opposite is likely to be true when staff believe otherwise.

The findings would support a move to encourage staff to work within a collaborative school environment. Once the premise that “all students can and will succeed” is adopted, working together will help to ensure that resources are in place for these students. Curriculum and individual education plans will be seen by everyone as a working guide that will lead to outcomes that have been embraced by the entire school staff. The identification of critical success factors can be seen as an important step in giving school staffs opportunities to move in this direction.

The procedure leading up to the identification of CSFs provide school administrators with a way to focus on areas that require their attention. Even if a number of areas have been identified, administrators can concentrate on the most pertinent ones at a given time. This procedure will help administrators to keep their focus on things that are of key importance instead of simply reacting to a series of “crisis” situations. In an effort to
become effective leaders in their schools, the identification of CSFs will assist administrators to structure their time towards what has been deemed to be important.

This study illustrated that this is a useful approach for vice-principals and principals in Ontario. At a time when there is a great deal of information available to practicing administrators, the critical success factors approach serves as a way to decide what information is or is not important for addressing the needs of students and staff. In this case, the school now has information that is tailored to address their current school situation. Administrators can use this information to assist them in realizing goals and objectives that are collectively embraced by the school community.

Areas For Future Research

There are a number of areas coming from this study that warrant research. A future study might focus on the views of staff at a greater number of school sites that offer services to students with normative exceptionalities. Expanding the sample may reveal patterns and themes that did not emanate from this study. Critical Success Factors could also be elicited from staff at a number of similar school sites. Parents'/guardians' critical success factors for these youngsters might also bring about information that would be useful to their progress.

In addition, comprehensive studies that focus on what and how to teach these students with a goal towards developing a consensus could prove to be beneficial. It is possible that studies of this nature would address the current disparity that surfaced in this study.

Future research is also recommended to understand the nature of leadership within these school settings. The literature indicates significant leadership challenges for local special education administrators. At present, there is a strong call for accountability. The CSF process can help leaders to focus on areas of concern that need improvement. Examples of what special education administrators are doing to reach these goals would be used by their colleagues for planning and problem-solving behaviours. A case study approach would yield rich narratives and detailed descriptions of effective leadership behaviour. The findings could result in a collection of behaviours and actions that impressive administrators display at schools which teach students with normative exceptionalities.
Lastly, this study sought to identify factors which were critical to a sample of teachers, support staff and administrators. The identified factors represent the needs of the school organization at this time. In time different issues and situations will influence the efforts of staff that work with these students. Ongoing research and analysis is recommended to maintain current insights into the work of those who are responsible for the education of students with normative exceptionalities.
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Appendix A: Interview Schedule for Participants

(Pre-Interview information included the following demographic data: gender, present position, number of years in position, number of years in present school; years within segregated school setting)

Participants were reminded of the purpose of the study, confidentiality, voluntary nature of the participation and that there are no right or wrong answers.

1. The interview will begin with questions to elicit demographic data.

2. Tell me about a successful school experience you have had while working with students with a multiple handicap (Research Sub-Question 1 & 4).

3. What factors accounted for the success you experienced (Research Sub-Question 1 & 4)?

4. Tell me about an unsuccessful school experience you have had while working with students with a multiple handicap (Research Sub-Question 2, 3 & 5).

5. What factors accounted for the lack of success you experienced? (Research Sub-Question 2, 3 & 5)

6. Tell me about goals you have for the students in this school. (Research Question 4 & 5)

7. What are your short term goals? What are your long term goals? (Research Question 4 & 5)

8. Critical success factors are defined as "the few key areas of activity in which favourable results are absolutely necessary to reach goals." An example of critical success factors from the computer industry may be the choice of market niche, technological leadership, orderly product development, service and stability and the attraction and retention of quality personnel.

Tell me about the factors that you see as critical success factors in your job at this time (Research Sub-Question 6).

What are your critical success factors relating to the following areas (you will not necessarily have CSFs associated with each area):

- Written Policies and Documents - Community Setting
- The School Building - The Budget
- Staffing and Availability of Assistance - Influences on Parental Expectations

9. Is there anything you would like to add about working in this school environment?
Appendix B: Letter to School Site Participant

Dear Colleague:

I am involved in a case study project about students who have multiple exceptionalities. Your views would provide unique insights into the education of these students. This research is part of my doctoral thesis at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The project has been approved by the School Board through the Research Department.

In addition to talking about your work at the school, I would like you to identify critical success factors that you see as necessary to work with the students. Critical success factors are defined as “the few areas of activity in which favourable results are absolutely necessary.”

I am asking you to participate in this study by agreeing to be interviewed at your school. Your insights will provide useful information about the program being offered to the students at the school. Please understand that the information provided will be kept in the strictest confidence. No names will be recorded nor will the school be identified. In names are used, they will be pseudonyms. With your written consent, you will be involved in an audio taped interview which will take approximately an hour to complete. However, at any point during the interview you have the right to withdraw with the understanding that there will be no negative consequences.

If you have any questions or comments about this request please contact me. My home telephone number is (416) 781-1879.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Uton E. Robinson
Doctoral Candidate, OISE/UT
Appendix C: Letter of Consent to School Participants

It has been explained to me that Uton Robinson is conducting a study as part of the doctoral program requirements at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto.

As explained in our conversation, by signing the form below, you are agreeing to participate in an interview about students at your school. The interview will focus on factors needed to meet the needs of students with multiple exceptionalities. The interview will take place at the school and will take about an hour to complete.

All information provided is confidential. The real name of individuals, schools and boards will not be published in the study; pseudonyms will be used instead. Therefore, your contribution to this project will remain confidential within the context of the final written thesis. All participants will receive a transcript of their audio-taped interview and upon completion of the study, the tape-recorded interview will be erased (destroyed).

If you decide not to participate or you wish to withdraw during the interview you may do so with no negative consequences. The research study will be on file with the University of Toronto as a doctoral thesis. Copies of the study will be available through the University of Toronto library.

Please complete the consent form if you have decided to participate in the research project.

Yours truly,

Uton E. Robinson
Researcher, OISE/UT

I consent to be a participant in the research on students with multiple exceptionalities in a segregated school setting. I understand that anonymity is guaranteed in the published study and that I may withdraw at any point with no negative consequences to me.

Name ____________________ Signature ____________________
(Please print)

Date ____________________
Appendix D: Terms of Critical Success Factors

**Educational Assistance**
- Volunteers
- Staff on hand when needed
- Community volunteers
- Staffing assistance
- Back-up support
- Floating Assistance

**Curriculum**
- "Art of Language"
- Change in focus
- Guidelines which are not prescriptive
- Guidelines which address the low and high functioning population of developmentally handicapped kids

**Technology**
- Computer augmentation
- Assistive devices
- Specialized equipment
- More equipment
- Computers
- Adaptive devices
- Gym equipment
- Proper facilities
- Practical work areas in school
- Shared open space

**Programming**
- Creative
- Language development strategies
- Developing independent students
- Ensuring that our student's dignity remain intact
- Transition program for graduating students
- Strong work education program
- Functional life skills
- Practical resources
- After twenty-one program
- Establishing partnerships with business
- Low pupil/teacher ratios
- Movement along a conceptual paradigm
- Focus on what can be done to the environment in order to meet the needs of the kids as opposed to viewing the kids from a deficit point of view
- Incentives
- Consistency
- Being part of a team
- Adaptive programming
- Freedom to make choices

**Training**
- In service
- The use of technology
- Improved teacher training
- Pre-vocational focus
- Background knowledge of kids
- Health issue
- Behavioural management

**Parent Involvement**
- Home and School involvement
- Cooperation
- Partnerships
- The establishment of a P.T.A
- Encourage parents to be active
- Open door policy
- Supportive home environment
- Realistic social and academic expectations
- Communication
- Expectations
- The development of routines

**Administration**
- Supportive leaders
- Visionary leadership
- Shared decision making
- Understanding of the mission of the school board
- Cooperation of the principal between departments
- Curriculum leaders
- Flexibility is critical
- Capital funding

**Staff**
- Support from administration
- Sharing of ideas
- The importance of "Talk"
- Team teaching
- Regular communication
- Interdisciplinary approach
- Shared vision
- Planning time
- The development of a net work
- Team work with consultants
- Supportive colleagues
- Can't be successful working in isolation
- Good relationships

**Health Issues**
- Medical support staff
- Health and safety issues
- Clinical model
- Physiotherapy
- Mobility issues
- Comfort level of students
- Holistic perspective
- Policies and board documents need to be followed closely
- Appropriate daily health care
- Special care for the medically fragile students
- Self Care

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Appendix E: HyperQual Computer Software Organization

The first card is a project face card that has two fields: One to enter the project name and the other to enter general project notes (such as the names of researchers, important dates and places, general notes, etc.).

The second card contains only one field that is used to enter the complete interview questionnaire or schedule. Once entered, the interview schedule becomes part of the "data set". When data are recorded in subsequent cards, the interview questions are merely indexed to the interview schedule rather than entering the questions each time that an answer is given.

The third card contains four fields and is designed as a face card for each interview in the data set. The information that can be entered in this card includes an interview number, the name of the interviewer, the date of the interview, and any general notes that the researcher wishes to document about a particular interview.

Immediately following the interview face card is the first interview data card. One card is used for a respondent's answer to one question in the interview schedule. Data cards contain four fields. These fields hold the following types of data: The interview number, the number of the question (from the interview schedule) that is being answered, notes by the researcher, and the actual interviewee responses to the questions and probes. When the data set is completed, there will be as many data cards for each interview as there are separate questions in the interview schedule.
Appendix F: Thesaurus of Critical Success Factors

The respondents identified a number of factors that they thought were necessary in order to meet the needs of students at the school. The names of these categories reflect the purpose of the research. They bring into focus an organized way to see the data by grouping them under the following headings:

Educational Assistance

The term educational assistance was used repeatedly by a number of respondents. They see educational assistance as necessary resources. Within this setting everyone can at some point be viewed as providing educational assistance. In a majority of cases where the term was used, however, emphasis was being placed on the support role that educational assistance play at the school. Their daily participation is seen as a critical factor in order to address the needs of students, staff and parents.

Curriculum

Many respondents commented on what these students should be taught. There were supportive comments for an emphasis on traditional academics and skills that will help students to function successfully when they leave school. A number of respondents believed that the current school board curriculum did not meet the needs of the student population at the school.

Technology

Staff at the school embrace technological advancements that enables them to work more effectively with this student population. A number of assistive devices were sited as being necessary. They allow the students to participate in a variety of activities. Staff is always seeking out additional technological equipment that will help their students achieve more success.

Programming

The focus of programming is on discovering ways of how to teach these students. The ultimate goal of good educational programming is to help students develop to their fullest potential. Respondents placed emphasis on the need to individualize the program for each student. There is an awareness of new Ministry of Education programs. Consideration is given to preparing students for transition from one setting to another. The program should be relevant and meaningful for the individual student. Many of these learning opportunities will be available at school whereas other can be offered at a home or in the community.

Training

Respondents see the need to receive on-going training through resources at the school. They often encounter challenging situations that require expertise from others. Work shops that deal with behaviour management strategies, health issues and the use of technological devices are seen as extremely valuable. Some respondents were critical of teacher training programs that did not pay enough attention to meeting the needs of the student they teach.
Parent Involvement

Parent involvement and the maintenance or establishment of good relations between parents/guardians and school staff were important factors. Respondents were aware of the important role that parents play in order to promote student achievement. Their insights were critical in helping the school to understand the needs of their child/ward. A number of respondents commented on the importance of having regular communication with parents and or group home co-ordinators.

Health Issues

Many respondents mentioned the need for special care of medically fragile students. The provision and maintenance of support staff personnel and equipment is an important factor at the school. Respondents talked about health and safety issues. They placed emphasis on appropriate daily health care for many of these students. The nurses at the school questioned the need for focusing on academic skills in light of the medical condition of some of the students.

Administration

The administration at the school was seen as a critical success factor at the school. Some respondents commented on the need for supportive leaders. Others mentioned the need for administrators to articulate the mission and vision of the school. A number of respondents commented on the administration’s responsibility to ensure that a culture of cooperation among staff is established and maintained. A few respondents see administration in the role of curriculum leaders.

Staff

A majority of respondents identified staff as being a critical success factor. They value a supportive collegial working environment. Specific examples of words to express this value were: good relations, supportive colleagues, sharing of ideas and regular communication. There is a feeling of empathy that is express among staff as a result of working in such a unique learning environment.
Appendix G: Focus Group Comments

Teacher comments
We knew that most of the teachers would include Educational Assistants as CSFs. They are a crucial part of our ability to run the program.
- Staff relations is critical from a resource point of view. "If you have a supportive staff you can deal with almost anything." We aren't surprised that all but one teacher indicated "Staff" as being critical. One teacher identified "Educational Assistants" which really could also be interpreted as "Staff".
- I'm a little surprised that more teachers didn't include parents as being critical. With all the talk of greater parental involvement, I though more teachers would have mentioned that as a factor. Twelve of us did identify "Parents" as being critical to the program.
- The new curriculum still does not meet many of our students at their level. "We have to modify far too much in order to make use of the curriculum materials from our Board. Many of us, however, have become good at adapting curriculum."
- Two of the teachers were surprised that more of their colleagues didn't choose programming factors as being critical. They felt that this should be the number one priority. "The teaching of skills that promote independence is key."
- On the issue of training, one teacher said, "Training gives you a level of awareness that you are able to develop once you start teaching."
Another commented on the fact that the fragile health of the students is something that's often understated. She said that, "The tentative health of these kids affect all other factors."

Administrators
- "I'm surprised that none of us saw "Health" as a critical success factor". Also, only one of us saw training as a CSF.
- Both administrators believed that curriculum, parents and staff were areas which are critical to the success of the school.
They commented that "training" wasn't viewed as critical by more administrators. One of the teachers said, "It bothers me a little that only one administrator identified educational
assistants as being critical."

-Staff is the critical factor for us. If we have good relations with staff we can help bring about greater success for these kids.

The administrator made the following comment towards the end of the meeting:

Probably one of the most significant critical success factor is the ability to maintain a sense of humour. That is the most critical thing to have when working in special education. You have to realize that you are going to have down days and up days and all the rest of it. You have to be able to laugh. If you can't then it's best for you to get out. That is a really important thing and it affects the interrelations among people.

Support Staff

- The nurse said, "I support staff in order to promote academic and social development. My job is to take care of their health concerns. If they are not healthy they can't focus on their school responsibilities."