THE PRINCIPALS’ ROLE IN FACILITATING INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS CONSIDERED TO BE EXPERIENCING BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS IN INTERMEDIATE LEVEL SCHOOLS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of PhD
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Abstract

This research examines the understandings and practices of inclusive minded principals toward facilitating the development of inclusive school environments for intermediate level (Grade 7 and 8) students who are experiencing *behavioural problems* in their schools. Qualitative interviews with 16 principals across 4 school districts were conducted to explore how these inclusive minded principals conceptualize and understand the needs of this particular group of students, and what they consider to be their roles and responsibilities as principals in meeting these needs. The data suggest that despite the number of barriers that serve to hamper principals’ efforts to develop the ideal inclusive school, there are a great many strategies principals intentionally use to facilitate change toward more inclusive school cultures and pedagogy. These strategies emanate from, and are reflective of, an inclusive philosophy that is common among participants. Principals’ individual philosophies and ideologies serve as a compass in guiding decision-making and actions that affect staff, students, and the wider school community. In an inclusive school, these ideologies are reflective of the principles of inclusion, such as the need to create a culture of care wherein *all* students feel valued, supported, and experience a sense of belonging and individual self-worth. The implications of this research toward improving the schooling experiences of
students with behavioural problems as well as other marginalized groups of learners are discussed in the context of the call for a re-culturing of schools toward more inclusive environments.

Keywords: behavioural students, inclusion, culture of care, inclusive leadership, facilitating change, re-culturing of schools, principals’ strategies
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Chapter One: Introduction

This research examines the understandings and practices of principals in facilitating inclusive school environments for intermediate level (Grade 7 and 8) students who are experiencing behavioural problems in their schools. The thesis explores how principals conceptualize and understand the needs of this particular group of students and what they see as their own responsibilities in meeting these needs. It also looks at how principals address this responsibility in schools, that is, how they facilitate the implementation of inclusive practices that are targeted for students who are considered to be experiencing behavioural problems within the school. Of particular interest are the ways and means in which school principals attempt to shape school culture and facilitate the development of inclusive schools for students who are acting out in a variety of ways and often find themselves frequently ostracized and excluded in schools.

Rationale for this Investigation

Students with social, emotional, and behavioural needs often find themselves excluded from participation in schooling in ways that intentionally or unintentionally serve to restrict, rather than to enhance their academic and social development (Barr & Parrett, 2001; McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2004). Exclusionary practice frequently contributes to a cycle of disengagement and early school leaving which has severe negative consequence for both the individual as well as society as a whole (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Foster, Tilleczek, Hein, & Lewko, 1993; Richardson & Richardson, 2003), including greater chances of unemployment and reduced lifetime earnings, poor health, delinquency, crime, substance abuse, economic dependency, and a lower overall quality of life (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 1995; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Anneke-Rummens, 2005).

Research indicates that low student achievement and academic problems often foster behavior problems, which frequently result in exclusionary disciplinary practices (such as time out and suspension) and further remove students from opportunities for academic instruction (Maguin & Loeber, 1996). Such exclusionary practices often perpetuate a cycle of failure that prevents students from gaining much needed academic and social skills.
(Costenbader & Markson, 1998) and prompts them to drop out of school (Baker et al., 2001; DeRidder, 1991; Skiba & Noam, 2001). Some research does suggest that several characteristics of schools are effective in promoting the achievement of at-risk students and in preventing school failure (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Montecel, Cortez, & Cortez, 2004; Portelli, Shields, & Vibert, 2007). Despite this research, very little is known about the specific role that principals play in developing these inclusive schools characteristics and as indicated by Ryan (2003) “comparatively little has been written in the area of leadership and inclusion” (p. 8), which makes this research timely and significant.

The present research seeks to explore how inclusive principals can facilitate the development of an inclusive school culture in which the needs of students experiencing social, emotional, and behavioural challenges are best addressed. Ryan (2003) suggests that despite trends to centralize control over schools in Canada as in other western countries:

> Principals still exert substantial influence. While their power to control school activities may be slipping in some areas, the school leaders still have the capacity to influence the day-to-day action of teachers and students perhaps more than any other single individual. (p. 8)

With this in mind, it is important that we identify ways and means by which school principals can address students’ needs and increase the educational successes of students with challenging behaviours. This research will provide principals with ideas and strategies that they may choose to implement in order that they might create more inclusive schools, not only for those students from marginalized groups, but for all students. Identifying such strategies will be of benefit to the students themselves, educators, other students in the class, as well as parents and families of students experiencing behavioural challenges in school.

This research is particularly timely as it coincides with the implementation of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009b) for schools. Within the framework of this strategy, Kathleen Wynne, Ontario’s former Minister of Education, acknowledged that research confirms that:

> Students who feel welcomed and accepted in their schools are more likely to succeed academically. We believe that everyone in our publicly funded education system – regardless of background or personal circumstance – must be welcomed and accepted, and thereby enabled to reach their highest potential. (p. 2)

The reference to *everyone* here presumably applies to those students who do not have the language or academic skills to meet the standards for performance, as equally it does to those
students who do not possess the necessary social or behavioural skills or otherwise find themselves unable to meet the standards for behavior as defined by individual school’s code of conduct. Indeed, in this very document, the former Minister also states that:

Student achievement will improve when barriers to inclusion are identified and removed and when all students are respected and see themselves reflected in their learning and in their environment. Everyone in the school community benefits from a school environment that is safe, accepting, and respectful. (p. 4)

To achieve such an outcome, the Equity and Inclusion Strategy calls upon educators to consider that “to improve outcomes for students at risk, [including those at risk because of behavioural problems] all partners must work to identify and remove barriers and must actively seek to create the conditions needed for student success” (p. 5). This research will provide us with timely information about principals’ sensemaking (Evans, 2007; Weick, 1995) and understanding around these issues of inclusion and inclusive practice. This will not only be of benefit to intermediate level students identified as at risk because of their behavioural challenges in schools, but to all students in all schools, regardless of the differences that set them apart from others.

Research Questions

The main research question under investigation was:

How do principals understand and address issues related to inclusion of students considered to have behavioural problems?

In order to explore the above, the following questions guided the focus of my investigation:

1. How do principals understand issues of inclusion and students who are experiencing behavioural problems?
2. What strategies do principals employ to facilitate the inclusion of students considered by teachers and principals to be experiencing behavioural problems?
3. What barriers do principals perceive obstruct their efforts toward including students who are experiencing behavioural problems?
4. What do principals perceive might better facilitate the inclusion of students who are experiencing behavioural problems?
Defining Inclusion

Inclusion remains an elusive term with multiple meanings in different contexts. Adding to confusion around a definition is the fact that the term inclusion is often understood or talked about in certain instances as a philosophy, in others as a process, or even as a product or outcome. In education, there are numerous explanations of what inclusion as a concept encompasses. Booth and Ainscow (Ainscow, 1999) refer to inclusion as a “process of increasing the participation of pupils in, and reducing their exclusion from, school curricula, cultures, and communities” (p. 9). Villa and Thousand (2005) suggest that “the underlying assumption, however, is that inclusion is a way of life – a way of living together – that is based on a belief that each individual is valued and belongs” (p. 10). Kugelmass (2004) suggests that inclusion is a conceptualization which is best understood as “a philosophy supporting and celebrating diversity in its broadest sense” (p. 3). This understanding, according to Kugelmass, reflects the definition of inclusion supported by UNESCO (1997, 2000), which views inclusive schools (as an outcome) as those designed to secure children’s basic human right to an individually, culturally, and developmentally appropriate education and to eliminate social exclusion. Similarly, UNESCO considers that:

inclusive education is central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies. Inclusion is still thought of in some countries as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. (UNESCO, 2008, p. 5)

Although each of these definitions of inclusion is unique, all four share one key element that links them together: their reference to the fact that these principles of inclusion apply to all students and not just select groups of students. Issues surrounding inclusion have traditionally focused on the right of exceptional students to be educated alongside their same age peers in regular classroom environments (Ryan, 2006b), but recent discussion has broadened the scope of inclusion to include other issues such as age, gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion (Boscardin & Jacobsen, 1997; Dei, 1996; Dei, 1998; Dei, Mazzuco, McIasaac, & Zine 1997; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b). This research aims to explore issues related to inclusion as they apply to one additional group that is very hard to identify and define, namely, those students who are typically considered to be acting out behaviourally in school or alternatively, those considered to be behavioural problems.


Defining “Behavioural Problem”

Although there are multiple understandings of what is meant by \textit{behaviour problem}, for the purposes of this study, I am using this label to refer to students who are identified as experiencing difficulties relating to peers or teachers, to such a degree that their behaviour significantly interferes with their own learning or the learning of others. This would include those students formally identified with the exceptionality of \textit{Behaviour} under the Ontario Ministry of Education’s criteria for such an exceptionality (Appendix 1). In addition, it would also include students who may not be formally identified, but may nonetheless be expressing significant difficulties in meeting the social and behavioural expectations within the school environment. These are the students who often find themselves in conflict and confrontation with peers and/or teachers, and may be unofficially labeled by educators as “problem students,” “troublemakers,” “disruptive,” and so forth. Barr & Parrett (2001) suggest that:

\begin{quote}
teachers have always known these kids. They have known them as disinterested and disruptive, as those students who refused to learn, as those who they thought could not learn. And they have known these students as those who, by their presence have made teaching and learning so difficult for all the rest. (p. 3)
\end{quote}

Apple (1990) reminds us that “labels, like ‘reality,’ are social constructions” (p.139) and cautions us not to adopt an un-relational focus on labels that hide the fact that the label is indeed an indicator of something beyond itself. To be effective, critical analysis must, as Apple (1993) suggests, lead to “an understanding of the sets of historically contingent circumstances and contradictory power relationships that create the conditions in which we live” (p. 5). Accordingly, he urges us to dig deeper to examine the ethical, political, and economic identities behind the labels and not to allow ourselves to use the label itself to define the student (1990). To assist us in looking beyond the label, it is useful to ask critical questions about who we are referring to and exactly what we mean by the terms we use. In this study, I refer to students experiencing behavior problems as individuals whom are placing themselves or others at risk by their behavior.

At the level of practicality, at risk is a categorization; it is a label typically attached to a wide body of students or groups of students who are not experiencing academic success in school. Students with behavioural problems who are experiencing difficulties with their
schooling, to the extent that these difficulties seriously impede their chances of graduating from high school, are considered to be at risk. The term at risk is not exclusively used to refer to students who are acting out behaviourally however. Educators often use the term to refer to young people who are at risk of dropping out of the educational system, sometimes to refer to youth who are not learning skills to succeed after graduation, and sometimes to refer to children whose current educational mastery makes their future school career problematic (McWhirter et al., 2004, p. 6).

In its broadest sense, at risk is a label that is applied to students who are “unlikely to graduate on schedule with the skills and self confidence necessary to have meaningful options in the area of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and relationships” (Bailey & Steglin, 2003, Smink & Schargel, 2004 in Ferguson et al., 2005, p. 4). Within this general frame of reference, all students who meet this rather vague set of criteria, regardless of their personal characteristics or life circumstances, may be classified and defined by this one label: at risk. There is not one, single, official definition of at risk in Ontario schools, and school districts as well as individual schools often use different criteria for the same designation of at risk. In a similar vein, the labels “behavioural” as a designated exceptionality, “trouble maker” or “problem student,” (Barr & Parrett, 2001) are all arbitrary and all bring with them a set of preconceived notions that often stereotype, categorize, and define the student in the eyes of the perceiver. Educators in one school may perceive a student’s problem behaviour as being severe enough to warrant a designation as behavioural, whereas educators in another school may perceive that same student simply as a problem student. The application of labels is contextual in this regard.

In this study, I explore how inclusive minded principals view and understand students who are experiencing behavioural difficulties and to explore their understanding of inclusive and exclusive practice as it applies to this particular group of students. In essence, I am interested in principals’ “sensemaking” (Evans, 2007; Weick, 1995) around issues of inclusion as they relate to this unique targeted group of students. More specifically, this research explores principals’ understandings of the needs of this group of learners, and as principals and leaders in the school, how they create inclusive environments that meet the needs of particular group of students. Towards this end, I explore inclusive principals’ understanding of four main aspects of their position as school principal: their role(s) as an
inclusive leader; barriers to developing inclusive schools; creating inclusive cultures for students; and creating inclusive cultures with staff.

**Organization of this Thesis**

The second chapter in this thesis provides a review of the literature that spans three central topics: the historical and current issues surrounding the identification of students as behavioural, or as being considered to be at risk because of their behavior; an overview of the myriad of factors that might be considered in order to adequately address the needs of students with behavioural problems; and research on how inclusive schools and inclusive leadership can facilitate the success of this group of students.

The third chapter provides a rationale and overview of the methodology selected for this thesis and a description of matters pertaining to data collection and analysis. It concludes with a summary of the major themes and sub themes, which emerge from the data serving as an introduction into the next four chapters (Chapters 4–7) on results of the data.

The presentation of results is divided into four chapters, the first of which (Chapter 4) describes the way in which principals understand or make sense of issues related to inclusive schools and their role as an inclusive leader. The next set of data (Chapter 5) reflects the many barriers principals describe which serve to restrict or prevent them from developing more fully inclusive schools. Chapters 6 and 7 report on the many ways principals attempt to overcome these obstacles through the leadership strategies they use that are focused on students, and leadership strategies they use that are focused primarily on staff.

In the final discussion chapter (Chapter 8), the results of the data are placed in context of our existing body of knowledge and discussed in terms of what new knowledge can contribute to our understanding of not only the inclusion of students with behavioural needs, but of the inclusion of all students. Implications for principals who aspire to facilitate the development of inclusive schools for students, staff, and community are discussed.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The second chapter in this thesis presents a review of the literature that spans three central topics. The first section provides an overview of the historical and current issues surrounding the identification of students as behavioural or as being considered to be at risk because of their behaviour. The consequences of these identifications and research on the life trajectories of such students are presented. The second section of the review provides an overview of the myriad of factors that might be considered in order to address adequately the needs of students with behavioural problems. In the third and final section, research on how inclusive schools and inclusive leadership can facilitate the success of these students is presented.

Identification of “Behaviour Problem” and “Behaviourally At Risk”

There is considerable variation in understanding with regard to the purpose and role of education and schooling. These understandings change over time, from place to place, and vary in part according to political or societal context. It might be generally agreed upon, however, that one of the central goals of education is to provide young people with the skills and knowledge they require to provide for their own means and subsistence as they mature into, and throughout adulthood, and that they have the skills, attitudes, and values required to live fulfilling lives as competent citizens. The report of UNESCO’s International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (1996) has identified four pillars of knowledge that should be emphasized through education: learning to know; learning to do; learning to live; and learning to be. Bayliss (1999) identifies five competencies that are helpful to students in meeting the complex demands that will be required of them in the future: learning; citizenship; relating to people; managing situations; and managing people. It is widely believed in Canada, as reflected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, (Section 15, 1985), that that all persons, regardless of race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability have a right to an education that fulfills his or her potential to grow (Jordan, 2007) and to develop the skills, attitudes and values identified above. This position is echoed in the former Minister Gerard Kennedy’s (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004) address to the Ontario legislature stating that the:
mission of publicly funded education and our moral purpose in schools is to ensure that all children and youth are educated to high levels of intellectual, practical, and social competence. It should not matter where you come from, but where you are going. Publicly funded education is the ladder of opportunity. (p. 1)

Although this is an admirable goal indeed, the experiences of a great many students in Ontario’s education system may not reflect such equitable and ideal realities.

For many privileged individuals in our society, education may indeed serve as their ladder of opportunity. For many others, however, their marginality positions them at a disadvantage and restricts their ability to access all of the opportunities for full participation in education, leaving them at a disadvantage and more likely than privileged peers to experience academic failure (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). In attempts to address this and to help ensure equity in schools, the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Equity and Inclusion Strategy (2009b), calls for an inclusive education system in which “all students, parents, and other members of the school community are welcomed and respected; where every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning” (p. 10). It suggests that “to improve outcomes for students at risk, all partners must work to identify and remove barriers and must actively seek to create the conditions needed for student success” (p. 5).

For some students with behavioural needs, their learning differences set them apart and at a disadvantage from their ‘abled’ peers in a number of ways. These needs typically cause them stand out from others with regard to the way they interact with, and respond to, others. These negative behavior patterns frequently:

- arouse negative feelings and induce negative behavior in others, including teachers. The reaction of most other children and adults is to withdraw from them to avoid battles…. typically they experience academic failure in addition to social rejection and alienation. (Kauffman, 2005, p. 5)

If their behaviour is extreme, some of these students eventually become formally identified and labeled as ‘behavioural’ students. With a formal identification as ‘disabled’ or ‘exceptional,’ students in North American schools are typically viewed as having learning differences that warrant special accommodations and modifications (Vaughn & Arguelles, 2000) designed to ensure success at school. In Ontario, educators are mandated to modify expectations and programs of instruction for formally identified exceptional students and
develop Individual Education Plans (IEP’s) that recognize and address individual learning differences (Hock, 2000).

Many students with behavioural problems, however, may not benefit from academic remediation or basic skills development alone, and in many cases, require a different set of initiatives and interventions that will better address their unique learning and social/emotional needs (James & Freeze, 2006). Some students experiencing significant behavioural difficulties in schools may eventually be identified as having a behavioural exceptionality and receive support services to address their needs. Most students in need of behavioural support, however, often go undiagnosed (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003), and as a result, many fail to have their needs adequately addressed in schools. More so than other exceptionalities, the designation of behaviour is a label that educators and parents alike are hesitant to endorse and have applied. Considerable stigma continues to be attached to the label of behavioural disorder with the presumption by some that the student is acting out because of ineffective parenting or because they have failed to adopt prevailing societal norms and values from their home. This allows some to conveniently place the onus of responsibility on the student or his or her life situation instead of having to look at the school environment and respond with effective and supportive interventions (Portelli, Shields, & Vibert, 2007).

Studies consistently indicate that at least 6 to 10% of children and youths of school age exhibit serious and persistent emotional/behavioural problems, but that less than 1% of the school age population are currently identified with this exceptionality and receiving special education services (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003). This means that 5 to 9% percent of the entire student population have persistent emotional/behavioural disorders but remain unidentified and/or are under serviced because they do not qualify for the support or the protection that being identified as an exceptional student would provide under Ontario’s special education legislation. Jordan (2007) points out that:

Unlike cognitive and learning disabilities, people with behavioural and/or emotional disabilities are not represented in strong advocacy groups. They tend to be hidden people in the disabilities movement, and as such, often do not have their needs adequately addressed with the support of an identification and an Individual Education Plan. (p. 75)

Without their needs being adequately addressed, many students continue to act out behaviourally and further place themselves at risk of academic and social failure. When the
behavior of these students begins to affect their academics to the degree that they are deemed not to be benefiting from educational opportunities and not accumulating the knowledge and skills appropriate to the standard for their age, they are typically determined to be at risk, or experiencing behavioural difficulties (McWhirter et al., 2004).

The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) examined several questions regarding students’ participation and sense of belonging in schools and the relationship of these factors to being at risk of not completing high school. Findings from this report suggest that:

many students are not engaged. They do not believe their schooling experience has much bearing on their future, and they do not feel accepted by their classmates or by their teachers. Gradually these students withdraw from school life, and become disaffected from school. Some disaffected students are disruptive in class and exert a negative influence on other students. (Willms, 2003, p. 5)

In comparison to other OECD countries, Canada scored slightly below average on indices of both engagement and participation suggesting that this is indeed a problem in Canadian schools. Many of these students experience frustration, act out, find themselves in conflict situations, and are sent to the office and repeatedly suspended. These students may not benefit from academic remediation or basic skills development alone, and in many cases require a different set of initiatives and interventions that will better address their unique learning and social/emotional needs.

Without appropriate supportive interventions being put into place, exclusive practices may exacerbate the challenges for students and teachers and lead to an escalation in confrontations and behavioural difficulties (James & Freeze, 2006), and in the long run, contribute to students’ reasons for dropping out of school (Baker et al., 2001; DeRidder, 1991; Skiba & Noam, 2001). Unfortunately for these students, patterns of disengagement often manifest themselves as behavioural difficulties and are frequently treated rather rigidly with a prescribed series of exclusive interventions laid down by the Ontario Safe Schools Act, Ontario Code of Conduct, and individual schools’ Behaviour Codes. Exclusive practices may temporarily rid the school of perceived troublemakers, but may prove in the long run to be counterproductive (Skiba & Sprague, 2008).

Failing to adopt a critical stance in regard to exclusionary practices may contribute to a “discourse of risk [which] has historically served more to mask the sources of educational
risk than to reveal them, often relocating the educational effects of racial, cultural, gender, and sexuality marginalization into individual, family, or community short-comings” (Portelli, Shields & Vibert, 2007, p. 2). Educators may fail to question systemic and structural patterns of events, power, social dynamics, and discourse which are in place and operating in a manner that facilitates and perpetuates these dynamics and patterns of behavior (Ford, 2003). In the absence of such a critical analysis, educators may neglect to examine their own role in the development and perpetuation of this cycle, choosing instead to blame the student or their family for their plight and position (Portelli, Shields, & Vibert, 2007). Within schools where such discourse is firmly entrenched, students with behavioural difficulties are all too often informally identified as at risk or having behavioural difficulties and are excluded from full participation in schooling in a wide variety of ways.

Exclusionary Practice in Schools

Research documents the systemic ways in which current practices frequently undermine principles of equity of opportunity and access in North American schools in terms of ethnicity (Bennett, 2001; Dei, 1996, 1998; Lee, 2002; Orfield, 1999;), social class (Coleman et al., 1996; Maynes, 2001; Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990), gender (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a; Osborne, 2001), and sexual orientation (Shapiro, Sewell & DuCette, 2001; Sears, 1993). Unfortunately, in Ontario schools as well, equity for all is not universal as many students continue to perceive that they are discriminated against when being disciplined at school because of their race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status (Ruck & Wortley, 2002.) Both physical and/or social exclusion from opportunities at school may be imposed on students with certain characteristics or those who act in certain ‘inappropriate’ ways (Ryan, 2006a). For example, students failing to show respect in the anticipated ways or those lacking the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991, 2007) or social capital (Barber, in Osborne, 2001; Bourdieu, 2007) required to successfully navigate and steer their way through the power dynamics that exist within a typical school, frequently find themselves in conflict with peers or with teachers. As a result these students often find themselves excluded from academic activities while they spend time out in the hall or at the office being disciplined (Christle et al., 2005; Hymel & Henderson, 2006). Worse off yet are those students who find themselves in conflict with teachers and
ostracized through official and legitimized forms of exclusion such as suspensions and expulsions (Christle et al., 2005; Kirkwood & Richardson, 2006).

Suspensions for relatively minor infractions are not that uncommon in many North American schools. Skiba and Peterson (1999) find that although fighting between students was the single most common reason for suspension, the most frequently reported reasons for suspensions included disrespect, disobedience, tardiness, and truancy. Studies also show that suspensions may be ineffective in preventing such behaviors from reoccurring. Skiba (2000) reports that studies of school suspensions in the United States consistently find that up to 40% of suspensions are given to repeat offenders. Instead of serving as a corrective measure and to improve student behaviour, “suspensions often become a ‘pushout’ tool to encourage low-achieving students and those viewed as ‘troublemakers’ to leave school before graduation” (Skiba, 2000, p. 13). DeRidder (1991) concludes that there is ample evidence suggesting that the very act of being suspended or expelled speed up the dropping out process. Such systemic means of exclusion may provide short-term relief for teachers and schools, but may in actuality prove more costly in the long run. According to James and Freeze (2006), “the exclusion of the offending student from the school can provide the feeling of relief for the staff. It means that the school no longer has to confront the behavior of the student: out of sight, out of mind” (p. 587). However, as Skiba and Peterson (1999) point out, “as we exclude ever higher proportions of children whose behavior does not meet increasingly tough standards, we will inevitably meet many of these disruptive youths on the street” (p. 381), where many find themselves undereducated and underemployed.

Despite such negative consequences, students continue to be suspended and expelled from schools in alarming numbers. In Ontario, 216,870 suspensions were imposed on a total of 149,167 students during the 2004–2005 school year, 76% of which were imposed on male students. Forty percent of the total number of suspensions in Ontario were imposed on elementary school level students with the remainder (56%) being assigned to secondary school students, highlighting the fact that such exclusive practice is not a phenomenon isolated to secondary school. More alarming is the finding that despite the overall trend toward greater inclusion of exceptional students in schools, since 2000–2001 (the year that the Safe Schools Act was implemented), the number of suspensions has actually risen across Ontario schools by over 25%, from 109,406 to 149,167 in 2004–2005! (Ontario Ministry of
Education, 2007a, 2005b). An even more dramatic increase is evidenced in Ontario’s schools expulsion rates which saw an increase in expulsions from 106 students before the implementation of the Safe School Act, to a total of 1888 in 2004–05 (an increase of over 1700 percent)! Of these expelled students, 90% received limited expulsions (20 days to a full year), 13% were from the elementary grades, and of the total, 85% of all expelled students were male (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).

With the implementation of the Safe Schools Act, it became mandatory for principals to suspend students for certain infractions such as swearing at a teacher or uttering a threat to inflict serious bodily harm. Instead of dealing with the student issues and addressing student needs that may have lead to the behavior, under the new provisions of the Act, principals were mandated to exclude the student from the school learning environment by imposing suspensions or expulsions. While sentiment toward accommodating exceptional learners in the regular classroom with more inclusive pedagogy was to be the norm, other student needs (such as behavioural needs) were being met with sanctioned mandatory exclusionary responses. Fortunately, recent changes to the Education Act, enacted through The Education Amendment Act, Ontario Regulation 472/07, Suspension and Expulsion of Pupils, (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b; 2009c) allow principals the flexibility to consider ‘mitigating circumstances’ in determining how to respond to infractions to The Code of Conduct and call for greater consideration of progressive discipline strategies rather than automatic imposition of suspensions.

Although suspension and expulsion statistics on racial identification, ethnic origin, or socio economic status (SES) are not publicized by the Ontario Ministry of Education, some research from Ontario and Canadian wide jurisdictions suggests that expulsion rates reflect disproportionate and inflated numbers of students from racial and ethnic minorities (Kirkwood & Richardson, 2006, Ruck & Wortley, 2002). International research cited by Ryan (2006b) reports that in the United Kingdom 8 out of 10 students who were expelled were male, and one of four of these were in foster care. Similarly in the UK, black and ethnic students were six times more likely to be expelled than were their peers, and in the United States, 15% of expelled students were white, 20% Hispanic, 35% African American, and 38% Indian, Alaskan Native.
These reports, as well as those noted above reflecting the gender biases in suspension and expulsion rates, are suggestive of deeper level prejudices and inequities within schools and society at large. Gillborn and Youdell’s (2000) work in the UK supports this contention, leading them to suggest that educational practices, reflected in part by differential suspension/expulsion and achievement rates among student groups, are constructed in such a way as to perpetuate inequalities associated with gender, ethnic origin, and social class. They suggest that through the social construction and perpetuation of difference, students are being selected, labeled, differentiated, and educationally ‘rationed’ in ways that differentially position pupils and perpetuate discourse and inequalities reflected in broader society. Many students perceive that this is indeed the case, as they see themselves as being disciplined at school differentially because of their race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status (Ruck & Wortley, 2002).

Evidence suggests that for some students (those that are experiencing behavioural difficulties for example), some Ontario schools districts are more exclusive in their practice than others. In 2004–2005 the range of suspension rates across school districts varied from 2.1% in the lowest, to a sizable 35% of the entire student population being suspended at some point in the school year (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a). Differences in rates across districts undoubtedly reflect demographics; school climate and cultural dynamics; and differential interpretation or application of the Safe Schools legislation. As complex as these issues are, one thing remains clear according to the research; When addressing the issue of behavior problems in schools, there are no quick fixes. “The complexity of human behavior defies simplistic solutions” (Curwin & Mendler, 1997, p. 11). If we hope to make any long-term positive changes in student behavior then we need to develop a range of approaches rather than merely rely on one (suspension) with dubious efficacy (James & Freeze, 2006, p. 590). In support of these contentions, this study seeks to explore these elements of inclusive practice that serve to facilitate the inclusion of students expressing behavioural difficulties in schools, rather than simply targeting their transgressions from behavioural norms and implementing exclusionary consequences.
Consequences of Exclusionary Practice: Cycles of Failure and Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

Despite the clear expectation in the Ontario Code of Conduct (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b) that all students are to come to school “prepared, on time, and ready to learn,” many students do not arrive positioned and ready to maximize opportunities for learning that a school may present. A significant number of students begin their school day with a host of unmet needs that leave them at a disadvantage. Many students lack the behavioural or social skills to navigate through the educational milieu in a manner that facilitates success in schools. Over time, and for a wide variety of reasons, many of these students find themselves marginalized within the school environment itself and experience repeated episodes of conflict and ‘failure’ within the school setting that as previously discussed, often result in being removed from class, sent to the office, or suspended. Upon their eventual return to the academic milieu of the classroom, they have typically missed introductory lessons to some ongoing academic activity and most often find themselves at a further disadvantage and alienated from the academic tasks expected of them. This, in turn, leads to “a downward spiral for both the student and the school. The student offends, then re-offends, the punishment is disconnected from the student’s capacity, needs, intent, and learning…” (James & Freeze, 2006, p. 589). This typically exacerbates the problem by perpetuating a cycle of failure that only further decreases the opportunities to gain academic skills and appropriate social skills (Constenbader & Markson, 1998), resulting in a cycle further conflict, confrontation, and suspension (McEvoy & Welker, 2000) and even dropping out of school altogether (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986).

The experience of such repeated failures can have a cyclical effect on subsequent behaviour, which is all too frequently reinforced within the school itself. Giroux (1997) states that “how we understand and come to know ourselves cannot be separated from how we are represented and how we imagine ourselves” (p. 15). How teachers interact with students on a daily basis defines this representation. Most students are aware of a teacher’s differential treatment of individual students and draw logical inferences about their own abilities from that (Butler, 1994; Good & Nichols, 2001). This often leads to their behaviour mirroring their self-perceptions; for example, they may exert little effort on academic tasks or may frequently misbehave in class (Marachi, Friedel, & Midgley, 2001; Murdock, 1999). As
misbehaviour increases, both teachers and school officials often administer even more aversive consequences that typically lead to even more exclusionary practices.

With each episode of exclusion, students risk falling even further behind as they miss key opportunities to benefit from the positive effects of school culture (Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1999; Meggert, 2000; Sinclair, Hurley, Evelo, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2002). This further contributes not only to student alienation and disengagement (Van Bockern, Brendtro, & Brokenleg, 2000), but may also lead students to come to view and identify themselves with the label of “troublemaker,” “behavioural problem,” and so forth (Barr & Parrett, 2001). Under such circumstances, “at risk students sense the teachers’ lower regard for their personal worth as learners, come to believe it, and live up to those expectations” (McWhirter et al., 2004, p. 103). This, in itself, is problematic as the identity may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, which can in turn contribute to even further cycles of misbehavior. Joiner (2000) has noted that negative attributions, when combined with negative life events, often increase hopelessness and thereby increase desperation. This may, in turn, leave students vulnerable to self-fulfilling prophecies of failure. As McWhirter et al. (2004) suggest, “school failure and social rejection may in fact stimulate behavior problems, enhance aggressiveness, and contribute to delinquent and hostile reactions by the struggling student” (p. 166). These same authors go on to explain that:

A self-perpetuating cycle or self-fulfilling prophecy is started when young people encounter situations that reinforce their more insecure, negative perceptions. They perceive things negatively and lower their own expectations. Building on these attributions, they exhibit learning, discipline, and acting out problems, or alternatively, passivity and withdrawal. When adults and peers act in an overly critical, judgmental, or punitive way, or exhibit limited caring and interest, the child is convinced that his or her subjective perceptions are valid…. This confirmation of negative attitudes increases the cyclical nature of the self-confirming process and leads to increased alienation. (p. 85)

The contentions for the development of such cycles are further supported by evidence from Rosenthal and Jacobson’s (1968) classic study demonstrating that teachers’ own expectations may contribute to this development of a self-fulfilling prophecy, exacerbating the problem even further.
When students engage in these cycles of repeated disruptive behaviour, educators often pathologize (Kugelmass, 2004; Shields, 2004b) them and perceive their shortcomings and failure to meet set behavioural standards as deficits owned exclusively by the student (Valencia, 1997). This remains the case, despite suggestions that the nature of schooling in itself may cause, or at the least significantly contribute to student misbehavior (Marachi et al., 2001; Murdock, 1999). In recognition of the complexity of issues that contribute to students engaging in such cycles of disruption, it is time to move beyond explanations that reflect a deficit mentality (Valencia, 1997) of simply blaming students, their families, and social factors for their performance and alienation from school, and turn instead to supportive interventions that may help teachers, students, and families address individual needs in the educational context.

In the sections that follow, several individual and program interventions that reflect a more inclusive approach to addressing the needs of this particular group of students are explored. Before reviewing these however, the next section provides an overview of the literature on the consequences of not adequately addressing the needs of this group of students and having them leave school early without completing the requirements for their Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma. It ends with a review of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s policy and directives in relation to reducing the number of students who do end up as early school leavers.

Consequences of Early School Leaving and the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Response

It is well documented that failure to obtain a secondary school education has negative implications related to both costs and consequences that affect both individuals and society (Foster et al., 1993). Included among these costs for many individuals who do not graduate from secondary school are “greater chances of unemployment and reduced lifetime earnings, poor health, delinquency, crime, substance abuse, economic dependency, and a lower overall quality of life” (Human Resources Development Canada, 1995). The future outlook for students who do not finish secondary school is overwhelmingly negative, with earning power, social status, and standard of living all dramatically affected (Morley, 1991). Those students who leave school early have higher rates of early pregnancy and increased rates of substance abuse. In addition, early school leavers are more likely than graduates to require
social services of various types that can extend over a lifetime (Woods, 1995, in Ferguson et al, 2005). White & Mulilis suggest (1992 in Edmonson & White, 1998, p. 43) that:

If the students who are at risk of dropping out are not identified and helped, the ripple effect may be seen throughout society in our prisons, the jobless rate, and in families that later suffer from poverty, alcoholism, violence, and neglect.

Richardson and Richardson (2003) similarly report that “studies overwhelmingly show that those who fail in school are much more likely to be delinquent… and that populations with low educational achievement are very likely to have the highest official crime rates” (p. 19). These overwhelmingly negative statistics are given a new perspective when one takes into consideration the fact that 23% of all Ontario students are leaving school early without successfully completing the Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b). More alarming is the finding that 58% of all American learners identified with emotional/behavioural disorders leave school before graduating, most by Grade 10 (Wagner, in Bauer & Shea, 1999). As noted by others, “the process of early school leaving often begins years before the actual act of school withdrawal itself, and is related to the countless events, experiences, and choices that occur throughout the life of the adolescent” (Ferguson et al., 2005, p. 44). Given these findings, it is important that educators not wait until Grade 9 or 10 to begin interventions with these students but instead focus their efforts as early on as possible in the intermediate grades (Grades 7 and 8) or sooner.

Of all of the early school leavers in Canada, one third leave school with a Grade 9 education or less, and almost two thirds drop out without Grade 10 or less, and 4 in 10 early school leavers have left school before they turn 16 (Human Resources Development Canada, 2000). Research by King (2004) forecasts that of those students who began Grade 9 in Ontario in 1999, at least 25% (40 000 students) will leave school without successfully graduating. This seems to be a relatively accurate forecast as current Ministry of Education reports indicate that only 77% of all secondary students were graduating in 2007, leaving 23% that were not (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b). These high rates of early school leaving have continued, despite the Ontario government’s targets and efforts to reduce the dropout rate to 15% by 2010. Reasons for leaving school without completing the requirements for an Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma (OSSGD) are as diverse as the population of students who find themselves in this position, but for the purpose of simplification they can be
categorized as school related, personal/family related, work related, or other (Bushnik, Barr-Telford, & Bussiere, 2004). Despite individual differences for leaving school, such students have historically been characterized as having simply ‘dropped out’ or ‘quit’ school, and were often referred to in somewhat a rather derogatory sense as ‘high school dropouts’. Research has identified a number of factors that contribute to students leaving school early including *push factors* (Kronick & Hargis, 1990), *pull factors* (McNeal, 1997) or *tuning out* (Smink & Schargel, 2004). In recognition of the influence of such factors, in Ontario, the term *early school leavers* has replaced the term *drop out* as a reference to students who do not complete secondary school.

Recognizing the economic and social costs of leaving school early, the Ontario government set new ambitious targets to increase the number of students who graduate from secondary school to 85% by the year 2010. Beginning back in 2004, the then Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004) released the Ontario Education for All discussion paper which states that:

> Publicly funded education is the cornerstone of a fair, productive and socially cohesive society. The societal gains harnessed from a strong publicly funded education system include and go beyond the ability to graduate students who are better positioned for the global marketplace. The benefits extend to improvements in the physical and mental well-being of individuals, increased citizen participation within communities, as well as higher and sustainable rates of employment. In many ways, our social progress overall is defined by our progress in education. (p. 1)

In the Education For All discussion paper, it is suggested that all students, regardless of individual background and circumstance, are deserving of such “positioning.” It specifically states that:

> The contemporary mission of publicly funded education and our moral purpose in schools is to ensure that *all* [italics added] children and youth are educated to high levels of intellectual, practical and social competence. It should not matter where you come from, but where you are going. Publicly funded education is the ladder of opportunity…. (p. 1)

This is to be reflected in a vision of schools where:

> Students are actively engaged in thinking creatively and independently; teachers and principals are empowered to innovate and are valued for their ability to address the diverse needs and talents of their students; and parents, families and community leaders are invited to participate in the school's learning mission…. (p. 1)
This vision is further defined in the statement “Our goal is to help develop the intellectual, emotional and physical potential of our children and young adults so they become the best contributing citizens they can be (p. 2).”

In a reaffirmation of the Ministry’s position on the need for a continuation of these change initiatives, the next Minister of Education Sandra Pupatello, in her May 3rd, 2006 Statement to the Legislative Assembly: Student Success Strategy Showing Results In High Schools, states:

Teachers, parents, school boards and the McGuinty government are partnering to make students a top priority…. Our Student Success Strategy is making it possible for students to customize their education and continue learning until the age of 18 or graduation. Our government believes so strongly in the strategy, that we have also set an ambitious goal to increase the graduation rate to eighty five percent by 2010. This is a big leap — just sixty eight percent of students were graduating when we took office. We have already seen some improvement with seventy one percent graduating in 2004–05. It’s a pledge to cut the dropout rate by half in the next five years…. Working together, we are making education exciting for all students by providing them with the learning choices they need to succeed. And we are building a well-educated, highly-skilled workforce that will be Ontario’s economic edge in the 21st century.

It is clear from these announcements that the present government has acknowledged that the rate of early school leavers is unacceptable and that they would like to see more students successfully completing secondary school. Recognizing this, the Ontario Ministry of Education moved forward with the objective to reduce the student secondary school dropout rate to 15% by the year 2010, and implemented the Student Success and Pathways initiatives (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003), which were in part aimed at re-culturing intermediate and senior schools and offering students support and options for their schooling experiences. This call for re-culturing reflects the understanding that many factors contribute to early school leaving including those that are embedded in the pedagogy of schooling and the nature of the programs and experiences offered to students. Unfortunately, the vast majority of attention and funding allocated for Student Success projects has been directed to students in Grades 9–12, despite the fact that these initiatives are intended to target students through Grades 7–12. A full one third of these students (those in Grade 7 and 8) have received comparatively little benefit from these initiatives, which continue to be directed toward students in secondary school (Grades 9–12).
In order to achieve the target of 85% of all students graduating from secondary school by 2010, and to ensure that students remain in school until 18 or graduation, (as they are legally required to in Ontario), the Ministry may have to acknowledge that waiting until Grade 9–12 may be too little, too late, for a significant number of students with behavioural problems. By Grade 7–8 many students are already experiencing a cycle of repeated failure and confrontation in school, and are well on their way to becoming disengaged from their schooling and dropping out all together (Ferguson et al., 2005). In support of this, Bushnik, Barr-Telford and Bussiere (2004) report that their findings “indicate that disengagement from school was underway for many dropouts by the age of 15” (p. 14), a finding supported by Ontario’s former Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004) in his statement that “Age 12 is a critical juncture, a tipping point, in a child’s life. If students by that age become convinced they cannot succeed at school, dropping out becomes a more attractive option” (p. 12). Recognizing that adolescent students in Grades 7 and 8 are at this critical juncture in their lives, the next section provides an overview of a number of programs and interventions, which are effective in preventing early school leaving by addressing the needs of students who are acting out behaviourally.

**Effective Programs and Interventions**

According to an analysis by Ferguson et al., (2005) on early school leaving prevention programs:

The empirical evidence on the effectiveness of prevention/intervention programs on early school leaving is scarce. Of those evaluations which do exist, very few are able to demonstrate program effectiveness, and virtually none link outcomes directly to a reduction in early school leaving. A specific best practice to address early school leaving does not currently exist, despite the fact that a number of programs [see for example, Barr & Parrette, 2001; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Parr & Richardson, 2005; Peacock Hill Working Group, 1991; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Slavin & Flashola, 1998; Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989] appear to hold promise. (pp.14–15)

Ferguson’s report goes on to suggest that interventive programs must be comprehensive and directed towards all facets of a student’s life, which would include not just academic but social, familial, emotional, psychological domains as well. Recognizing that students leave school before graduating for multiple reasons (Knonick & Hargis, 1990; Mann, 1986; McNeil, 1997), it is suggested that services and supports must be flexible and customized to
meet individual student needs (Rumberger, 2001) as would be the case for any formally identified student who has a required Individual Education Plan. In a review of longitudinal studies investigating academic, social and behavioural failures of students in elementary schools, Kamps, Kravits, Stolze, and Swaggart (1999) conclude that studies suggest that antisocial behaviours that begin at an early age are predictive of a developmental pattern of learning and behavioural difficulties that lead to negative, counterproductive interaction cycles with parents, teachers, and peers. To offset this trajectory, the authors call for the implementation of prevention programs encompassing multi level interventions (academic, social, behavioural) and that these programs be offered ‘universally’ to any student that would benefit from them rather than reserved for just those students who are formally identified as having serious behaviour and conduct disorders.

Schargel and Smink (2001) suggest that the range of strategies which are effective in reducing early school leaving can be divided into four categories: 1) early intervention; 2) core strategies; 3) instruction; and 4) community. Effective early intervention programs are aimed at preventing future difficulties through increasing family involvement and consist of programs such as parent skills training and early childhood education with a focus on reading and writing skills development. Basic core strategies offered to at risk students include mentoring and tutoring programs; service learning opportunities which link school and community experiences; alternative schooling options that offer flexibility to individual needs and circumstances; and programs which enhance out of school experiences (recreation and social programs). Maximizing instructional opportunities involve professional development for staff; awareness and respect for diverse identities; learning preferences and multiple intelligences; and the effective instructional use of technology. Effective use of community resources includes systemic renewal; meaningful community collaboration; career and workforce preparation; conflict resolution and violence prevention programs. In respect of individual differences, each student identified as at risk may have an intervention program tailored for him or her that best reflects their individual needs. According to Schargel and Smink (2001), however, each of these four areas should be addressed in order to ensure that a comprehensive and effective plan for intervention is developed.

Other research suggests that schools can help prevent students with behavioural problems from leaving school early by intervening with a variety of individual and program
initiatives. To counteract the risks of academic failure, suspension, and early school leaving, schools can ensure they provide a positive structure, high quality academic programs, and consistent, school wide, pro–active behavior programs (Christle et al., 2005). A quality program for behavioural students would include addressing a wide variety of both academic and social needs (Falvey, Blair, Dingle, & Franklin, 2000; Parr & Richardson, 2005; Parr, Richardson, & Scott, 2008; Richardson & Parr, 2005) so that students develop competence with academics and mastery of the social and interpersonal skills required to successfully navigate throughout adulthood. In an effective inclusive school environment, students with behavioural disorders feel respected, welcome, and experience a sense of belonging and value (Kunc, 2000) in addition to experiencing a “pedagogy of care” such as that described by Noddings (1986). Indeed this is reflected in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s new Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009b) which states that:

Student achievement will improve when barriers to inclusion are identified and removed and when all students are respected and see themselves reflected in their learning environment. Everyone in the school community benefits from a school environment that is safe, accepting, and respectful. (p. 2)

Taken as a whole, these findings can be useful to principals in evaluating their own school’s programs and interventions for students who are behaviourally at risk and in identifying areas or ways in which they can better address the needs of such students. The research conducted in this study builds on this research by investigating the particulars of how principals with an inclusive perspective on schooling understand and attempt to address many of these factors and elements identified above within their own schools. In order to understand the relationship between many of these elements and an inclusive school (philosophy and practice), an overview of the conceptual framework developed for this thesis and related inclusive school literature is provided in the following sections.

Conceptualizing Inclusion

The conceptual framework (Appendix 2) used as the basis for this thesis’s views on inclusion as both a process and a product (Ryan, 2006b). In relation to process, a principal can facilitate the development of inclusive cultures and practices through a wide variety of strategies. Many of these strategies are represented in Ryan’s (2006b) Inclusive Leadership Framework, which is described in detail in the section below titled Inclusive Leadership
Framework. This thesis research complements and builds on this framework with the identification of further strategies principals may use in facilitating the development of inclusive schools. In addition to a leadership framework for inclusive strategies, the conceptual framework used in this thesis also identifies a principal’s understanding of inclusion and of his or her role as an inclusive leader as critical to the development of inclusive schools. These understandings can be grouped into the following three areas: the way in which principals conceptualize or envision an inclusive school; the way they understand inclusive leadership and his or her role as an inclusive leader; and the variety of strategies they use to facilitate the development of inclusive cultures and practices for students’ with behavioural challenges in schools. Each of these components of the conceptual framework is discussed in the sections that follow.

Characteristics of an Inclusive School

One goal of inclusive education is to remove barriers and provide opportunities for students to actualize their unique potential, regardless of their race, ethnicity, ability, (dis)ability, exceptionality, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation (Ainscow, 1999; Kugelmass, 2004; Ryan, 2003). This should apply equally to students with behavioural challenges as it does to those from other marginalized groups. Reaching this individual potential can in part be facilitated in truly inclusive schools where every student experiences a welcoming and supportive environment that fosters the development of a sense of belonging and value (Kugelmass, 2004; Kunc, 2000). Once again, this would apply equally to students with behavioural problems in a fully inclusive school. In such an environment, exclusionary practices and barriers to success are removed in such a way, and to such a degree, that allows each and every student to develop his or her unique potential rather than be molded to an artificially imposed standard for all. Students in a truly inclusive school would be invited to participate fully in all aspects of schooling and valued as an integral member of the school community. In addition, they would experience a sufficient degree of success required to see themselves as both gaining from their schooling, and contributing positively to the overall school community.

Such schools would typically be considered inclusive schools where the vision and commitment of staff, students, and community is to ensure that all students are included to
their fullest potential in meaningful participation in the school community. In an inclusive school, all members of the school community have a sense of being welcome, of belonging, and of being valued within the context of school (Kugelmass, 2004; Kunc, 2000), and experience a “pedagogy of care” such as that described by Noddings (1986). As Curwin and Mendler (1997) suggest, “We must remember that school is for all children, including those we find unattractive, those who misbehave, and those who don’t give it their best” (p. 42). In an inclusive school, “a collective commitment to educate all children takes hold and typical students (as well as teachers) realize that ‘those kids’ do belong in their schools and classes” (Kunc, 2000, p. 92). ‘Those kids,’ include students who are seemingly disruptive, disrespectful, or otherwise acting out behaviourally in schools as much as it does to students with identified exceptionalities of other sorts. In an inclusive school, educators are called upon to treat these disruptive students in the same manner as all others: with respect, care, compassion, patience, and so forth. Many teachers may find it difficult to view challenging or disruptive students with such understanding, but as Dei (1996) reminds us:

Inclusive schooling means opening spaces for the alternative and, sometimes oppositional paradigms, to flourish in the schools. It means ensuring representations of diverse populations in the schools. It means developing broad-based curriculum and diverse teaching strategies, and having support systems in the schools that enhance the conditions for all students. (p. 79)

Part of an inclusive principal’s role is to ensure that members of the school community explore, consider, and implement such alternative and oppositional paradigms as required.

In a truly inclusive school, the principal, teachers, parents, and students work collaboratively (Ainscow, 1999; Dyson & Millward, 2000; Hunt, Hirose-Hatae, Doering, & Goetz, 2000) to ensure that all members of the school community experience a sense of being welcome, of belonging, and of being valued within the context of school. The school culture must reflect this sense of community and be extended to all persons, regardless of their cultural heritage, their skin color, whether they are rich or poor, whether their needs are formally identified or not, or whether they “come to school prepared, on time, and ready to learn” (p. 6) as the Ontario Code of Conduct (2007b) mandates. This culture of care is in part reflected in how the school understands and in turn responds to disruptive behaviour on the part of students through either exclusionary or inclusive means. In an inclusive school:

Students are encouraged to take ownership, solve problems, access supports, manage their own behavior, and to become active participants in the learning
process. Inclusion is a practice that demonstrates the value of learning while zero tolerance expropriates the opportunity for learning to take place. Inclusive schools focus on prevention of misbehaviour and the teaching of pro-social behavior. Zero tolerance schools focus on punishing consequences for misbehaviour and abdicate their responsibility to teach the behavioural attitudes and skills needed for students to be successful in society. (James & Freeze, 2006, p. 588)

Within inclusive schools these same authors suggest that:

The practice of inclusion is flexible and personalized. A variety of strategies are implemented to achieve the same outcomes for different students. Creative problem solving is encouraged, as children are viewed holistically as unique individuals defined by much more than one behavioural event, no matter how momentous.... The practice of inclusion is, inherently, a problem solving process. It involves professional consultation and collaboration within schools as well as collaboration with parents and community partners. The process focuses on planning that supports students’ need to participate successfully and responsibly within the school and community. Planned outcomes typically emphasize access, participation, normalization, full inclusive supports, and student self-management. Thus a school that believes in inclusion cannot support exclusion as a disciplinary action. (p. 588)

In summary, in inclusive schools all stakeholders collaborate to ensure that each student experiences a curriculum that is meaningful and relevant to his or her own unique life experiences. Through appropriate delivery of the curriculum, students in an inclusive school feel engaged, valued and experience a sense of belonging that has been identified as so critical to success (Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Shields, 2003b, 2004; Vibert, Portelli, Shields, & Larocque, 2002; Vibert & Shields, 2003). Additionally, inclusive educators strive toward developing practices that reflect the respect, support, care that Noddings (1986, 1992, 1998, 2002, 2005) calls for and in doing so, to build school cultures that offer sanctuary to students expressing a wide variety of needs (Bloom, 1995) including social, emotional, or behavioural needs. How this is reflected through the school culture is discussed in the following section.

Inclusive School Cultures

School culture and the climate that permeates within the school are fluid forces that exert influence in a variety of ways within a school environment. Deal and Peterson (1999) explain the evolution of school culture this way:
Cultural patterns and traditions evolve over time. They are initiated as the school is founded and thereafter shaped by critical incidents, forged through controversy and conflict and crystallized through triumph and tragedy. Culture takes form as, over time, people cope with problems, stumble onto rituals and routines, and create traditions and ceremonies to underlying values and beliefs. (p. 48)

In this light, a school’s culture may be understood as “the historically rooted socially transmitted set of deep patterns of thinking and ways of acting that give meaning to human experience” (Deal & Peterson 1990, in Villa & Thousand, 1995, p.8). McWhirter et al (2004) suggest that “school culture is determined by student involvement, teacher factors, community support, curricular focus, and educational leadership-factors that also define effective schools” (p. 64). Principals can influence the evolution of this culture but must be mindful that an inclusive culture is a shared culture, both in its development and in its lived experience. Administrators need to safeguard against manipulating and directing culture, single handedly attempting to shape activities and processes to suit their own ends. Alternatively, in inclusive schools principals must ensure that they are truly respectful of everyone’s interests, not just attempting to see that their own interests or those of other dominant groups prevail (Ryan, 2006b).

Principals have considerable influence over the school culture as they play a critical role in the development of a vision, mission and goals that reflect inclusive practice (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). Emerging from, and reflective of the school culture, a school’s climate influences the day-to-day lived experiences of staff and students in a more direct sense. In a recent study exploring the administrative influence on creating inclusive climates and culture in schools, Salisbury and McGregor (2002) report that principals are effective in making incremental changes (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987) as well as deeper changes in the culture of the school itself. In their study, changes in teachers’ attitudes, beliefs, and practices that are reflective of a more inclusive approach are facilitated by a number of processes used by principals. These included the use of reflective inquiry among school teams to promote changes in culture, and discussions about the values and implications of diversity, inclusion, collaboration, and instructional practices. Such changes do not come about on their own however, but are instead created through the diligent efforts of principals, staff, students, and community as they unearth, illuminate, and eliminate unjust practices that serve to discriminate and exclude. Such inclusive practices develop over time as staff are called upon
to critically reflect on their own practice and on how they themselves contribute to the perpetuation of exclusionary and unjust practices (Ryan 2006b), and replace these with philosophies and practices that are both reflective of and promote the principles of inclusion. A more detailed overview of many of the ways and means that inclusive leaders can facilitate change in school culture is outlined in the section that follows that highlights Ryan’s (2006) Inclusive Leadership Framework.

Inclusive Leadership

There are currently myriad approaches to conceptualizing leadership including those labeled as managerial, humanistic, distributive, transformational, emancipatory, and inclusive (see Ryan, 2003 for a thorough overview of each). Each approach varies in relation to the goals of leadership, the particulars of the process of achieving these goals, and the value placed on the contributions of members within the organization. Of these approaches to conceptualizing leadership, emancipatory and critical understandings hold great promise for inclusive schools. In relation to process, they focus on collective endeavors rather than power differentiations and the notion of one powerful individual making the difference for many. Just as importantly, they identify their objectives and do not hide from the fact that their goal is equity for all and the elimination of inequality.

The Inclusive Leadership Framework proposed by Ryan (2006b) best reflects the tenets of this emancipatory/critical tradition. It is critical in that it challenges educators to examine how institutional variables as well as an individual’s own understandings and actions serve to generate or perpetuate inequality. It is emancipatory in the sense that it seeks to educate and empower members of the school community to become meaningfully involved in initiating and directing change to reduce inequities that may exist. In the sections below, I provide a review of Ryan’s Inclusive Leadership Framework and highlight the ways and means through which an inclusive principal might facilitate the development of such inclusive school cultures. In the remainder of this thesis, I elaborate and build upon these strategies in describing the findings of this study on inclusive schools for students who are behaviourally at risk.
Facilitating Inclusion

Within Ryan’s (2006b) Inclusive Leadership Framework, principals are viewed as well positioned to influence the development of inclusive school practice through a variety of processes. I utilized an inclusive leadership framework in this study which seeks to adopt a critique of the myriad of ways in which principals facilitate the development of an inclusive culture for all students as it relates to the following elements: 1) conceptualizing leadership; 2) including members of the community; 3) advocating for inclusion; 4) educating participants; 5) developing critical consciousness; 6) promoting dialogue; 7) emphasizing student learning; 8) adopting inclusive policy making processes; and 9) incorporating whole school approaches. I briefly describe each of these components below and discuss them in the context of how they can provide a suitable lens for exploring how principals understand and address issues related to the inclusion of students considered to have behavioral problems.

Conceptualizing Leadership

It has been suggested that inclusive leadership is best thought of as both a process and a product (Ryan, 2006b). One might argue that you cannot have one without the other. You cannot have an inclusive school community if members of that community do not feel they have a voice and that their ideas and interests are indeed valued and respected. This applies equally to students, teachers, parents and community. Inclusive leadership then must be viewed as a collective process (Ryan, 2003), one which necessitates that the decision-making functions typically associated with making decisions regarding student behaviour be distributed or shared in meaningful ways. In this study, I seek to gain insight into how principals understand their roles as a leader in schools, and how this impacts the shaping of school culture and practice.

In an inclusive school, many of the traditional roles of the principal must be reexamined and often re-conceptualized in a manner that facilitates the redistribution and sharing of power and control in order to allow for greater input and representation from the wider school community. Sharing of power and decision-making in this regard does not, however, necessarily minimize the role or influence of the principal within the school.
fact, with inclusive leadership, Ryan (2003) notes that the power principals “derive from their organizational position, their experience and their knowledge, will in most cases make them more influential than any other single individual in their school communities” (p. 59). The challenge before principals then is “to use this power to ignite, nurture, and sustain a leadership process that facilitates inclusion in ways that most other members of their school communities cannot” (p. 59). This study seeks to explore how principals understand their role(s) and how they use this power (afforded by their position) to facilitate inclusion of students with behavioural difficulties.

Including Members of the Community

An inclusive community calls for participation of all of its members to have influence in a wide variety of processes that affect education and schooling. Such influence should not only be extended to administrators, teachers, and School Advisory Council members but to parents, students, as well as other community stakeholders. All school community members should have barriers to meaningful involvement removed so that they can become increasingly better informed and actively participate in all aspects of the school community. The sphere of influence may be quite broad and should include, but not necessarily be limited to instruction, curriculum, student behavior, staff development, promotion and retention, budgeting, teacher evaluation, hiring, and so forth. This requires that principals advocate on behalf of parents and community members, as well as direct their efforts toward both empowering and enabling parents and community participants (Lewis & Nakagawa, 1995, in Ryan, 2003) to participate in this regard. In some instances, principals may have to outreach and connect with their community to build bridges and network with those who might traditionally shy away from school involvement or partnerships.

Ryan (2003) notes that parents of students who are misbehaving in school may not feel comfortable or may be unable to participate in issues related to schooling that affect them for a wide variety of reasons. He suggests that single parents for example may have difficulty actually getting to the school for meetings and so forth, while still others may feel intimidated by their own schooling experiences or past experiences with schools involving their own children and shy away from contact and participation in school related activities. To help overcome these barriers and obstacles, principals must allow for a two way process
of communication and sharing, with educators learning from the community, and the community members learning about the school setting from educators (Ryan, 2003).

Recognizing the value of this two way communication and collaboration, the Ministry’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009b) has called for the development of schools where “all students, parents, and other members of the school are welcomed and respected” (p. 10) and where “all partners must work to identify and remove barriers” (p. 5). In this particular study, of notable interest are the ways and means by which principals listen to and include the voices of those affected by student behaviour; that is, teachers, the wider student population, those students who are acting out, as well as the parents of those students experiencing behavioural challenges. Additionally this investigation explores principals’ understanding of how these voices are, or are not, valued and included, as well as ways in which principals attempt to provide a welcoming environment to parents of students who are acting out, just as they might for all other parents.

**Advocating for Inclusion**

Another way that principals may use their positions and authority is to act as advocates for inclusiveness. Efforts aimed at advocacy to bring about change may be required for a variety of reasons. Teachers may not realize that their practices may be exclusive; they may be preoccupied with other tasks and responsibilities and have the mistaken view that inclusive pedagogy will interfere with their overall effectiveness as a teacher. Alternatively, some teachers may mistakenly believe that segregation and exclusive practices are in the best interest of the misbehaving student, or for others in the class, and may attempt to have students they perceive as problems removed. Principals can break down such barriers and misconceptions and advocate for inclusive pedagogy in a wide variety of ways including establishing alliances with likeminded others (Ryan, 2006b), creating cognitive dissonance, discomfort and a sense of urgency among members of the school community (Thousand & Villa, 1994), trading and bargaining with those who resist efforts and initiatives toward inclusion (Gale & Densmore, 2003), and stalling and maneuvering to counter exclusive policies (Oakes & Lipton, 2002) such as mandated testing initiatives and pressure toward improved test scores at all costs (Apple, 2001). This study explores ways in which inclusive principals employ such strategies to help facilitate a more inclusive approach.
among their staff in addressing the needs of students who are acting out behaviourally in their schools.

Such measures will not always be enough to convince some staff to adopt more inclusive practice however, and under certain circumstances the principal may have to make inclusion a non-negotiable option (Keys, Hanley-Maxwell, & Capper, 1999) even using persuasive means to bring about inclusive practice. Forceful pressure is less than desirable however, and goes against the very philosophy of inclusive pedagogy itself. Despite this, some individual teachers have deep rooted presuppositions, that is, the ethics, values, beliefs and attitudes which Hawkins (in Villa & Thousand, 1995) refer to as deep barriers that propel them to continue to participate in discriminatory and unjust practices which significantly jeopardize the well being of students. In such instances, the principal may have little choice than to rely on mandates and levers (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987) to bring incentive for change - if only surface change at minimum. This study explores how principals understand and deal with situations where teachers refuse to change discriminatory, unjust or exclusionary practices in their schools.

By virtue of their position as administrators, principals have at their disposal a number of tools that can assist them in initiating change in this regard. McDonnell and Elmore (1987) outline four generic classes of policy instruments that principals may use as mechanisms to influence or control teachers and students, mandates, inducements, capacity building, and systems changing. Policy mandates can be seen as the various “rules governing the action of individuals and agencies, and are intended to produce compliance” (p. 134). In the present context of this study, principals are able to invoke rules and policy protocols, such as those set out in the Safe Schools Act, to impose behavioural codes of conduct for their schools and institute mandatory suspensions for students who operate outside of prescribed boundaries. Principals may also rely on expectations set out in such policies as the Provincial Code of Conduct (2007b) or the Ontario College of Teachers Foundations of Professional Practice (2008) to enforce expectations for teacher behaviour, ensuring that teachers’ actions are in fact respectful toward students themselves. In addition to these pressures, principals have the authority to sanction and discipline teachers who do not adhere to the mandates that are set in policy by using the Teacher Performance Appraisal process and, as required, by invoking the services of the Ontario College of Teachers to review and
discipline teachers when warranted. Although these are extreme measures, and may be considered exclusionary in themselves, this investigation was open to exploring the principals’ use of these as tools for forcing compliance when teachers are not respecting the rights of students (in this case students who are acting out behaviourally).

Thankfully, the role of principals as advocate is not limited to policing and disciplining as they also have, by virtue of their position, many opportunities to offer inducements (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987) that might entice teachers to adopt change; in this case, to adopt more inclusive practices. Principals often have the technical, material, and organizational resources (Villa & Thousand, 1995) that can assist with implementation of inclusive measures such as making adjustments to timetables to allow for collaborative learning opportunities and team teaching; finding or creating extra time in the schedule to allow for staff development; procuring and allocating computers and other resources; and so forth. They can also offer instrumental support by helping teachers with their work, appraisal support by offering feedback or clarifying job responsibilities, and informational support by way of providing information and recourses (Littrel, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994, in Villa & Thousand, 1995). Ways in which principals offer such inducements in order to facilitate the development of inclusive cultures and practices are explored through the research for this thesis.

*Educating Participants and Developing a Critical Consciousness*

Inclusion extends well beyond mainstreaming exceptional students in the regular classrooms and brings to light issues of racism, homophobia, class distinctions, power structures that permeate the very fabric of society and culture. Foster (1989) and Smyth (in Ryan, 2003) believe that educative leadership practices should in part inform others about ways in which such unfair practices may restrict the liberties and freedoms of others and in doing so, be counter to the principles of inclusion. They suggest that leadership activities should critique the status quo and challenge others to step back from the many taken for granted practices, placing them under a microscope and subjecting them to a critical gaze (Foster, 1989, in Ryan 2003). In this specific study, of interest are principals’ own understandings of such issues as they relate to students with behavioural problems, and the
ways in which principals bring these issues to the forefront of discussion and reflection within their school community.

Raising and discussing such issues in the school community is one way in which principals attempt to develop a critical consciousness among stakeholders. Critical consciousness begins with being critical: becoming skeptical about established truths and taken-for-granted norms and assumptions. “Being critical requires skills that allow one to discern the basis of claims, the assumptions and underlying assertions, and the interests that motivate people to promote certain positions” (Ryan, 2006b, p. 114). But being critically conscious implies more than this set of intellectual skills in that it also requires an eagerness to engage in critique as well as a willingness to follow through and take action. Critical consciousness then necessitates both unveiling and acting to address inequalities that may exist. It is believed that developing a critical consciousness that is geared toward facilitating reflection on personal beliefs and professional practice would ideally lead to changes in pedagogy that reflect greater inclusiveness within school communities (Anderson, 1990; Blasé & Anderson, 1995; Foster, 1989; Freire, 2002; Grundy, 1993). Central to the discussions around critical pedagogy are several questions that seek to explore the purpose of current practices within schools (such as how teachers/principals respond to student misbehavior), the outcomes of such practice (the effects of exclusionary practices), specifically whose interests these practices are best serving (who benefits, who gets excluded, whose voices are heard, whose are silenced), and which practices are required to change in order to bring about more equitable, just and inclusive experiences for all students.

The principal has a key role to play in first becoming aware of these issues themselves, and secondly in engaging the school community as a learning community that is centered on addressing inequities. In finding a balance between pressure and support or accountability and capacity building (Fullan, 2005), principals are encouraged to “maintain pressure to be reflective about current assumptions without being confrontational in a way that merely reproduces and amplifies current conflicts” (Ryan, 2006b, p. 112). Ryan further suggests that principals attempting to develop consciousness adopt a positive stance without allowing people to be very comfortable with themselves, prompting others to reflect on the current state of affairs without producing the fear and guilt that might trigger further conflict.
Another way principals develop critical consciousness is through modeling ideal practices (Ryan, 2006b) to teachers, parents, and students. In this study, I explore how principals respond to, and interact in a respectful and inclusive manner with, students and parents of students who are presenting behavioural challenges. Principals do this in their day-to-day interaction and in the way they relate to people, but they also do this in more formal, structured ways. Through information sharing and exploratory exercises initiated in staff meetings, team meetings, Professional Development days, School Council meetings, and so forth, principals often present staff with activities geared to generating discussion of matters related to inclusive practice. Such activities might be developed and presented by a wide variety of participants from the school community, but are likely most beneficial when teachers and parents can apply directly what they have learned to their experiences in and out of school (Ryan, 2006b).

**Promoting Dialogue**

In order for schools to be considered inclusive, the ways and means through which students experience schooling must reflect inclusive practices. Within an inclusive school environment, the principal ensures that the school community fosters conditions for communicative virtues such as tolerance, patience, an openness to giving and receiving criticism, a willingness to admit mistakes, listening thoughtfully and attentively, reexamining one’s own presuppositions and comparing them with others, and reinterpreting one’s own concerns (Ryan, 2006b). This requires, in part, that dialogue is facilitated by the principal from within (Ryan, 2002; Shields, 2003) as opposed to “top down,” and that this dialogue be nurtured in such way that members of the school community want to participate and invest emotionally (Burbules, 1993). In order for participants to be willing to make such an investment in dialogue, they must believe that they have a voice; that they will have equal opportunity to share this voice; and that their ideas will be tolerated and subject to fair assessment. Ryan (2006b) likens this to Jurgen Habermas’ (1990) ‘ideal speech situation,’ wherein power, influence, and authority is suspended and participants have an equal opportunity to initiate and continue conversations, to make assertions and recommendations, and to explain his or her wishes, feelings, and desires. Ryan (2006b) suggests that for this to occur, inclusive principals may have to displace themselves as knowers and evaluators,
abandon the desire to overtly assign worth to observations; suspend personal authority; and be prepared and willing to experience vulnerability and to admit ignorance. In doing so, principals allow staff and others to be equal partners in dialogue and exchange – be it around matters related to understandings, feelings, ideas, knowledge, or the like.

Inclusive principals promote similar dialogue with parents and with the wider community in a variety of ways as well. With the tenets of equity of voice and value identified above remaining the same, principals promote meaningful dialogue by making themselves accessible and available; actively entering into the community to meet and visit members and to share positive messages; exchanging information and soliciting the same through surveys and conversations and so forth; sharing through newsletters, newspapers and meetings; and inviting participants into the school for a wide variety of events and celebrations. This study seeks in part to explore the various ways and means that principals facilitate this type of dialogue within school communities, with all members, including staff, students, as well as teachers.

Emphasizing Student Learning

One of the central goals of Ontario’s current educational agenda is the development and mastery of academics and skills deemed essential to student success in school and beyond. Inclusive schools seek to remove barriers to students achieving this success and in doing so, help every student to develop to his or her fullest potential. While there continues to be pressure to focus on academic outcomes and on standardized tests of achievement, inclusive schools are challenged to define and create a balance that views students as holistic beings and treats each student’s learning needs as distinct and individual. In exploring key questions that focus on the kind of knowledge schools favor, Bates (in Ryan, 2006b) suggests educators explore what type of knowledge and skills they value and assess the appropriateness of these biases for all students. Challenged through guided critical discussions around these topics, educators may explore alternative approaches to both instructional techniques as well as alternatives to what they teach so that the schooling experiences may be better suited to the needs and interests of students who are disengaging and acting out. Central to this present investigation is the role that an inclusive principal plays in facilitating such critical discussions around ways and means to enhance student
learning. Of specific interest are the strategies principals employ to enhance the learning outcomes for students who are experiencing behavioural difficulties that, in turn, might be interfering with the academic and social development of not only themselves, but of other students as well.

**Adopting Inclusive Policymaking Process and Whole School Approaches**

Educating participants, developing critical consciousness, collaborative policy and decision-making will be of minimal value in creating inclusive schools if the process and very core of these initiatives are not in themselves inclusive in nature. To bring about lasting and meaningful change requires changes to the culture of schools themselves (Senge, 1990). Such depth of change will not likely come about if educators simply adopt the perspectives of a given administrator or visionary who is presenting the latest fad, trend, or ideals. Principals need to ensure that approaches to exploring, defining, and implementing changes are representative of the needs of the whole school community rather than simply of the principal, a few dominant teachers, a powerful school council member, or superintendent. To rise to this challenge, principals need to involve all members of the school community in defining values and shaping policy that reflect inclusive practice. Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999a) outline the benefits of such collaboration in building a shared vision with staff and developing a consensus on commonly developed goals reflecting a school’s culture.

In a similar way, policy making at the school level must be inclusive and reflective of total community involvement in order to bring about the magnitude of commitment required to maintain enduring change. This means that representation of varying interest groups must be meaningful and valued, and that all stakeholders involved in the school community are empowered to share in the process of policy development through a variety of venues (Corson, 1996, Leithwood et al., 1999b; Ryan, 2006b; Villa & Thousand, 2000). Unfortunately, this is often not the case as many of these strategies represent little more than attempts by administrators to induce members of the school community to buy into a vision that reflects their own version of how things ought to be (Ryan, 2006b). In a truly inclusive approach to leadership all segments of the school community and all groups must meaningfully contribute to and benefit equitably from these values and vision. This study
explores the ways in which principals engage others in such meaningful participation in defining a school’s vision and developing more inclusive schools.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this literature review identifies students behaviourally at risk as those who have distinct needs that most often extend beyond mere academics and into social and emotional domains. With or without formal identification, the needs of these students must be addressed in schools if they are to experience success and continue to be engaged in learning through to the successful completion of secondary school. In inclusive schools, principals play a crucial role in facilitating the development of an inclusive culture wherein these students receive the support needed for success in school and beyond. This thesis explores the understanding and reported practices of 16 inclusive principals pertaining to issues related to inclusion and how inclusion may be facilitated in schools. The findings will add to our current research base and ideally expand knowledge of the various domains of Ryan’s Inclusive Leadership Framework outlined above. Additionally, it is hoped that this thesis research adds to our understanding of not only the philosophical aspects of inclusion, but the praxis of inclusive pedagogy as well. The principals interviewed for this study describe a wide variety of strategies they use to facilitate the development of inclusive philosophy and practice within their schools. These descriptions complement and further contribute to Ryan’s framework and add to our growing understanding of principals’ influence in developing inclusive schools.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework that guided this investigation and a description of the Critical Constructivist Grounded Theory method of inquiry selected for the gathering and analyzing of data. Details regarding the selection of participants, demographics of participants, collection of data, and the methodology used in the coding and analysis of data are also highlighted.

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry was selected as a methodology in order to gain a more detailed and robust understanding of how principals make sense of and address issues related to inclusion of students considered to have behavioural problems. Such analysis could not be obtained through quantitative analysis of statistical measures of data that removes the elements of human dynamics and interaction from our understanding. In order to gain a holistic picture of the nature and influences of school principals, qualitative inquiry that allows for detailed questioning and comparative analysis was required. Qualitative inquiry allows for a more in depth study of the role of principals “in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). This mode of inquiry was selected in order to build a more holistic picture of the needs and challenges before us and the initiatives that principals undertake to develop inclusive school cultures that address the needs of students displaying challenging behaviours. I note that this picture of the challenges before us will not be complete in isolation of other research, and recognize that qualitative research is “emergent” (Merriam, 1998, p. 155) and builds on itself with each successive research initiative. The purpose of qualitative research has historically been to explore, explain, or describe a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Keeping with this tradition, I expect that this present research will help educators to understand, develop, or discover ways and means in which they can better engage and provide for the holistic and educational needs of students’ with behavioral challenges.

It is important for me to acknowledge from the outset that the introduction of my own subjectivity and my particular personal interchange and interpretive lens (which is inevitable with all research), indeed permeates this investigation. My past experiences as a student,
teacher, parent, and as a school administrator have all left indelible shadings on the lens through which I view and interpret what is before me. As a young student in elementary school, I was quite active, considered disruptive by some, and ‘identified’ and ‘labeled’ as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. I was fortunate in that I attended one neighborhood school from Kindergarten to Grade 8 that provided a supportive community environment. In university, I studied sociology and psychology, which led me back into the field of education as a teacher some years later. I initially taught primary/junior and then junior/intermediate students identified as having behavioural disorders for seven years, and later held a variety of positions as a regular class teacher, resource teacher, and K–8 school administrator across the next six years. While teaching in the public school system, I taught the Special Education Behaviour Additional Qualifications course for certified teachers, which eventually led me to my current position as a faculty member in a pre-service teacher education program.

These personal and professional experiences working within the educational system, combined with my experiences as a parent having three children complete their schooling in Ontario, have contributed to my evolving understanding of the nature of education and schooling that I cannot, nor would I necessarily want to cast off. These experiences position me somewhat uniquely for this research as I explore the nature of leadership as both an insider and an outsider. Having professed this, I recognize that “what observers see and hear depends upon their prior interpretive frames, biographies, and interests as well as research context, their relationship with research participants, concrete field experiences, and modes of generating and recording empirical materials” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509). I do not intend to attempt to hide this fact that I am unable to completely objectify my perception and understanding, nor apologize for it. I acknowledge it, as well as my role as a “bricoleur, as a maker of quilts” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5) as it were, and leave it up to the readers of this research to exercise their rights to use their own understanding and interpretive lens in determining the ramifications of such subjectivity in regard to the limitations that this might impose.
Theoretical Framework

Historically, and possibly now more than ever, schools have played a significant role in the socialization of our youth. As the structure and nature of the North American family shifts to a more nuclear as opposed to extended family unit, and as increasing work demands leave less time for parent(s) to be at home with their children, society is relying more heavily on schools as socializing institutions to transmit the norms, values, and character traits that are deemed to be of value at the time (Hawkes, 1978; Osborne, 1999). Ungerleiger (2003) argues that in the past a child’s moral framework was developed and nurtured primarily by the family and the church but that these are being replaced by other influences such as entertainment and popular culture. Ungerleiger (2003) also suggests that this:

influence is seen in the identities, beliefs, and behaviours of the young – and in their response to education. The importance of the peer group in the lives of young people has also increased…. The decline in the family’s importance and in the influence of organized religion has increased the demands on the remaining community agencies responsible for the young. This is especially true for the public school, upon which Canadian society has become more dependent on for the moral development of children. (pp. 36-37)

Adolescents are increasingly shaped and defined by the experience they encounter outside of the family and church, interacting with peers and teachers in schools, engaging in online pursuits and with media. To a significant extent, these experiences allow students to construct a sense of themselves; to define who they are; and to develop a sense of self in relation to others and to the world around them (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). This sense of self is by no means fixed, however, and may be best viewed as a fluid sense of self that evolves and changes with experiences each individual engages in through the daily interactions and events they encounter.

Far from being a deterministic perspective, this critical constructivist view allows one to recognize the influence of external events and forces on an individual, while still acknowledging the critical influence of agency that we all possess over our own self and actions. This provides much optimism for educators as it recognizes that schools do indeed influence and play a significant role in the shaping of students’ lives and through these means, the future of our society. However, it also acknowledges that this influence is constrained by numerous structural and systemic barriers that may limit the development of
potential, and frequently do so, for certain groups of marginalized persons more so than others (Ryan, 2006b).

This understanding recognizes that individual agency is constrained by the myriad of social, political, and gendered roles through which we define ourselves or have defined for us. It further acknowledges that we are in part, shaped and defined by these forces as well as the more formal structures and processes involved in more legitimized forms of socialization such as schooling. Schools can be considered both formal and an informal organizations (Bernard, 1938) which have both manifest and latent functions (Merton, 1967), all of which exert influence on a student’s social interaction and his or her developing sense of self and positioning in society. Such influences, within the organization of schooling, can be understood from a critical constructivist lens as a combination of both visible and “invisible ways in which social interaction is ‘structured’ power wielded, and privileged interests protected in the organizational context” (Anderson, 1990, p. 40). This is in part accomplished through a series of legitimizing myths that serve to preserve social order and perpetuate inequities through institutionalization of accepted practice and legitimization of the status quo (Anderson, 1990, p. 42). Several critical approaches to educational administration have emerged that offer a more detailed explanation of this perspective (Bates, 1980; Foster, 1986; Sirotink & Oakes, 1986). In recognition of this, educators must be forever vigilant with regard to their role in socializing students. Educators must ensure that they allow all students the freedom to reach their potential without limits and constraints placed upon them by external forces and parameters.

Reaching individual potential, I would argue, is only achieved in truly inclusive schools where every student experiences a welcoming and supportive environment that fosters the development of a sense of belonging and value. In such an environment, exclusionary practices and barriers to success are removed in such a way, and to such a degree, that allows each and every student to develop to their fullest potential regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, socio economic status, color, race, religion, ethnicity, or (dis)ability. In order to create such an inclusive environment for all students, we must adopt a critical lens that propels us to ask questions about the legitimacy or our current policies, objectives, and methodology as educators (pedagogy and practice). Reflective of this, the social justice paradigm described by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004 cited in Cambron-
McCabe & McCarthy, 2005) calls upon educators to engage in ongoing practiced reflexivity, and dig beneath the surface of their actions to answer the following questions:

1. What are we doing?
2. Why are we doing it?
3. How are our values evident or not evident in our practice?
4. How is what we are doing affecting all students?
5. Is what we’re doing privileging one group of students over another?
6. Is what we’re doing working for all students, why or why not?
7. Are our practices transparent?
8. Is our leadership transparent? (p. 3)

A critical perspective applied to education promotes social justice with the aim of improving the opportunities for those who are marginalized or otherwise oppressed through schooling. This is accomplished in part by acknowledging that patterns of exclusion, privilege, and differential treatment result in inequities that affect the way individual students experience their schooling. It is through this critical lens that educators can begin to unmask and eradicate these social practices, intuitional structures, hierarchies, and discourses that create or perpetuate existing inequities.

This critical paradigm further calls upon school leaders to take up the role of transformative intellectuals, public intellectuals, or critical intellectuals; that is, individuals who engage in critical analysis of conditions that perpetuate historical inequalities in schools and who work to change institutional structures and cultures (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). The principal has a pivotal role in this regard in bringing about this critical awareness among staff through the development of a critical consciousness (Anderson, 1990; Blasé & Anderson, 1995; Foster, 1989; Ryan, 2006b) that propels staff to ask questions of themselves about beliefs and practices that lead to more equitable and just practices in education and society in general.

Following the lead of other researchers, this study intends to:

- go beyond the classroom to ask questions about the historical forces shaping societal patterns as well as the fundamental issues and dilemmas of policy, power and dominance in institutions, including their role in reproducing and
reinforcing inequities such as those based on gender and race. (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 6)

In this specific study, the inequities identified are those perpetuated on those marginalized within the school community because their behaviour is incongruent to the established and prevailing norms.

On a more micro scale, this research critically examines patterns that serve to inequitably exclude or otherwise restrict opportunities for students acting out in schools. It involves an exploration of the ways in which schools act in ways as socializing institutions for students in Grades 7 and 8 and effectively serve to intentionally or unintentionally, implicitly or explicitly, categorize, label, and often exclude students (such as those considered behavioural problems) when such students experience difficulties in complying with and adhering to norms that dictate rules, routines, and teacher expectations. Reflecting a critical view (see Apple, 1999, 1990; Corson, 1998; Foster 1989; Foucault, 1980; Freire 1974, 1998, 2002), I suggest that such labeling occurs through the application of power, control, and authority that is exercised in a manner that maintains the status quo “through the minutiae of the day-to-day reinforcement of the dominant construction of organizational reality” (Anderson, 1990, p. 49). Of interest in this study are the official and unofficial ways in which students who are experiencing behavioural difficulties in school are perceived and understood by administrators and teachers. Also of primary interest are the ways in which the principal influences these understandings in order to more effectively address the needs of students with behavioural problems. In contrast to practices that inhibit inclusion (in both specific and broadest sense), there are many ways in which schools, and principals in particular, promote inclusive practice and pedagogy. In doing so, they enhance opportunities for individual expression and success and best facilitate the development of all students in reaching their unique individual potentials. How such practice and pedagogy is understood and promoted by inclusive principals is a focus of this study.

Critical Constructivist Grounded Theory

Interviews were conducted as a form of inquiry, based on a constructivist approach to grounded theory that is informed by critical inquiry (Charmaz, 2005). There are several reasons why I chose to rely on the application of this more recent advancement of this methodology, one being that with its recent modifications it now more closely aligns with the
goals of social justice inquiry. The constructivist position (see also Charmaz, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006; Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001) challenges earlier objectivist and positivist underpinnings and assumptions and offers a systematic approach to inquiry that fosters integrating subjective experience with social conditions in any analysis (Charmaz, 2005). A constructivist grounded theory:

adopts grounded theory guidelines as tools but does not subscribe to the objectivist, positivist assumptions in its earlier formations. A constructivist approach emphasizes the studied phenomena rather than the methods studying it… and takes a reflective stance on modes of knowing and representing studied life. That means giving close attention to empirical realities and our collected renderings of them – and locating oneself in these realities. (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509)

Such an approach further recognizes that “what observers see and hear depends upon their prior interpretive frames, biographies, and interests as well as research context, their relationship with research participants, concrete field experiences, and modes of generating and recording empirical materials” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509). Recognizing the inevitable influence of self in qualitative research of this nature does not constrain the value of its findings if these are understood not as truths, but rather as understandings and representations of realities as constructed by individuals.

Within the critical constructivist tradition there is much attention given to the understanding of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ as we perceive it to be. I have acknowledged my bias and recognize it in representing the views of others. “We can claim only to have interpreted a reality, as we understood both our own experience and our subject’s portrayals of theirs” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523). This understanding arises through one’s research over time as “the grounded theorist’s analysis tells a story about people, social processes, and situations. The researcher composes the story; it does not simply unfurl before the eyes of an objective viewer” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522). This telling of a story unfolds as researcher attempts to:

…find what research participants define as real and where their definitions of reality take them. The constructivist approach also fosters our self consciousness about what we attribute to our subjects and how, when, and why researchers portray these definitions as real… each is a rendering, one interpretation among multiple interpretations, of a shared or individual reality. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523)

Recognizing the existence and legitimacy of this individual interpretation:
A constructivist grounded theory distinguishes between the real and the true. The constructivist approach does not seek truth-single, universal, and lasting. Still, it remains realist because it addresses human realities and assumes the existence of real worlds….We act within and act upon our realities and worlds and thus develop dialectic relations among what we do, think, and feel. The constructivist approach assumes that what we take as real, as objective knowledge and truth, is based on our perspective. (Schwandt, 1994 in Charmaz, 2000, p. 523)

Additionally, data collected through research does not simply provide a window on reality, rather the “discovered reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts… (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524)

Acknowledging this, I am mindful of the limitations inherent in my role as researcher to uncover the truth as it is represented, and cautious not to suggest that my interpretation reflects reality for all. Indeed, I am reminded once again that “Researchers’ attention to detail in the constructivist approach sensitizes them to multiple realities and the multiple viewpoints within them; it does not represent a quest to capture a single reality” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523). In qualifying my interpretations, as does Charmaz, I have, in my understanding, developed:

conditional statements that interpret how subjects construct their realities. Nonetheless, these conditional statements do not approach some level of generalizable truth. Rather, they constitute a set of hypothesis and concepts that other researchers can transport to similar research problems and to other sustentative fields. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524)

My intent is not to unveil some ideal truth but rather to present an analysis that helps to inform us of people, social processes, and situations. In this case, the interviews inform us of the principals’ individual understanding of their unique role in creating inclusive environments for students with behavioural problems at school. These understandings have in turn been strung together to form a tapestry, which I, as the researcher compose. This composed story as it were, has come together in the form of this thesis itself, and will hopefully serve to inform others interested in the field of inclusive leadership and of best practices toward facilitating the development of inclusive schools.
Research Questions

The main research question under investigation was:

How do principals understand and address issues related to inclusion of students considered to have behavioural problems?

In order to explore the above, the following questions guided the focus of my investigation:

1. How do principals understand issues of inclusion and students who are experiencing behavioural problems?
2. What strategies do principals employ to facilitate the inclusion of students considered by teachers and principals to be experiencing behavioural problems?
3. What barriers do principals perceive obstruct their efforts toward including students who are experiencing behavioural problems?
4. What do principals perceive might better facilitate the inclusion of students who are experiencing behavioural problems?

Data Collection

Principal Interviews: Purposeful Sampling

I interviewed sixteen principals in five school districts; three were in Northern Ontario and two districts were in Southern Ontario. Four of the five districts of education were English public school districts, with the fifth being English separate. Potential participants were selected on the basis of recommendations from the group of principals and superintendents who I know professionally. Following discussion and briefing, principals who were considered to have met the following criteria were invited to participate in interviews:

1. Principals who have had experiences in transitioning to a school climate that reflects principles of inclusion (specifically as this relates to acting out students);
2. Principals of schools that have evidence of high inclusivity of students at risk/acting out (lots of challenges but low suspension rates);
3. Principal reputation (as determined by superintendent and principals) as promoting an inclusive philosophy as reflected in school climate and practices;
4. Willingness of principal to participate in and volunteer for the study.
Deliberately selecting schools and principals that meet the above criteria was deemed to be appropriate to fulfill the needs of the research, given that its purpose was to explore understandings and practices of inclusive principals. Such sampling methodology is accepted practice under the circumstances. Creswell (2007) explains that:

An important step in the process is to find people or places to study and to gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they will provide good data. A closely interrelated step to the process involves determining a strategy for purposeful sampling of individuals or sites… that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under investigation. (p. 118)

Principals in each district were invited to participate through personal contact (phone call) in which I briefly outlined the purpose of the study. This contact was followed up with an e-mail describing the particulars of the study in more detail and inviting the potential participant to contact me if they had any questions or if they were interested in pursuing the opportunity to participate further in the research.

The principals interviewed have an average of 24.4 years of experience as educators, working as teachers, resource teachers, co-ordinators, consultants, or principals for districts of education. The overall total number of years of experience each participant has as an educator ranges from 10 to 38. The average number of years experience as an administrator is 11.3 years. The principal with the least number of years experience has been an administrator for 4.5 years and the principal with the most number of years experience had been in the capacity of principal for 32 years. Almost all of the principals interviewed for this study have been administrators in several schools during their careers. Many principals have experience in schools that offer classes from Kindergarten to Grade 8; others are administrators in middle schools with a Grade 7 and 8 complement only. Still others have experience in schools offering classes for students in Grade 7 through to Grade 12. Almost all of the schools that principals were employed in at the time of the interviews were in comparatively small centres with populations under 60 000 people, although two are working as administrators in major metropolitan centers with populations ranging from 700 000 to 2 million people. Of the participants, several have experience as a principal in both rural schools that service a wide geographical area, as well as experience in schools in larger urban schools. In one instance, the principal was responsible for supervising two schools, one of which has a relatively small population of 90 students. At the other extreme, one principal
teaching in a metropolitan inner city was supervising a school with approximately 900 students.

In the Northern schools, most principals report on the notable proportion of First Nations and Métis students as well as the high number of students coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In one instance, a principal currently in a Grade 7/8 school indicates that 47% of his students come from single parent families and that within these, 98% of those families were single mother families. In the two large metropolitan centers, diversity represents itself primarily through socio economic status as well as through the high population of new immigrants and students of ethnic minority.

Principals were recommended and invited to participate in this study based solely on the criteria listed previously. By no intentional design on the part of the researcher, seven of the principals interviewed are male, and nine are female. Participant quotations used in this thesis have been selected because they are considered to be the most representative or the best example of the point being highlighted. The best quotes speak for themselves and have been selected on this basis alone. For the purposes of reporting of data in this thesis, all principals, teachers, students, agencies, schools and districts have been given pseudonyms. There is no intentional effort on the part of the researcher to select quotes specifically from any one individual regardless of their gender, age, position, or status (member of a visible minority).

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, discussing the key questions listed above and sub questions (see Appendix 3) lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Semi-structured interviews were considered appropriate for this study because they provided for a fluid dialogue which allowed the researcher flexibility to explore a participant’s comments in more detail where appropriate. Such in depth dialogue and exploration could not have been facilitated through survey or questionnaire, document or statistical analysis. All but two of the sixteen interviews were conducted at the principal’s school, at a date and time the principal determined to be convenient. Most were scheduled during the school day with a few being held after the students’ dismissal. One interview was conducted by means of a
telephone conference call and another was conducted in the researcher’s office at Nipissing University.

Initial demographic information regarding years of teaching, years as an administrator, number of schools, overview of school demographics, and so forth, was gathered. Sub-questions were used as a bank of possible questions to draw upon, in recognition of the fact that the interviews were semi-structured and the questions were to be reflective of the participants’ responses. Interviews were recorded for later transcription using a mini cassette tape recorder with an external microphone. All necessary University of Toronto as well as school district ethics approval was obtained prior to interviewing and consent forms were completed and maintained. All tape recordings are kept in a locked filing cabinet and transcripts are being kept on file on the researcher’s password protected computer.

It was noted at the outset of the interviews that if a situation arose in the school and the principal being interviewed needed to address a matter, then we could simply pause the interview and resume thereafter. There were only two instances where the interviews were interrupted – both times due to student related issues. In the first instance a student was apparently angry and had fled from the school. The principal and teacher who notified him of the occurrence discussed the incident briefly, and they agreed on a response. The teacher went to inform parents and the interview resumed. In the second instance a disruptive student was sent to office and the principal took a moment to have a discussion with him and organize the student with some work at a table outside the office. The student remained there for the duration of the interview without further incident.

In reference to the interviews themselves, in acknowledgment of my intentional and unintentional role as a participant in these interviews, I accept the contention of Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006) that:

The researcher need not minimize his or her interest or investment in the issue on the pretense of remaining objective. While stating research questions in ways that predict or prejudice answers is best avoided, the more familiarity the researcher has with the issue, the better the potential understanding of it she or he will have. Researchers who are passionate about their area of interest can offer interesting and insightful knowledge and go on to inspire others to investigate the issue further. (p. 37)
While not truly a collaborative participant as defined by Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006), I nonetheless did participate in the flow and direction of interviewing and, and took the liberty of probing and questioning in ways that hopefully inspired further investigation and discussion of issues from the participant’s viewpoint. In support of such participation, Fontana and Frey (2003) state that “interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in interactions with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place” (p. 90–91). In a similar vein, Schwandt (1997) states, “It has become increasingly common in qualitative studies to view the interview as a form of discourse between two or more speakers… in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent” (p. 79). I trust my participation in discourse in this regard resulted in the collection of data that was richer and more robust than it would have been otherwise.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the principal interviews has been analyzed in acknowledgment of the assumptions that “data analysis is not off-the shelf; rather, it is custom built, revised and ‘choreographed’” (Huberman & Miles, 1994, in Creswell, 1998, p. 142) and that “the categories, concepts, and theoretical level of an analysis emerge from the researcher’s interactions within the field and questions about the data” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522). I also acknowledge that “conceptual categories arise through our interpretations of data rather than emanating from them or from our methodological practices… [and as such] our theoretical analyses are interpretative renderings of a reality, not objective reporting of it” (Charmaz, 2005 pp. 509-510). I am reminded once again that “researchers’ attention to detail in the constructivist approach sensitizes them to multiple realities and the multiple viewpoints within them; it does not represent a quest to capture a single reality” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523). In essence, what I, as researcher, am attempting to do is to “create or adapt concepts relevant to the data rather than to apply a set of pre-established rules” (Dey, 1993, p. 58, in Merriam, 1998 p. 165) that help to explain the principal’s role in creating inclusive climates and practices within their school.
Charmaz (2005) contends that “critical inquiry attends to contradictions between myths and realities, rhetoric and practice, and ends and means,” and that “studies can show how inequalities are played out at interactional and organizational levels” with researchers defining “how, when, and to what extent participants construct and enact power, privilege, and inequality” (pp. 512–513). It was my intent, as is the intent of critical inquiry in general, to generate “an abstract analytical schema of such phenomenon that relates the particular situation. This situation is one in which individuals interact, take actions, or engage in a process in response to a phenomena” (Creswell, 1998, p. 56). In this particular study, the interactions, actions, and processes are encompassed in the phenomena of a principal’s influence on the development of inclusive schools and pedagogy. Once the data was collected and transcribed, it was coded and analyzed in consideration of the categories under investigation as presented in my Conceptual Framework (Appendix 2). I attempt to identify themes that emerged from the data, recognizing that I am not able to approach the data with absolute objectivity and that my own lens filtered my interpretation and development of themes. These themes will hopefully be useful in helping to define or redefine a framework from which to interpret the data and guide future investigations.

The process of data analysis for interviews followed the process outlined by Creswell (2007, 1998). I used open coding to form initial categories of information about the phenomena being studied by segmenting information and making categorical notes on transcripts using the bubble comment function on track changes in Microsoft Word. This phase was followed by axial coding techniques wherein I assembled the data in new ways and into new emerging categories after open coding. I looked for and identified emerging central phenomena and explored the interconnections between several of the categories, causal conditions, specific strategies, contexts and any intervening conditions. In the last phase, selective coding, I attempted to identify a “story line” and write a story that integrates the categories in the axial coding model. It is in this last phase that conditional propositions or hypothesis have been articulated and presented in the discussion chapter of this thesis (See Creswell, 1998, p. 57, pp. 150–152 for a detailed description of the above processes).
Limitations

As with any research, there are a number of factors and conditions that serve to impose limitations on the findings and implications of the study. One of the most significant of these limiting factors is the relatively small sample size (n = 16) of the participant population interviewed. This sample size limits us from generalizing to the larger population of principals in the field and suggests that further study with a larger sample would be useful if generalization is desirable. In addition, this study focused on principal’s experiences with students with behavioural challenges and did not look at the inclusive needs of other marginalized groups of individuals such as students of color, diverse sexual orientations, racial or ethnic minority groups. To extrapolate these current findings and assume that they would be similar with groups of students would be methodologically unsound. These findings are however useful in drawing comparisons between the present findings with behavioural students and other research that has investigated similar variable in other marginalized populations of intermediate level students.

As no valid and reliable test measure was administered to participants, the researcher cannot say with certainty that the principals interviewed are “inclusive principals”. They were reportedly inclusive in theory philosophy and approach, and identified by colleagues, superintendents, and/or the researcher as having a reputation of being inclusive, but this was no opinion of their degree of inclusivity solicited from students, parents or teachers. Although these reports would themselves be wrought with subjectivity, triangulation and confirmation of the validity of the reports to inclusivity would add to the rigor of this research.

The reports from principals themselves are recognized as self reports and as such, carry the potential for bias and subjectivity and possibly even deceit (knowingly or undescribed to the participant themselves). There is the possibility that some degree of error is introduced by the principals telling the researcher what he/she thinks they want to hear. Alternatively, bias may be introduced when the principals share textbook perspectives which they believe may make them appear well informed and competent. These expectancy effects and self reports were minimized by refraining from informing the participants of the details of the study and questioning prior to interviewing them. This allowed for minimal mental
preparation or rehearsing on the part of the participant and forced a higher degree of natural responses.

Although the focus of this study was on principals experiences with intermediate level students in grade 7 & 8, many of the principals interviewed had experiences as principal in both primary/junior divisions and high schools as well. It was requested that principals focus on their experiences in 7 & 8 level schools but to completely isolate their experiences in this way would be an impossible task. Some self-reports of high school or primary/junior experiences were evident in the data. Although this contamination was minimal it places restrictions on generalization of these findings to divisions other than the Intermediate level. Again, what may work well as an inclusive strategy in grade 7 & 8 may not be effective or inclusive in primary schools or high schools. Similarity, the needs of students in grade 7 & 8 may not be understood as the same needs of students in other divisions. Generalizing these findings to other divisions should be done cautiously keeping the need to check for reliability in mind. Further investigation or comparisons of this research to findings of similar research at these levels would be beneficial to expanding the knowledge base in this field of inquiry.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have introduced the rationale behind the adoption of the Critical Constructivist Grounded Theory as a method of inquiry and highlighted the process I went through in selecting participants, collecting and analyzing data. As a foundational process, this methodology is critical to all the findings that emerge from this research. The potential limitations outlined are meant to inform and guide the reader with his/her interpretation and application of the findings as presented throughout this thesis.

The chapters that follow provide an overview of the major themes and subthemes that have emerged from the data analysis. Four major themes predominated principal responses: 1) their understanding/sensemaking of Inclusive Schooling and Leadership and what this entailed; 2) the barriers that hinder efforts to facilitate the development of inclusive schools; 3) the descriptions of the leadership strategies they employ that are directed toward students; and lastly, 4) the leadership strategies that they employed that are directed toward facilitating staff to be more inclusive in their approach to students with behavioural concerns. Each of these themes has a number of sub-themes that address components or strategies that are all
related to the major theme within which it is grouped. It is interesting to note, however, that many of the sub themes emerge across several of the thematic categories, that is, the principles of inclusion and similar strategies may apply and may be utilized with both staff and with students for example. This highlights the nature of an inclusive school, that there exists certain aspects of equality that transcend positioning and power, and that all persons have equal shared rights and responsibilities and should be treated in similar ways (with regard to respect for example).
Chapter Four: Principals’ Understandings/Sensemaking of Inclusive Schooling and Leadership

It is important to have an understanding of what inclusion might look like (i.e., vision of an inclusive school), if one is to attempt to move closer to developing that reality. How educators individually come to understand inclusion however will be greatly influenced by our own unique history, backgrounds, beliefs, work experiences, role identities, and group affiliations (Evans, 2007). These aspects of ourselves influence what we emphasize, downplay, or ignore, in words, actions, behaviours, and decisions we make (Evans, 2007) in our professional lives at school, as well as in our personal lives. Based on the works by Spilane et al. (2002) and Coburn (2001), Evans (2007) suggests that we consider the “importance of individuals’ specific and unique worldview, which interacts with the contexts and the cues people receive and enact to help them frame information in ways that make sense to them” (p. 162). This act of making meaning, of sensemaking (Evans, 2007, Weick, 1995) “is generally understood to be the cognitive act of taking in information, framing it, and using it to determine actions and behaviours in a way that manages meaning for individuals” (Evans, p. 161). In the present research endeavor, in order to ascertain what principals understand about inclusion – their sensemaking, as it is – participants were asked in part to describe what they understand the purpose of schools to be; what they understand the needs of students to be and how we can best address these in an inclusive school; what inclusive leadership entails; and what they envision an ideal inclusive school culture will look like in their school. What follows in this chapter is a compilation of these understandings: the statements of beliefs and awareness that inclusive principals share based on what they see and what they do day to day, and how they come to understand and articulate this.

Principals’ Understanding/Sensemaking of the Purpose of Schooling: Teaching “The Whole Person”

When principals were discussing their understanding of the purpose of schooling, one frequently cited phrase was the reference to educating the whole person. This most often entails a conceptualization of purpose that extends far beyond mere academics, encompassing the social, emotional, and psychological well being of students as well.
Although inclusive principals agree that academics are important (particularly references to literacy and numeracy), it is acknowledged that unmet social, emotional, and physical needs often impair learning and that education in an inclusive school seeks to attend to these non-academic aspects of a person’s life as well. As Cilla suggests:

They [students] do need to do well in school, to the best of their ability, but they have to have all of the tools. And if they aren’t there emotionally or socially, we have to bring them along, because if not, we have failed.

This reference highlights the understanding that schools have a responsibility to teach much more than academics and if the other needs of students are not addressed, then educators have failed them. A second principal (Dale) echoes this perspective, suggesting that:

The academic is important; there is no question about it. But sometimes the reality is that some kids are not in the position because of the baggage that they’re carrying and the experiences they’ve had, to benefit from the academic feats. So it’s working in concert with all those things that promote the academic learning. I think it’s a recognition that we are talking about, you know a total person here...

Dale further explains that in order to function in society, a person needs skills and characteristics other than those that might be gained through mere academic pursuits:

Someone once said that if you want us to raise literacy skills, that’s the easiest thing in the world to do, that’s all we’ll do, no problem. If, however, we believe we have a responsibility in terms of developing qualities and characteristics and skills and knowledge that will benefit individuals in terms of their capacity to function in society, the game is much bigger than that. It just seems to me that an inclusive school looks at that totality. It doesn’t underemphasize the academics, but there [is a] recognition that with academics, you may have to be a little more patient than with others.

Even when students’ needs go far beyond academics and necessitate a broad spectrum of interventions and instruction, Raymond states he has a moral and ethical responsibility to address these needs:

There are a wide range of students with behaviour needs. Attention, to me, is a huge one; kids with behavioural problems are sometimes attention seeking. Other times, they have some social deficiencies that they need support with. They don’t know how to respond to their peers, they are too aggressive, or too reactive if someone says something to them. A large part of the improvement plan is educating a full child.... If we were just looking at EQAO scores, we teach literacy, numeracy, and problem solving, and away we go. That’s not what we focus on, we focus on the full child and we think that it’s very important to do that... To finish off the question, should we deal with these
things? Absolutely. Do we have a responsibility, morally, ethically to deal with those situations where kids are having those difficulties? Absolutely.

While high academic achievement and increased EQAO scores remain as goals, principals acknowledge that it is critical to attend to a myriad of student needs ranging from nutrition, security, safety, sense of belonging, and of feeling valued in the school, as precursors to enhancing student learning and outcome. In order to offer this type of holistic education, numerous principals suggest that as educators they are called upon to attend to several of a student’s more basic needs (i.e., food, and safety) as a precursor to even beginning to address the academic success. For example, Ashley maintains that, “We are feeding the kids, taking on or looking after their social, emotional needs, as well as their academic needs... because the need exists.” Addressing the diverse nature of these needs is understood not as ‘going above and beyond the call of duty,’ but rather as a moral responsibility that inclusive educators are called to fulfill in order to ensure that students reach their full potential. Students are seen as reaching this potential when they have these basic needs met and are able to best position themselves to capitalize on opportunities for learning that school provides them with.

It is also noteworthy that two principals, Stephen and Dale, comment directly on their understanding of their responsibilities as being there to serve the students as opposed to simply acting as servants for the Ministry of Education and improving EQAO scores. Stephen clearly views serving students as his mandate: “You see, we’re here to serve the students. You’re not teaching curriculum, you’re teaching students.” Dale states that “There is a sense of purpose in so far as the vast majority of the people in the building believe that the reason they're there is for the kids in the building.” This sense of purpose is reflected in a teacher’s willingness to do what it takes to assist each and every student in ensuring their needs are addressed, even if the students do not “come to school prepared, on time and ready to learn” (p. 6) as the Ontario Code of Conduct (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b) dictates.

Understanding/Sensemaking of Student Needs, Student Behaviour, and an Inclusive Schools’ Response

Principals have much to share about their understanding of student needs. They consistently note that they consider the whole child and that needs went far beyond
academics, especially for students with difficulties. This understanding of needs in turn guides their interpretation of student behaviour. While recognizing the fact that every adolescent is a complex and unique being, principals identify clusters of student needs which they suggest are characteristic of the students whom present behavioural challenges. The principal’s responses to their understanding of student needs can, for the most part, be categorized into one of the following three areas of need: 1) basic physical needs; 2) emotional/psychological/social needs; and 3) academic/instructional needs.

**Basic Physical Needs**

Almost all participants acknowledge that student learning is impeded when students are distracted because their basic needs such as those for food, comfort, and adequate sleep, are unmet. Beth comments that:

> It's not just about the academics; it's about the whole child.... there’s a need there so they fill it.... Whatever label or whatever they come with they are still children and children need to be nurtured, they need to be happy.... It’s our job to make the whole child happy. It’s very important that they learn to read and write. I mean that’s critical. But you can’t teach a child to read or write if they are hungry or if they are cold because they have holes in their shoes.

Cilla suggests that students’ “needs - mentally and physically - have to be met before their educational needs, because if they are a mess they are not going to learn.” Inclusive principals acknowledge that a great many students come to school each day hungry, without adequate sleep, and without having the security of knowing what their night at home that evening will have in store for them. As inclusive leaders, these principals understand the importance of responding to these basic needs and see this as of paramount importance to precursors of learning.

**Emotional/Psychological/Social Needs**

Almost all of the inclusive principals interviewed commented on the need for students to have a sense of belonging, of being valued at their school, and of generally feeling comfortable, safe, accepted, and happy. Once again, it is understood that without these needs being met, students will not be able to fully capitalize on the learning opportunities before them in school. Rosemary explains that:
As a staff we have to accept the fact that students are not going to learn at all unless they are comfortable and accepted and feeling happy; and if those things are in place, then your literacy and numeracy will have a chance to succeed. When you have an unhappy or hungry student, it doesn’t matter how much time you spend on literacy – you won’t see any progress.

Ashley indicates that, “We are taking on feeding the kids and looking after, you know, their social and emotional needs as well as their academic needs...” When asked ‘why’ they do this, Ashley responds, “Because the need exists, and it could happen here, so let’s do it! You see a need there, and the learning is not occurring unless those needs are taken care of.” How schools might address the gamut of emotional, psychological, and social needs of students undoubtedly varies, but the central assertion is that inclusive principals recognize that providing a climate and culture that responds to these needs is essential for the success of the many students who may not experience such support elsewhere in their lives.

Professor Dale says, “You know when you look at differentiated instruction, another key piece to all of this, in terms of inclusiveness, is making kids feel, genuinely feel that they are being successful, that they are accomplishing stuff.” Taralyn describes how differentiated instruction allows for a program and its delivery to be tailored to the unique interests and skills of students thereby increasing student motivation. Taralyn explains that:

You try to find ways to support them things that work for them. I would say strategies that you do as a teacher that you might find are more engaging... differentiated instruction allowing them to do the, you know, the problem based learning things that are applicable. As I said, and I’m not trying to be stereotypical, but often these kids are boys, and you know so what is appealing to a boy who is 12 and 13 years old as far as learning? You bring the popular mechanics book in or whatever, something that can help to light a bit of a fire. In education, you know, we are doing a lot of things differently. They are more engaging. For some students, these are hands on types of learning. I do think that we are trying to incorporate different ways of instructing and assessing so that we can try to be more engaging for some of
these kids, so ideally, we try to do as many things as we can to keep them in the classroom.

Acknowledging a link between student engagement and behavior problems, Beth suggests that in addition to enhanced academic learning, the added value of differentiated instruction is that you end up with fewer behavioural problems in the classroom. She explains that:

If you are providing an appropriate program for children where they know what the expectations are (both the behavioural expectations as well as the academic expectations), and if you’re differentiating instruction (making sure the kids are working at their level to meet their potential), then the behaviour, as I found in this building, has decreased greatly. I mean it’s [the difference is] huge.

Even when teachers were using differential instructional techniques, however, principals indicate that the curriculum expectations may themselves have exceeded the students’ abilities or capabilities. Without appropriate programs and expectations that allow for success, it is understood that students cannot be expected to continue to remain focused, engaged and committed to the tasks before them. In such cases, it would not be unreasonable for students to stop trying to succeed and to focus their attention on other endeavors (i.e., off task or disruptive behavior). Modifications in the curriculum itself however cannot be made unless the student is identified as an ‘exceptional’ student. This poses problems for inclusive teachers, because it forces them to deliver a curriculum and administer assessments that they know will lead to failure and frustration with student who are not capable of meeting the expectations for various reasons. In some instances, testing will reveal that a particular student does have an exceptionality that will be identified and labeled as such. With this identification, curriculum modifications, prescribed in an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to allow for success, can be put into place. For other students, however, their reasons for not performing at the levels expected by the Ministry are not always related to identifiable exceptionalities, and as a consequence, there is no formal identification or IEP developed. Without an IEP, many of these students continue to have their needs unattended to and experience repeated cycles of failure as a result.

**Principals Understanding/Sensemaking of Inclusive Leadership**

Principals were asked to discuss what inclusive leadership meant to them. In their answers, principals describe 1) the various roles of an inclusive principal; 2) essential skills
required of an inclusive principal; 3) how inclusive principals determined priorities; and 3) the benefits principals gained from being an inclusive leader. While their responses varied, there were three major themes which emerged in relation to the roles of an inclusive principal: the need to build bridges amongst members of the school community (be it between teachers, parent, students, or community partnerships external to the school itself); the need to providing support to teachers, parents, and students; and thirdly, setting direction through visioning and active listening. Essential skills, characteristics, or qualities of inclusive principals that made one an effective leader included being reflective, respectful, compassionate, and non-judgmental. Priorities were determined most notably on the basis of what was in the best interests of students at any given time or situation. The fourth area, benefits of being an inclusive leader, typically centres on the value of being able to make a positive difference with students and their lives and the personal and professional rewards that this degree of influence brings. Each of these understandings of roles, skills, barriers, and benefits are elaborated on in the following sections.

The Roles of an Inclusive Principal

There are three themes around the roles of inclusive principals that I have identified as: building bridges, support, and setting direction (visioning). All three roles share the common goal of uniting members of the school community in some form or fashion, while still recognizing and respecting individual differences.

Building Bridges. Several participants shared their understanding that as principal, it is incumbent upon them to bring people together and set a common direction between persons whom might have different perspectives and interests. This could be within a staff, or alternatively between staff and students, or even a parent group for example. One principal, Kirk, describes his role in this regard as that of “building bridges between people with different views... [because] other people have visions too and what we have to do is build connections between what we all believe and what we all think.” Building bridges extends to teachers, students, parents, and community as well. How this might be accomplished varies across principals but typically involves creating opportunities for sharing and listening, as
well as developing and sharing of a school’s vision. Each of these strategies used to build bridges between people and views are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7 in this thesis.

Support. Several principals see themselves as a “support” for staff, offering whatever means and forms of assistance that circumstances call for. As Beth indicates, she sees herself here to “serve the kids and the staff, to support... to set the pace in the school... to give each of the staff the opportunities within their division to work on these goals.” Without adequate support, teachers may find themselves teaching in a bubble and isolated in their efforts to achieve the goals and address the numerous day-to-day challenges presented to them. Stephen shares his belief that:

If a teacher feels that they are isolated in trying to solve that child’s problem they are going to become frustrated... and if they are not being successful with that particular child on that particular day, then that’s because we haven’t given enough support to that teacher in that environment so that she can be successful.

Providing whatever form of support is required, to assist a teacher in facilitating the success of students, is considered to be a critical role of inclusive principals. Elaborating on such an understanding, Rob shares his perspective that:

We talk about support staff in schools. I think that is a neat concept. We talk about support staff as being the custodian, maybe the secretary, maybe the EA’s. I have news for you, we are all support staff. I am support staff, the superintendent is support staff, the director is support staff. The only person that is not support staff is the teacher because if all of us are not supporting the teacher, then what the hell are we doing?

Similar comments from other participants reflect this understanding that one of the most critical roles of an inclusive leader is to offer the support needed for teachers to teach, and for students to learn most effectively. How this support is extended is discussed at length in the Strategies chapters of this thesis.

Setting Direction: Visioning. In reference to the principals’ role in setting direction or vision, one principal commented that he understood his role to be similar in some ways to that of steering a boat. As a captain of sorts, he might remain at the helm navigating through the waters, but he is constantly listening to and relying on the various members of the crew as
they advise him of what is happening in the sea around them. Listening is deemed to be critical to successful navigation. Jonathon shares his view that it is essential for him to:

Listen, because if you’re not listening there is no inclusion... Listening to me means that they are giving me the information I need to make a decision, because the bottom line is I’m the person that’s making the decision.... I think when I say it’s my decision, I refer to that as this is the final decision, the final decision is my decision.... I will ultimately be responsible for that decision, not them... It’s the process. Inclusion is the process for how I make the decision. I’ve been including people in terms of what they are saying to me and what they believe is important or needs to be done, or the direction we are going to go. I can steer the boat, but if they’re not rowing, we’re not going anywhere. That’s kind of my analogy... the listening part is the steering.

Jonathon’s quote is particularly interesting, because he makes reference to the fact that although he shares responsibility in the process for decision-making, he accepts responsibility for the final decision. He sees it as his responsibility to listen to all stakeholders (staff, students, parents, district, Ministry) and to collaborate on the building of a common vision, which he uses to ‘steer his ship.’ If he is not listening, then he will be steering the ship in a direction few may want to row toward. In listening and collaborating, he is not shrugging off or abdicating responsibility, but simply relying on others for information as a principal, or as it were, as any Captain would.

Another principal Kirk describes his role in facilitating the development of a school’s vision this way:

What do leaders do? A leader sets agendas and goals, and sets discussions and brings things to the table, and creates conditions so that people can do what they have to do. But in the end, the leader is someone who helps to share people’s visions and helps to build understandings without building them for them.

Almost all of the principals interviewed in this study identify themselves as being instrumental in facilitation of the process of generating and maintaining a shared vision. None reported simply developing a vision and imposing it upon others. Particulars of how principals facilitate the participation of others in the development of creating a common vision are highlighted in the Strategies chapters of this thesis.

**Essential Skills Required of Inclusive Principals**

Principals had a variety of responses when asked to identify essential skills that are required of an inclusive principal. Included among these skills are the ability: 1) to listen to
others; 2) to be reflective; 3) to be authentic; 4) to be respectful; 5) to be compassionate; 6) to be non-judgmental; 7) to be honest; 8) to think systemically; 9) to possess confidence; 10) to have strong interpersonal skills; and notably, 11) to have patience both with people and to allow for time for things to happen.

Several of these essential skills required of an inclusive leader are identified in Dale’s succinct summary:

[inclusive leaders] have a capacity to think systemically. They see beyond sort of the day-to-day kinds of operations. They’re not necessarily reactive, they’re generally reflective people. And more often than not, my experience has been that they’re people who have been able to, no, have had experiences in their lives where, they’re not hampered by middle class values. They actually are able to see the work and value in a lot of, a wide diversity of people. And are open to that. And are secure and confident in their capacity to be able to work comfortably in a variety of contexts with a variety of people who may not necessarily share, sort of mainstream kinds of values if you want. The other thing is that I think there’s a compassionate streak as well. They want to be helpful and useful to people and they see that, as a person and as somebody who can sort of pull things together, that they can in fact have a positive impact on a kid, or a family system, and that they’re in a position to utilize resources both in terms of their own internal capacity, the capacity of their school, the capacity of their community. To support kids and families.... There’s a respect piece there too, like they, they’re not hung up on authority. They’re not. I think, inclusive leadership implies that you have, a person [who] has strong interpersonal skills and a good sense of themselves as a person... they’re accepting I guess when… when you get right down to it.

This quote is not atypical in either length or substance. Most principals interviewed easily identify what they consider to be essential characteristics of inclusive leaders and shared these through similar descriptions. Not surprisingly, descriptions of required skills centre around interpersonal skills rather than organizational, technical, or managerial skills. Although these latter skills were mentioned as important for purposes of effective time management and the processing of paper work, these are viewed as secondary to the more critical skills of how one relates to others; inclusive leaders see themselves as people persons. Accordingly, in their schools, people are not ‘managed,’ they are ‘valued’ – a condition in itself which necessitates inclusion rather than top down management. Valuing and working with people, as opposed to simply managing people, reportedly, takes considerable skill, patience, and time.
The participants in this study also maintain that a principal has to be authentic and genuine in order to be credible. Principals’ actions have to reflect character and traits that are representative of an inclusive philosophy or ideology. One principal, Dale, suggests that this authenticity is part of a person’s core, and that if it is not genuine, it cannot be fabricated:

…my belief would be that it’s, it’s part of a person’s core. [Author: Tell me more about that...] I think it would be very difficult to, to appear authentic if in fact you weren’t authentic with your approach to being non-judgmental and being supportive and compassionate and working with people. With one group and not another group, it just wouldn’t make any sense to me. I think it would come across as, people would pick up on it very quickly. And it would not be perceived to be authentic at all…. There would a mismatch, that whole phrase about you know, words and music right? It just wouldn’t. How would you get your staff to buy into your approach with kids and parents if in fact you weren’t exhibiting the same kinds of traits and characteristics and personal qualities? It would make no sense.

Several principals specifically commented on the fact that being an inclusive leader requires patience because to be inclusive often necessitates taking more time than other modes of leadership. Jonathon suggests that:

If you are going to use inclusive leadership to make change, you need to allow time for that to happen. Because you need that information, you need to know what people want, you need to provide the opportunity if it’s an individual that has to change. Even if it’s the total environment of the school, you have to be prepared for it to take time. Behaviour changed in the school from when I arrived with 258 suspensions a year down to 55 two years ago. [It] took time to change because it’s a whole environmental change... there had to be an understanding that change is going to take time.

In his comments, Jonathon reflects the understanding that it often takes considerable time to address issues related to school culture, climate, and practice. Accordingly, Jonathon suggests that an inclusive principal has to have the patience to allow for individuals or a staff to bring desired changes through to fruition.

This requirement for patience is also reflected in Rob’s comments regarding bringing about change in individual teacher perspective or practice. In the following quote, Rob suggests that his role as an inclusive principal does not involve invoking quick fixes or pressuring teachers to comply, rather:

We’ve bought into this Nintendo generation that if we’ve got a problem, we have to fix it right away. Umm, I have pain in my legs, don’t give me physiotherapy that’s going to take six months. No. No, I want a pill that I take for two consecutive days and have my leg not bother me again for the rest of
my life. We’ve got this quick fix thing, and we try to dump this quick fix on teachers. If per-chance my superintendent thought I was incompetent in that particular area, do I want him to come in with a quick fix? Well, it might work, depending on the problem, but it probably wouldn’t, because I have been doing this for a long time. It’s going to take a little while for me to change my methods. Well if I don’t… respond to a quick fix, then why would I try to jam change into a teacher?

Rob prefers to rely more on strategies which metaphorically align with ‘gently pulling a rope’ rather than using pressure and coercion which are focused more on creating dissonance and compliance. The strategies pulling a rope, and pressure and support, as a means by which a principal may facilitate change, are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

While it would be overly simplistic to attempt to present one archetype of the ideal inclusive principal, the characteristics and skills identified above add to our growing understanding of what such a profile might look like. Although every inclusive principal will not embody or possess all characteristics or skills sets to the same degree, it is reasonable to suggest that the characteristics and skills outlined above would be of significant benefit to an inclusive principal in whatever school they found themselves in.

**Determining Priorities in an Inclusive School**

Participants in this study consistently note that the overriding principle they use to determine priorities for initiatives or actions in an inclusive school is consideration of “what’s best for students” and that “students come first.” This is the case regardless of whether decisions involve student or staff interests, administrative or managerial needs of the school community, allocation of staffing resources, or students’ competing interests, and so forth.

References to setting priorities were frequently stated in a matter of fact way, blunt and to the point with responses such as Heidi’s. In response to the question of how she sets priorities, she quickly replied “What is best for kids. That is going to be my bottom line. Not what’s best for you the teacher, what’s best for kids.” Several other principals commented that in almost all instances student interests were placed before individual staff interests. Jonathon notes that prioritizing student needs even above staff needs is not always favorably received by all staff, however. He explains that:

I do have a priority when making decisions. That priority is always stated and is very clear... that decisions are made based on students first. And that’s
troublesome for some teachers, it’s very troublesome, and I think sometimes that they perceive that as not being inclusive because they aren’t listened to, which is really the opposite, because they are listened to... in time, they come around. You can say that you are making decisions in the best interests of kids, but I think that when your track record begins to show that’s what you are indeed doing, those staff members come around... Not that they like it anymore, but they do begin to understand that maybe this is the way it’s going to be.

Such action reflects a recurring theme that students come first and that inclusive principals have to model this philosophy in their actions as well. Student needs come before staff needs and as an advocate for students, principals often have to make decisions in students’ best interests even if this leaves them unpopular or in less favorable standing with the staff.

Several principals mentioned that there were differential needs among students and that this impacted their decisions regarding setting priorities. This is reflected in their need to allocate time and resources differentially depending on student need. In many cases, students who are acting out are seen as in need and deserving of attention and resources even when these students seemingly do not want help or even to be at school. Theresa sees herself in these cases as “being a champion of the underdog, you know the kids out there who don’t have people to advocate for them and don’t like school...” Similarly, in reference to students who seemingly do not want to be at school and present what might be considered a ‘bad attitude,’ Ashley explains that:

Those are the ones that really need the support. Those are the ones that need more of our time and those are the kids that, that are at risk, the kids that are hard to serve; those are the ones that we need to intensely be putting or support towards.

Ashley justified this given her understanding that “The kids that are failing, they’re the ones who need you. All the kids need your time... but fundamentally that’s why we’re here is to help kids that aren’t successful.” Helping these students means taking the time to identify and attend to their needs; an endeavor that most frequently requires the investment of valuable resources. Exclusionary discipline and exclusive practices that may provide temporary, quick fix solutions, are not preferred interventions by principals. Indeed, inclusive principals take the time to respond to student needs with the understanding that this will lead to greater and sustainable long term benefits.

Responding to the needs of students as opposed to simply disciplining and suspending students has benefits for students, but there is a price to pay as well. Because of limited time
resources, other matters that principals are responsible for may be left unattended to or at least put aside to be addressed at a later date. Despite this, the priorities of inclusive principals still remain the same; the student needs come before their own needs. Reflecting on the competing demands for principal’s time, Jonathon responds that:

My priorities are making decisions and the consideration for kids and students first… I’ll go back to my philosophy of why I’m here, my belief of why I’m here, and it’s not to make sure teachers are delivering curriculum… My priority, the way I look at it, is the students, and if I have a kid who is in crisis who needs to sit down in my office and talk to me, or I have to send in my EQAO results, there is no contest here. Guess what’s waiting until tomorrow? Not the kid in crisis because he may not be here tomorrow...

In an inclusive school, one can expect that ideally, all teachers will share the same vision and work toward developing the same culture of care within the school community. Recognizing that the principal is not always readily available or even in the building, individual teachers, and reportedly even often school secretaries, will extend themselves in a similar manner and take the time to address students’ needs in an understanding and respectful way. Preserving this culture of care can be seen as the priority in an inclusive school.

The Benefits of Being an Inclusive Leader

Participants interviewed in this study recognize the unique position they are in as principals of a school to positively impact and influence the lives of others. Principals take this position of influence seriously and regard it with respect. In return, principals reportedly receive many personal and professional rewards that impact them considerably.

Beth indicates that she felt “blessed” as a principal and expresses her understanding of her unique role:

I don’t feel a sense of power here. I really feel blessed. I do. Every day I come to work and I feel blessed that I have been given this opportunity… I feel blessed with the staff that I’ve been given and the kids I have to work with. And there are difficult days certainly, but at the end of each one of them, you know, I stop and try to think that we’re here for a reason, and here for a purpose, and you know I think the vocation I’ve been given is to support the kids and support really, anyone that comes through that door.

Beth’s sentiments reflect a moral purpose and a sense of importance of one’s work to individuals and to society as a whole. This is echoed by other principals who express
appreciation for the rewards they receive from having an impact on students and their lives. Several principals specifically refer to the unique role they have as principal as positioning them to be able to make a positive difference in the lives of those students facing challenges at school or home. Sometimes, opportunities to make a difference present themselves when students are sent to the office because of conflicts they are experiencing with teachers or peers. Although not always the case, principals are often able to find the time to uncover and address the issues behind the student’s behavior. While this often leads to the need for more time invested in follow up interventions, the rewards are reportedly great when the outcome is successful. Jonathon describes the ability of educators to help a student through such a situation as “the ultimate reward in education.” He elaborates in stating that:

I often find, there’s a reason for their behaviour.... and I guess my philosophy, and I express it, and I think staff already had it or believed it for those who deal with kids with problems is that, let’s see if we can get to the root of what their problem is. And staff will try to do that too. Because I think we, as teachers, love rewards... when you’ve got that kid acting out, and they’ve confided in you a problem and you helped them solve it and turned them around. To me, that’s the ultimate reward in education. Yes, their successful learning, that’s wonderful, but to take those kids that are all, and the one, you see it in Grade 7 and hit Grade 8, and there’s a whole biological change going on, and you add something. You add a crisis. Large or small to you and I, it’s large to kids and it comes out in their behaviour. So the people here are good at trying to figure out what is it? What changed, what happened? And you know, it comes from a dog dying, to a separation of parents, to a brother or sister being charged or whatever it may be, but most of the time kids will let you know that.

As the quote above suggests, educators are positioned to help students deal with personal crises or problems that they may face. Often, however, a teacher may not have time to devote to a situation that presents itself as they fulfill their responsibilities to the other students demanding their attention as well. Principals can often fulfill this role with a listening ear and a quiet place to discuss matters. In many cases, this makes all the difference to students dealing with a crisis. Inclusive principals strive to ensure that they provide adequate opportunities to take the time to listen to such student needs and concerns. In doing so, they provide the environment that sends the message that ‘in an inclusive school, we care about and we value you enough to listen and to help you with the challenges you face.’

In other instances, the impact the principal and teachers have can be even more significant. Some students find themselves repeatedly in conflict with peers, teachers, or
other authority figures and come to view this as a normal extension of themselves at school. This often leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy and a cycle of conflict and failure. Inclusive principals view such a student not as a “problem,” but rather as a person in need, and see it as part of their responsibility to attempt to change the mindset or sense of self that this student might have. Raymond shares his understanding of being positioned to make a difference in changing a student’s mindset this way:

It is such a challenging thing to do because by the time they get to Grade 7 and 8, they are seen by themselves and by their peers as the behavioural kids. They are expected to behave in that manner by everyone around them. By their school, friends, parents, so that it’s a self-fulfilling prophecy at that point, and it’s challenging to knock the kid out of that mindset so they don’t have to be that way. I believe we can do it, and I know we’ve done it. I’ve had kids come back from high school from the schools that I’ve been an administrator and they say “yeah you showed me a different way.”

Many principals referred to instances where they had worked with students who had come to view themselves as ‘troublemakers,’ or worse yet, as a ‘behavioural problem,’ and because of the collective efforts of staff, had eventually come to see themselves in a more positive light. The rewards of witnessing this transformation are described as considerable and reportedly serve to encourage both principals and teachers to never give up on students regardless of the circumstance.

Rob refers to the potential to make such a life altering differences in students in the following way:

I am talking about a kid that is just on the edge. If I can move him from having a kind of rotten life, sort of partially employed, partially on social assistance, and unhappy and in and out of relationships because of their emotional background and the baggage they bring, into a person who may not be the poster child for marriage, but at least has a one or a few mutually satisfying relationships with people in their life and is employed most of the time...and are able to do and doing it well and with satisfaction, doing whatever they can with reasonable satisfaction and with a sense of integrity and a sense of accomplishment and a sense of self-confidence that they are doing something well, then I made a major change in that child’s life.

As Rob suggests, making a major change in a troubled student’s life, and seeing them transform into a person with a more positive sense of self and optimism toward what lies ahead, brings many rewards to principals and teachers alike. Educators cannot likely affect such positive change in all students, but as inclusive leaders, all participants alluded to the understanding that this ability to profoundly impact students is a responsibility that they take
very seriously, and also one that brings with it great reward when they are able to see positive changes in students’ lives.

The Inclusive School: Vision/Culture

An inclusive school is described as one that is built upon a philosophy of inclusion, a philosophy that finds its roots in a school vision and is expressed throughout the school culture. A school’s vision, culture, and climate are all influenced to varying degrees by the philosophy and actions of the school principal, but uniquely so by inclusive principals. Specifically, what distinguishes inclusive principals from others is the manner in which this influence is exercised and applied within the school community. Comments on the need to involve others, to respect differences, and to build bridges between people are evident in the understanding of the principals I interviewed.

Vision. A school vision was often described as a tool to help facilitate development of the culture and climate of the inclusive school. Although it is understood that a school’s vision would likely be reflective of the district’s mission, inclusive principals recognize that a vision should reflect the ideas and beliefs of the local school community as well. This involves community consultation and discussion on matters pertaining to what the school culture and climate might ideally be. Stephen explains how he understands the process of developing such a vision that is consistent with a district’s philosophy, yet unique to each school:

Vision is not something you set and click and it’s like a photograph. It’s not like that. Vision expands and grows depending on the circumstances and the situation. The board vision is a broad stroke, how it’s practiced, how it plays out varies from each one of the school communities. Every one of us has its own school culture, its own school community, and they’re all different.

It is interesting to note in Stephen’s description that the vision is not static but exists in more of a fluid form that reconfigures and reshape as the school culture develops and adapts to new and ever changing circumstances. This then necessitates that the inclusive principal continuously listens and observes and works with all community partners to rework and convey this vision as it evolves.

Despite individual differences in the principals’ understanding of their school visions, one common element is that they all envision the school as belonging to the community, and
not just to educators. The physical building may be owned by the school district, but the entity of the school itself is seen as belonging to the entire school community. Raymond explains that:

> It is shared. And I think it’s got to be made clear to everyone that the school doesn’t belong to the principal. The school doesn’t belong to administration; it belongs to everybody who works there. Not just teaching staff, secretaries, custodians, educational assistants, everybody who works in that building; and the parents first and foremost need to know that it is their school, and that they can participate in. We convey this message by newsletters, parent council meetings, and our parent council spreads the word. That is still a challenge, don’t get me wrong... There are a percentage of staff members who are very threatened with the parents being in the school and in the classrooms. On the whole, people are very well committed to coming in, helping out, and volunteering.

Kirk stresses the need to build connections between individual beliefs and understandings so that the common vision that emerges respects individual perspectives:

> A leader sets agendas and goals, and sets discussions and brings things to the table, and creates conditions so that people can do what they have to do. But in the end, the leader is someone who helps to share people’s visions and helps to build understandings without building them for them. I think shared vision is a really interesting piece, it’s often a synonym for manipulation and getting people to do what you want them to do but making it look like you didn’t. [Author: Is that inclusive leadership?] No, I don’t believe it is. I think that inclusive leadership is the opposite, it’s fine for leaders to have visions, it’s fine for them to strongly articulate those visions, and to involve people with them in the debate, but other people have visions too and what we have to do is build connections between what we all believe and what we all think.

Several principals commented on the need to take the time required to make connections between varying ideas and perspectives so that everyone shares in a common understanding of what type of school it is they are trying to build and maintain. There are many benefits to having a shared vision identified by principals including collaboration, commitment, and shared responsibility. As Stephen suggests:

> In a sense, we are a service industry and we serve this community; their children are in our care.... If the parents are working with us, we’re going to be successful, but if we’re at a crossroad and don’t have the same vision, we’re not going to get there.

This same principal explains that the significant amount of time he is required to be out of the school for PD and meetings is:
another reason why you and staff really do need to be on the same page. Everyone in the school needs to have the same vision, needs to be going in the same direction. When I walk out of this school, I need to know that this school is going to basically function without me. I need to know that they don’t need me. It needs to work that way.

As Stephen and others suggest, it is critically important for inclusive principals, students, parents, and community to have a clear understanding of a vision of what their school represents. Although often based on a broad concept of vision or mission as defined by each school district, the inclusive principals interviewed understand the value and necessity of shared ownership in regard to not only the development of a vision for their school, but in the responsibility for actualizing this vision as well. In this respect, their role is to ensure that ownership of the vision is shared as much as possible in order to strengthen an understanding of and commitment to a common purpose.

Principals believe that sharing in the development of a common vision is beneficial in a number of ways. With shared ownership and understanding that a vision can provide, all members of the school community can share in common understandings and work toward common goals that will be reflected in the very fabric of the manner in which the school operates. This fabric, as it were, reflects a school culture that will in itself be inclusive.

School Culture. Principals had much to say about aspects of their school that contributed to, or were reflective of, what they understand to be an inclusive culture. Comments include references to values, beliefs, and understandings; safety and security; belonging; and respect both for differences and for individuals, in general. Beth shares her understanding that their school culture is in part expressed through “the way in which we speak to kids and the way in which we treat kids. [It] comes right back to our values, and you know, our beliefs and understandings about kids.” These values and beliefs are expressed through interactions with students and the messages such interactions send. Ashley indicates that in an inclusive school there exists a “whole culture of feeling safe and secure within the school for all students,” one in which “we celebrate difference, but you belong and we want to celebrate that belonging and identity.” A third principal, Raymond, believes it is critical that the students “are first and foremost successful. Feeling successful, feeling respected, valued, and listened to... they can feel that. Kids say that as they walk through the door.
Things like that are part of the culture.” In a similar vein, Dale comments on cultural indicators of inclusiveness such as:

- the extent that contributions of kids are valued, when it comes to decisions that affect those kids... how those kids are greeted when they show up late.... how those kids are welcomed into the building. The respect that’s shown to the parents of those kids... all of which indicate an attitude towards the kids in terms of their concern, compassion, and care for their safety and security.

Dale also suggests that “for the most challenging kids, one of the things that indicate a level of inclusiveness is the respect that’s shown to these kids even when they’re at their most difficult.” In an inclusive culture, these “difficult” students are still valued as members of the school community, despite the challenges they present. Stephen shares his perspective on the need to focus on the positive potential and contributions to the school/classroom that these students can make, rather than for the challenges they presented. In Stephen’s words:

> Each one of the students is a gift to us in a sense. It doesn’t matter what the student brings to the table, they’re a gift. They’re an opportunity for us as individuals as teachers as parents to hope. So we can’t take a look and judge a child that comes in and say… “Well this kid doesn’t fit our mold, he’s got all kinds of behavioural issues, he’s been suspended ten times, he doesn’t fit with us, he can’t come here.” That child is an opportunity, or challenge to us to really be who we are. That’s the same with the staff too; each of us is at different points, everyone has their ups, their downs, their strengths, their weaknesses and together it’s what makes us good.

Stephen’s sentiments clearly reflect a culture of respect for individual differences that transcend normal boundaries presented by traditional codes of conduct and standards for behaviour.

The principals interviewed for this study suggest that the central means through which a school culture emanates is through the implicit or explicit messages sent to staff, students, and parents – how educators deal with challenging student behaviour, how they listen to others (teachers and students) and so forth. When asked about the message you wanted to send to students about the school, principals frequently had little difficulty in describing the culture of their school as one that is first and foremost a safe environment. This sense of safety and security is manifest across several domains as suggested with the following quotes from a number of principals. Beth wants to send the message to students at her school that “every child is entitled to a safe, welcoming environment;” that this school “is
a good place to be... that you’re safe here and accepted.” Ashley wants her students to know that:

We expect you to do your best, treat others with respect, treat us with respect, and that you should never be fearful to come into the office and talk to us because there was nothing to fear, we are here to support you, to help you... and to understand that when you get into trouble or do something wrong that no one was there to judge you and come down on you with a hammer.

Ashley also added that:

I want kids to feel comfortable here. I want them to have a loyalty to the school and to feel comfortable and to feel safe and secure, because I know from talking to kids over the years that if they don’t feel safe and secure there’s no learning that’s going to be taking place. They’re going to be focused on looking after their basic needs.

Maria wants to ensure that her students believe, “That they matter. That they are valued. That we want them to be here. That this is a great place to learn. That we’re going to help them go from point A to point B. That’s the type of message we want.” When asked if this applies to even those kids that seemingly don’t want to be here, that have a bad attitude, Ashley’s reply was “even more so with those kids because those are the ones that really need the support.” It is evident that inclusive principals want to ensure that their students feel safe, secure, welcome, and valued at the school. With these needs attended to, it is understood that students can then best focus on and attend to the tasks at hand.

Not surprisingly, when asked, “What messages would you like to be sending to your staff?” principals described messages that were congruent with those they were sending students: that this is a safe place, one in which we all make mistakes; that you are respected and your individuality will be respected; and that all of us have much to offer. This is reflected in comments such as those from Beth, “That I’m not here to be judgmental, I’m here to listen... You can make a mistake. You made a mistake. What can we do to move forward from that?... I make all kinds of mistakes.” Kirk strives to create a “climate for dialogue, creating a climate of dissent, the ability to question, you know. It’s about the ability to hold up your hand and say I did that wrong and I didn’t do that very well, I’m sorry.”

Another principal, Chris, reportedly considers it important that their staff knows “it’s all right to make a mistake... that I make tons of mistakes. So let’s move on...”

Other messages for staff are reflective of a culture of mutual respect and the need to recognize the inherent value in everyone. Ashley stresses that “that we need to treat kids the
way that we would be expecting to treat each other, and there is not one set of rules for the kids and one for the staff.” A final recurring message, as reflected in comments by Terri, is the need to focus on the potential in all of us, each and every individual, including those who present behavioural challenges. She states, “I don’t want them [teachers] to ignore students who don’t meet their expectations - that there’s something in everyone that can be promoted or salvaged or worked on.”

In an inclusive school, the culture is one of safety, security, trust, and value regardless of whether you are a student, a teacher, a parent, and so forth. Furthermore, the expectation is that this will be the case regardless of the needs presented or the challenges an individual brings with them. Inclusivity includes, and is out of necessity, to be extended to all members of the school community, equally, and principals were quite clear that this applies to those students presenting behavioural needs as equally as it does to ‘model students.’

Chapter Summary

In summary, inclusive principals are holistic in their understanding of what their mandate is in regard to meeting student’s needs. They do not narrowly define their objectives as improving academics and increasing EQAO scores, but rather look at the individual student, his or her life situations, begin ensuring basic needs are addressed and moved forward from there. It is clear from the principals who I interviewed that they put the student first, assess individual needs, and then collectively as a staff do all they can to address each of these needs so that individual opportunities for learning and developing one’s fullest potential are recognized. This of course, entails attending to the holistic, social and emotional needs of students as well as the academic. Cilla summarizes the essence of such an understanding quite succinctly as “They do need to do well in school, to the best of their ability but they have to have all the tools. If they aren’t there emotionally or socially, we have to bring them along because if not, we have failed.”

Inclusive principals take the responsibility for student success very seriously, even personally. Student failure, however this is defined, is understood as being reflective of a failure on the part of the school and educators, as well as other partners. This perspective is philosophically congruent with the principles of an inclusionary, constructivist approach to learning which views learning as a shared endeavor, rather than one that places the onus of
responsibility on the student alone. As a shared learning experience, educational successes are celebrated and shortcomings are used as catalysts for change in understanding and practice with the goal of better positioning educators to respond more effectively.
Chapter Five: Barriers to Inclusion

This fifth chapter addresses the numerous barriers reported by principals that impair their efforts to facilitate the development of more inclusive schools. Many of these barriers may be considered either structural in nature, or alternatively, people related. Although several of these barriers may be addressed by the direct efforts of a principal alone, most require the energy and attention of school communities working in concert towards the goals of inclusion. Once barriers are identified, it becomes part of the inclusive leader’s challenge to draw upon the resources of the school community to overcome these challenges in ways that will enhance the development of an inclusive school culture.

This first section of this chapter highlights the major structural barriers that principals report as interfering with their ability to facilitate the development of the inclusive schools they strive for; that is, they pertain to the structure of schooling and/or the policy decisions that impose such structure. Structural barriers that principals identify include: time; the number of Ministry and district initiatives; curriculum disconnect from students’ lived reality; lack of program options; teacher hiring practice; and funding. Other barriers principals identify can be considered people related; they arise because of the actions or limitations of persons and their skills, knowledge, and values. These include barriers such as: lack of experience; relationships between principals, teachers, students, parents; and burnout. Each of these barriers is discussed in detail in the following sections.

Time

To be truly inclusive, principals in this study report that they take sufficient time to both share information with teachers, students, parents, as well as listen to what each of these partners has to share (Ryan, 2006). This sharing and listening take a wide variety of forms, but all have one common denominator: they take time, and according to the principals interviewed in this study, time for a principal is a precious commodity. A number of principals share the frustration of not having enough time to accomplish all that they want or are required to do in a typical day. Many talk of the need to set priorities and to determine which pressing demands are critical to process and act upon, and which tasks can either wait, or simply be passed over all together. Of particular note, however, is the repeated mention of the understanding that being inclusive necessitates an approach to decision-making that takes
time to bring about change. As Jonathon succinctly expresses, “If you are going to use inclusive leadership to make change, you need to prepare to allow time for that to happen.” Inclusive principals invest this time, because they consider it to be both essential and worthwhile to embed the principles of inclusion throughout the culture of the school.

**Time to Gather Staff Input**

Raymond is one of many inclusive principals who believe that shared decision-making is essential for inclusiveness but that this is often constrained by timelines. He comments that:

Inclusiveness with staff is trying to make everybody part of the decision-making process by inviting into the discussion and by demonstrating to them that you are going to listen... sometimes, the barrier to that is time. Sometimes, you need to make a decision that is in a reasonable time frame, and trying to be collaborative and inclusive. Time is a barrier.

As an example, Raymond cites the need to develop and submit the school’s improvement plans by a date set by his superintendent. He found himself challenged to schedule meetings for conferencing with staff to include them in the development of long range plans (LRP’s) and meet the deadlines imposed for submission. He mentions that in response, he:

invited every staff member personally… to be a part of the team, and to be part of that discussion. More than half our staff took me up on that which raised a challenge in itself, a logistic challenge more than anything else. But when you have a due date by which this school improvement plan needs to be to the school board, and all of a sudden you are collaborating and being inclusive to get the decisions made and the plans done, the time becomes a barrier you don’t have enough of the time to get it done before the due date.

Although in Raymond’s situation, his superintendent had approved a small amount of release time for teachers to be freed up to meet to develop the school improvement plan, Raymond felt that that this had not allowed for sufficient collaboration and he requested that staff meet further on their own time to continue dialogue around the school’s plan. Despite noted concerns from the teachers’ union with regard to teachers voluntarily meeting on their own time, Raymond indicates that:

...we did it, and we made it work... because they wanted to be a part of it and put in extra time. There was an artificial constraint because of the amount of time for the release time but the teachers on staff didn’t mind meeting after school, meeting at lunch hour and meeting before school. So we did that.
This willingness of teachers to volunteer their own time to participate in dialogue and offer input is reflective of the inclusive culture already present in this particular school.

Admittedly, not all staff at all schools will be willing to participate in such a degree of collaboration over school improvement plans or other matters outside of regular staff and divisional meetings. The staff in this school, however, reportedly participates because they feel their input is valued and that their efforts are worthwhile. As noted by Raymond:

I don’t think they minded because I think they realized that their input is valued, and when we wrote up the official improvement plan, the same kind of process happened. And we followed through on it, we tracked it, we questioned each other to see how we were doing on it. We modified it based upon what our results were showing us, and they [staff] knew that we were going to be utilizing it and following it so they invested in the fact that they could help the turn in the direction they are going to go.

A key element here is the reference to the fact that the staff “realized that their input was valued.” Inclusion requires more than soliciting input and ideas. As a number of the principals interviewed for this study report, it involves valuing, respecting, and genuinely considering that input in a truly open and inclusive manner.

New Initiatives

With the increase in the number of Ministry initiatives being implemented in Ontario schools, principals report that both they and teachers are required to spend considerably more time out of their schools for related in-servicing. Along with these initiatives has come an increase in managerial tasks related to accountability. Stephen notes:

I’d say within the last seven or eight years it’s much more paperwork, many more responsibilities, more Ministry initiatives. So much is taking us away from the classroom. There’s a big push to be a curriculum leader but to get to be a curriculum leader you’re not allowed to touch curriculum, you’re out of the classroom, there’s a big disconnect...

Stephen wants to be in the school and in the classroom alongside teachers as a curriculum leader but indicates that he finds this hard to do. He states:

I need to be here a lot more often, [but] I need to go to the safe schools workshops that I went to yesterday to find out what the changes are in the legislation. I need to find out what’s going on and what I need to change in my code of behaviour so it fits all the regulations. So I need to do that kind of stuff, but on the same token, I need to be here too to work with the different teachers... We’re out a lot more now as principals than we ever were before.
Sixty to seventy days a year, now not full days, half days, parts of days, which is absolutely incredible compared to when I first started.

The cumulative effect of too many new initiatives and the accompanying accountability measures they bring, may also lead to increased tension and an erosion of trust between principals and teachers. More than one principal commented on the increasing number of initiatives stemming from the Ministry of Education and the demands that these have placed on their time as well as that of teachers. In at least one instance, this never ending barrage of change and demands has begun to erode the trust that had been developed between the principal and their staff. Ashley explains that in her school:

I feel right now that the level of trust is a little bit, that there’s a little bit of a dip in the trust right now and it has to do with I think me pushing too hard and I’m pushing too hard because, I feel, I guess I’m being pushed. And if I look at the board level, the Ministry is probably pushing the board so it’s like a reverberation effect and [it] causes a lot of stress to, well, to everybody.

This places the principal in a rather unique position as broker for the Ministry and Boards of Education (districts). Although they do not want to overburden their teaching staff, principals report feeling pressured to move quickly onto the implementation of the next initiative as it comes down from the Ministry or the district. Adding to this pressure is the stress that serves to strain relationships between administrators and teachers. Included among these stressors are the seemingly continual quest for improvements through top-down, mandated initiatives. Reflecting on the pressures and strains this causes led Ashley to comment further that there is:

a lot of pressure from the Ministry... for instance, today we were working on teacher moderation, consensus marking. And it’s like this is what the expectation is, and the Ministry gives that to the Board, and the Board pushes that onto us, and now I’m pushing that onto you!

The cumulative effect of the onslaught of new initiatives is that it positions principals as taskmasters, assigned with the task of implementing a never-ending barrage of top-down change initiatives. Within this process, there is little, if any, teacher input at the school level with regard to the initiatives that best suit their school/students’ needs. Such processes are reportedly incongruent with an inclusive philosophy and serve as barriers to inclusive practice.

Although an onslaught of Ministry initiatives add to the stress among teachers and in some cases negatively affecting relationships between staff and administrators, Stephen notes
that on the “other side of that coin is that professional learning communities, learning teams are really valued [and] there’s a lot of professional development from the Ministry for creating those and working with those which is a good thing.” It appears that it is not necessarily the nature of the initiatives that is causing frustration, as many principals are in support of them and see the benefits to student overall learning. Rather, it is the sheer number and speed at which new initiatives are being presented, each of which have their own set of demanding accountability protocols. Reflecting this premise, Rob expresses in exasperation “We need a six month hiatus. No improvements, thank you very much!” Although six months without the introduction of new initiatives will likely be appreciated, it will not address the overall problem of the significant degree of time that is required as an investment into a seemingly never-ending onslaught of Ministry and district initiatives.

*Time Spent on Administrative Duties*

Adding to the demands for in-servicing and administrative meetings for principals that take them outside the school, are the day-to-day managerial responsibilities that divert their attention and efforts away from classrooms, teachers and students. One of the most frequently cited barriers to the development of inclusive schools is the amount of time principals spend on routine administrative duties. Several principals comment that administrative requests and the time required to fulfill these tasks has increased “significantly” leading Kirk to exclaim:

There’s so much to do, from everywhere. From the board, there are so many departments; there are so many people that want things all the time. We have to reconcile every single piece of money everywhere in the building. We have a musical instrument inventory now that has to be done online, our steel pound drums, our trumpets and trombones and clarinets, and everything has to be seen and entered online and log the state of repairs. There’s just tons of things. We are constantly filling out surveys about every Goddamn thing you can imagine... You have to compile the following plans for crisis response, lock downs, emergency lighting, fire drills, trespasses then you have to do them at your staff meetings.

When asked whether these administrative and managerial demands are affecting the way he chooses to run the school, Kirk responds:

Yes, I mean this is all about safety audit, safety action plans, full school audits for safety, full school action plans, safe school committee reviewing code of conduct. Basically, you’re stuck doing all the drills you need to do, making
sure all your procedures are constantly up to date. Here’s another one - list of demands here that we have to complete. [Holds up a set of papers sitting on desk.] We have to do a supervision schedule, then we have to analyze our supervision schedule in terms of minutes, average minutes, and minutes per teacher and take it to the nearest decimal point of a minute. It takes forever, and constantly, we’re being asked [to do such things]... These are just two things for my superintendent. Think about every department. We have to know [and input] what all of our DRA [Developmental Reading Assessment] and such like things directly online so they can be dealt with. It’s ludicrous, the whole thing takes forever. What we find ourselves doing is chasing around trying to do stuff. I come in at 7 and am leaving really late, really late at night, trying to do all the stuff that I can’t do during the day, because I try to do real things during the day... It’s absolutely an impossible job, it’s mad from our perspective.

Although many principals recognize the need and benefits of new initiatives, several express frustration over how detailed and time consuming these associated tasks are and question both the need for, and the intentions of, many of the new measures of accountability. Kirk explains that:

The incredible thing about a board like this is that the quality of things the board produces is often really good - like the way that our lock down procedure should be structured, the way that our attendance should be marked online, whatever it may be, they do things well... But if you expect everybody to do everything in this time consuming and ludicrous way, they have no time to do anything else.... We’re in that age of accountability, but basically it’s all about cover your butt, cover your backside, and you need to do this... it’s not really about dealing with [kids]... It really is too much, I would just love so much less to be asked of us, to give us more time to do real things.

By “real things,” Kirk is referring to spending time meeting the direct and immediate needs of students rather than accounting for liability and political purposes. A similar and revealing example comes from Rob:

I just got a request last week from my superintendent; he’s coming for his parochial visit and he wants a copy of all my staff meeting agendas, since September 2006. And I’m thinking I gave them to you last June, [but] he wants them again. Like I’ll spend several hours gathering all those stupid things together so he can check it off on his checklist. He’ll never read them; he didn’t read them last year either.

All administrative duties and responsibilities that tie a principal to his or her desk or computer take valuable time away from other duties they deem as essential to their role. Many inclusive principals resent this current shift toward greater procedural accountability precisely because it takes so much time and attention away from what they believe to be of
greater importance: spending time attending to the students’ and teachers’ needs rather than the superintendents’ needs. One principal, Theresa, comments that:

Kids are my job, and you know what, one of my goals this year was to get out of this desk, because I spend way too much time here, way too much time in front of that stupid computer. I’ve read 15 e-mails in the last half hour and all of the paperwork; and I’m not the paperwork queen... I often get e-mails saying like “Don’t you remember the paperwork you were supposed to hand in?”

Many principals reportedly cope with such demands by putting in long hours; others rely heavily on their office secretaries to compile and input data; and still others prioritize and give “minimal and insufficient” attention to reports and requests that they feel are “likely to be given little attention anyway.”

Not Knowing Your Students/Parents

Principals note that the sheer number of administrative tasks required of them takes valuable time away from time to spend with students and teachers. The effects of this are compounded in middle schools because of the limited amount of time principals and teachers have to develop relationships with students, parents, and often, school council members. In middle schools that do not also contain primary/junior classes, students enter the school September of their Grade 7 year and leave two years later as they graduate from Grade 8. Within this relatively short period of time, students, as well as parents, adjust to a new school with a set of expectations and characteristics that are often different in many regards from previous experiences within the primary/junior schools.

Jonathon reflects on the challenges that this never-ending cycle of transitioning imposes considering that with:

the quick turnover of 50% of students you often get a new group of students who have a different view than the last group.... We’re going to get all the Grade 7’s coming in this year, like we did last year... Things change that way and again, the school council has trouble keeping parents because of the two years [cycle].

This two-year turnaround poses challenges for teachers and administrators as it limits the time available to develop relationships with students. Relationships that are based on trust, and facilitate inclusion of students and parents, take time to nurture. With students entering middle school and exiting within two years, there is a sense of urgency noted in establishing
student – teacher boundaries and relationships and frustration that there is a never ending cycle of adjustment that impacts on school culture.

**Length of Appointment at Schools**

Another barrier related to time is the transferring of administrators between schools. Participants indicate that they believe that principals should remain at a school for a minimum of three years, up to a maximum of seven years, in order to effectively facilitate the development of what they envision to be an inclusive school. Although the reasons vary, Ashley draws the following analogy:

> This is my third year here and I would have to say, if I would answer that concretely a minimum of three because I’m starting to see now that there are more things that are … because the expectation is ingrained, there are some things that just run themselves and [after three years], I can get down, I can peel away the layers of the onion and get down to the nitty gritty.

Unfortunately, for a wide variety of reasons, administrators are often transferred from a school prior to establishing the cultural elements required for an inclusive school to maintain itself through transitions from one administrator to the next (Hargreaves, 2009).

**Lack of Experience**

Another obstacle to inclusion reported by some principals interviewed for this study is the inexperience of many administrators who are entering positions of responsibility at a younger age and with less experience than ever before. This inexperience is confounded as aspiring administrators respond to the shortage of principals and are able to enter the field of administration with less years of experience and less competition than in the past. In reference to new vice principals entering administrative positions, one principal, Taralyn, comments that:

> …[It] is a maturity thing too. I think in fairness to them, they’re very new and often lots of them are very new educators. They haven’t even been in the field long, so they don’t even have the experience and...those life experiences broaden your world view and they give you the ability to see the grey and to understand. When you first start out, you think, Oh my God I have follow everything by the book and somebody is watching over me and if I don’t I’m going to be up on the carpet and I’m going to lose my job...

These life experiences, as well as those acquired through many years working in schools as teachers/administrators, enable principals to keep issues of inclusion in the forefront instead
of being overly concerned with this ‘watchful eye’ above them. The implications are that younger, less experienced administrators may feel pressure to maintain the status quo instead of championing the cause and fighting for issues of equity and inclusion that may at times position them unfavorably with their employers.

**Disconnect to Students Lived Reality**

It remains a challenge to make school meaningful and relevant to all students while implementing a curriculum that does not necessarily reflect the needs, abilities, interests, or lived experiences of many of students (Portelli & Vibert, 2002). Although the Ontario Code of Conduct (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b) indicates that it is the students’ responsibility to “come to school prepared, on time and ready to learn” (p. 6), this is often not the case and that learning about what might be on the teacher’s agenda that day may not be of importance to that student, at that particular time. Rob comments that:

Some of them just haven’t had enough sleep the night before, it’s just, chronic sleep deprivation. They are up running the streets until 3 in the morning, so it’s pretty hard to focus on math at 9:30 in the morning when you’ve been up till 3 in the morning. Some of them are malnourished, some of them are abused, emotionally, physically, sexually. Some of them are not academically oriented.

Although individual students have preferred learning styles, modalities of intelligences, skills, abilities and talents, principals in this study note that the Ministry of Education expects that all of these different students learn a uniform curriculum and achieve targeted levels on standardized performance indicators. Rob comments on the contradiction in these expectations and how such standardization serves as a barrier to developing an inclusive environment where the unique interests, needs and abilities of each individual student are considered. Rob notes that:

It’s interesting that as a society, I think this is a key point, as a society, we expect that schools will teach every child to read and to write, and at a somewhat arbitrarily, or pre-selected level by the time they are 12 years old. However, we don’t expect them to be able to run the 100 metres in 15 seconds; everybody should learn to read, not everybody should be athletes. What’s the disconnect here? Because if you recognize individual differences, and you say OK, I won’t make you practice running every day after school for an hour just because you can’t run the 100 m in 14–13 seconds. You don’t have to be on the track team, you can be on the chess team, and then all of a
sudden they are all created equally when it comes to reading. How insane is that?

In summary of what Rob suggests, when you consider the uniqueness of each adolescent, educators cannot expect that all students will be reading and writing and doing math at some arbitrarily determined level any more than they can expect all students to be able to play classical music or create a critically acclaimed piece of art. Those students who are not intellectually inclined to excel at literacy and math related tasks are likely going to find the focus on such assessment in schools to be a barrier to their success and to them finding their schooling a truly inclusive experience.

Principals also report pressure or concern over EQAO scores that present barriers to addressing broader student needs. This concern for the watchful eye and the perceived pressure from above seemingly diverts educators’ focus away from matters that are identified by most all of the principals I interviewed as foundational for inclusive practice, that is, caring for the whole person rather than simply focusing on curriculum and EQAO scores. As Kirk elaborates on this point:

It’s important that you care, because if you care, you have to follow through on the things that you really need to do for children. I think one of the problems is... that people care about the wrong things. They care about the subject, they care about getting through the curriculum, they care about their marking. Well I think we need to care about the kids, and who they are and understanding them if we want to have academic success and we want to make progress with them academically. We also need to value them as human beings and work with them as people and support them as people.

Kirk further explains that a significant pitfall of placing too much focus on curriculum delivery and test scores is that curriculum and standardized tests are frequently not inclusive, which in itself presents barriers to success for many students. Being from a large urban school with a high immigrant population, he notes that:

The test scores are measuring curriculum, which is totally not inclusive. But it’s middle class, it’s white, but on the EQAO test a couple years ago there was a study called the Sugar Bush. It’s about a grandfather who takes his grandson on a walk through the cottage and they go to see how maple syrup’s made. You’ve got to be joking. In this city! What’s a cottage? What’s a sugar bush? A tree that’s made of sugar? That kind of thing is just ridiculous.

When the curriculum and or resources are in themselves not inclusive, this presents unnecessary barriers to engaging students and to maximizing opportunities for learning. In order to have inclusive schools, teachers need to have access to, and be free, to draw upon
learning materials and assessments that reflect the lives of their students and are themselves inclusive in design. When this is not the case, as Kirk reports for example, this impedes inclusive practice and presents a barrier to the development of a fully inclusive school.

**Lack of Program Options**

Several principals comment on past closures of wood shops and technical programs in middle schools and the effects this has had on student engagement. Many principals indicate that they would like to be able to offer students a wider variety of courses in order to cater to individual interests and learning styles and keep each student engaged in learning through experiences such as wood shop, co-op placement and community based experiences (service learning). Theresa suggests that “it would be great to have different options for students where you could do more certification and skills training take them out of their desk take them on field trips everywhere that kind of stuff.” Cilla, as well, suggests that she:

> would really like to take advantage of the community. In bringing, taking the kids out in the community and helping out, helping seniors, working with, now I’m talking about kids who are in a social program, not low functioning, and not identified as behavior, but at risk. And I’d like to get them out into the community.

Cilla also identifies the lack of equipment as well as appropriate staffing resources as barriers to offering successful technical programs:

> Yes, or the applied stream they have at high school. Get them so that they have something to look forward to in high school. We get some of them – we did a little bit of that at Twin Lakes, but it was very difficult. Other classes had to be made bigger so you could free up that one teacher. You also have to have the right teacher for the job. So it goes back to, I mean, resources are wonderful. You can have a beautiful design and a tech room, but if you don’t have anybody to lead it, to teach shop, who is qualified, forget it. So that you need to have, but what is also near and dear to me is to see these kids in the shop. I know that I never had anybody kicked out of shop, because they were all engaged and doing things... in some of the things, pride would come out. We had a beautiful, well we had family studies as well. We had a big burly guy teaching that. It was just so neat....You know, really, you can have all the resources you want, and you might not go anywhere. But if you have the staff that is dedicated, that believe in kids, really want and willing to work for it. It’s not a job – it’s a calling. You can do anything.

With many shops closed and the equipment removed, the majority of Grade 7/8 students no longer have access to this type of programming option. Theresa notes that this
does not have to be permanent however, and that that this barrier can be addressed through a change in ideology and influx of resources to better serve the students in her school:

I really think that where we were a long time ago, it wasn’t perfect, but when we used to educate kids to give kids skills. You know, the vocational program or the, there’s nothing wrong with that but you know, we just went away from it because it was labeling kids and it was bad and whatever. And you know there’s nothing bad about saying, “This is what you’re good at, and this is what you want to do, so let’s give you the skills.” So I think giving us that freedom again and encouraging that and recognizing that it requires funding.

In a final argument for restoring technical programs, Rob discusses both the benefits as well as the human costs to restrictive program options that do not recognize, value, and promote different skills sets in an inclusive way. He explains that at his school, he and the staff identify the shop class as pivotal to the success of many of their students and accordingly, they have fought the district’s efforts to dismantle and remove the shop from the school. He informed me that “We fought to keep that shop, because there were some kids that had success in there that had successes nowhere else in school.” Without these options, such as technical programs, many students do not find that school caters to their individual strengths and interests and as Rob suggests, soon become disengaged from schooling:

That’s the insanity that we dealing with. So, if I take some of these kids, who may be not academically inclined, but are kinesthetic learners, and recognize in them that ability, and encourage them to develop that ability; there’s nothing wrong with being a plumber…. Reminds me of a quote, a society that accepts shoddy philosophy because philosophy is a lofty occupation, and despises plumbing because plumbing is a lowly occupation, will soon find that his theories or his pipes won’t work. And I think there’s a lot involved in that, and again it comes down to the situation of respect….By the time they get to Grade 9 we’ve lost, we’ve lost too many…

In summary, lack of program options is seen as a barrier to inclusion because it does not allow teachers or students to capitalize on the unique interests and skills each student possesses. Instead of capitalizing on students’ abilities, educators are forced to have students strain to learn within the rather narrow experiences and options that currently reflect a predominance of traditional literacy and numeracy based experiences. In truly inclusive schools, all students would be able to engage in meaningful and relevant programs and learning experiences that allow each student to capitalize on their own interests and strengths in order to facilitate learning and success in their schooling endeavors.
Relationships between Principals and Teachers

Management vs. Union

One obstacle to the development of inclusive relationships between teachers and administrators is the distinct status imposed upon them with the implementation of Bill 160 (Education Improvement Act, 1997). This legislation strategically prohibits administrators from participating as members in Federations, and places them apart in a position of non-unionized ‘management.’ Up until this point, principals and teachers in Ontario were members of the same federation and typically viewed as a team of educators, with a certain degree of solidarity given their common roots and purpose. This changed, however, as teachers were forced by this legislation into ‘unions’ and principals into positions of ‘management.’ As such, this common link has been severed and they are no longer allowed to be members in solidarity. As Rob puts it:

It was Voltaire who said ‘if you would bind the masses, you must be seen to wear the same chains’…. [this legislation severed those chains and] exacerbated the wedge that was started by the Mike Harris’s government when he took principals out of the union. Prior to that, we were all in the same boat together we were all bound with the same chains…[after that] I know that a lot of my colleagues found that they were dealing with an us/them situation that they had never done before. It was management and union - management and labor. And never the twain shall meet.

Placing divisions between principals’ and teachers’ federations serves to interject a wedge between principals and teachers As Rob suggests, this is detrimental in the sense that inclusion is based on the principles of equity and equality. Taking principals out of the federation does not serve to make things more equal or to unify, but rather it increases the divide between teachers and administrators. Bill 160 (Education Improvement Act, 1997) serves to formalize the divide between principals and teachers. One of the challenges this Bill presents for inclusive leaders is to bridge these newly created divisions between themselves and teaching staff and to somehow minimize the negative effects that this creates.

Staffing Resources to Deal With Behavioural/Emotional Issues

Several principals comment on the amount of time they spend dealing with issues concerning student behaviour. One such administrator, Dale, reports that earlier in his career, he had found himself “constantly fighting fires with kids who were acting out and with other kinds of problems in the context of the schools, and with the parents.” Another principal,
Cilla, shares that she “couldn’t leave the office because there was a steady flow of kids coming in, kicked out of class” for a variety of incidental reasons. The demands for attention presented by student misbehaviour monopolizes not only teachers’ and principals’ time, but it also takes the student away from learning opportunities in the classroom. Many principals describe ways in which they work with teachers to determine when and for what reasons students are to be removed from classes and sent to the office. This minimizes the ‘exclusion’ of students for reasons that might best be dealt with by the teacher in the classroom.

On the other hand, it is also noted that serious incidents of misbehavior which require attention and assistance are often neglected because of the demands on the teacher and the lack of available support staff. Reflecting a teacher’s frustration in this regard, Stephen notes that:

a teacher has 25, 26, or 28 kids in their classroom, and one student is having a meltdown, and sometimes you [teachers] are just physically not able to spend the amount of time with that particular student if there are other issues going on in the classroom that you need to do in that particular situation.

Given this, a teacher typically has two options: attempt to provide a band aid solution to the immediate problem and deal with the matter later, or send the student to the office and hope that the principal is available to attend to the matter. According to the data obtained in this study, many principals have concerns about the fact that they are out of the schools much too frequently for district and Ministry related matters, leaving teachers to apply such band aids the best they can. Additionally, with adolescents, problems are often severe and complex enough that they require intervention in the form of supports or counselling from trained professionals. If the principal is absent from the school, or appropriate and professional help as required is not available, then the student issue or concern festers and often leads to other difficulties as the day progresses. Not having qualified and available staffing resources to deal with student issues as they arise must then be considered as another barrier to providing an inclusive environment where students’ needs are addressed in a manner that allows one to deal effectively with challenges and return to the classroom where they can resume their day in a focused manner.

Several principals suggest that one measure that could be taken to address this problem of lack of appropriate intervention is to have Child Development Counsellors (CDC’s) or other trained health care professionals available on a full time basis for high
needs schools. Unfortunately, principals in this study report that in their schools, such personnel are rarely available outside of scheduled itinerant visits. Several principals comment on the negative consequences of this limited access to CDC’s and Social Workers and their inability to address the immediate needs of students facing or dealing with crises. Students cannot be expected to leave their issues and problems at the door as they enter the school each morning, and many crises develop within the school setting itself as the day progresses. If timely intervention and support is not available, problems often escalate to full blown crises resulting in greater investments of time required for intervention and follow up resolutions. This often leads to escalation of issues and problems, however, as Stephen notes:

If a student’s having a problem, right away, that’s the time to deal with it. If you can work with that child right away you’re going to have a lot more success than trying to deal with it four or five hours down the road.

Unfortunately for students, due to these limitations in resources, many problems are not addressed through that day, and many others are left unattended and not addressed at all. To prevent this, Beth calls for trained personnel in all high needs schools so that student concerns may be addressed on a daily basis as needs arise. In commenting on the need for trained professionals to be in the schools, Beth explains that:

If we had somebody that was very well trained to work with some of these kids, that would be a gift. Full time. Specifically I’m referring to the behaviours, you know when we’re talking about a family whose parents just split up and mom was taken away by the police the night before and they’re coming to the school and they’re having a lot of difficulty settling... behaving appropriately. And the teacher is trying to teach her other 20 kids. It would be nice to have somebody who was trained in that area... it would be nice if we had a full time person here. Having that opportunity for the kids to have someone here to talk to that’s trained in that manner. Because you know three days later when they’re dealt with, well it’s, you know, yesterday I could have really used the help!

Whether the request for this type of support is ever met is dependent in part on the prioritization of needs and the allocation of resources. Principals with an inclusive philosophy believe such allocation of resources is important because they recognize that they are critical to addressing basic needs for security and comfort that must be met as precursors to optimal learning.

In reference to the type of professional services required to address particular student needs, Kirk complains that there is a:
lack of expertise... the supports are really stretched... we share a social worker
with several of the schools. We don’t have an attendance counsellor here so
the social worker is supposed to do all of that... but they’re not here very
often. She does five schools.

In schools in outlying areas (where there is most often only itinerant services available),
weather and distances may further compound this problem, not only making it difficult for
the itinerant staff to get to a school to deal with an unscheduled crisis but to make it to school
for even their regularly scheduled meeting as well. Sharing the frustration of cancelled visits,
once principal of a rural school comments that:

We have development counsellors once a week. And when they’re coming 50
miles, once a week can very easily become once every two or three weeks.
That’s a service that we definitely need more of. Same with the child family
center in Grand Oaks. They will deal with parents and families and schools
together, and because of our distance, we get very little service from them and
I know the town schools get a lot of service. It’s not a purposeful thing, it’s
just that if it’s stormy out or it’s whatever, it’s going to be the faraway places
that get dropped.

And indeed, when these itinerant services get dropped in rural schools, it is reportedly the
case, that there are often no local community centres in the immediate vicinity that can
provide the services.

Compounding this problem is the lack of recreational and professional resources
outside schools to support or even enhance the experiences of adolescents in the community.
Jonathon describes the effects of such a void on the students he sees at his school:

I think the biggest frustration I have at this school is that there are very few if
any community supports to the students... whether it be home support,
whether it be behaviour support. Outside the school, there seems to be very
little of this age group out there. CAS [Children’s Aid Society] tends not to be
all that involved unless it’s really horrific, because, well, you know they’re 15
years old, the moms not dealing with them right, you know that... I think if
they had things to do, that would, and it was at the school, and I’m thinking
like a community centre approach where there are open Friday nights, the
school’s open Friday nights and Saturday nights with programs to get these
kids in here doing stuff as opposed to sitting behind the school smoking drugs
and drinking alcohol, graffiti the walls, so on and so forth. I think if we had
something for them to do, somewhere to go that they like, and it was here at
the school, that would help... And I just think more social programs whether it
be for parents or for kids or you know - interventions with the professionals
outside of education. Those are supports I see missing.
Taralyn recognizes that despite overwhelming needs of students for counselling and protective services, other agencies and institutions are attempting to do their best in fulfilling their roles and mandates given the limited resources available to them:

And the agencies are strapped too. They are no different than educators, and they are strapped, and they also have a lot of territorial issues. “Oh my goodness that’s not my responsibility, doesn’t fit my mandate,” and that would be one of our huge challenges in special education and that’s one of our areas we want to focus on when we’ve created our own in my department. For my team, one of them is to try and do a better job of working with agencies and getting them at the table and making them accountable and trying to get them to help us with supporting these very high needs students.

Participants clearly identify the need for support and professional services in the schools and acknowledge that despite best efforts, these supports are often not readily available outside of schools when they are needed. The result is that many students struggle with emotional, social, and psychological needs that continue to go unaddressed both in the schools and in the community. In response to this, many principals choose to do all that they can but ultimately have to acknowledge their limitations in this regard. All of these comments, and the many more principals shared, reflect the frustrations inclusive principals have in recognizing the multitude of students’ needs but not having adequate resources available in their schools to address these. Many acknowledged that despite their own efforts and the diligent efforts of their teachers working collaboratively with other agencies, although they do the very best that they can, they recognize that this is often inadequate at best.

The Counselling Relationship

There were several references to the notion that teachers and principals might be constrained by their very roles as authority figures and consequently not positioned to meet certain personal, psychological, or emotional needs students may have. Principals report that not all students feel comfortable sharing certain concerns or information with teachers or principals in part because of the nature of their roles or the information to be shared. Such students often benefit from the unique relationship that is found between a Child Development Counselor (CDC), Social Worker (SW), or Educational Assistant (EA) and students. At times, it seems that the formal roles between staff and student may hinder the
relationship of trust/rapport that is beneficial to the counselling relationship. The following excerpt from Heidi alludes to these dynamics:

Oh yes – ‘cause sometimes the kids don’t want to talk to a principal because of a perception that the principal is a bad guy, the disciplinarian. Sometimes they don’t want to share with anyone within the school because it is stuff going on they just don’t want us to know. And that outside person is better, you know, we have had, when I was away at [Riverside] School, we had a Child Development Counsellor. I had a day treatment program. The counsellor would take the kids for coffee, they would go to Tim Horton’s, they would get permission from the parents at the beginning of the year that they could walk to, you know, wherever without specifics, and it really, really helped.

Another principal, Terri, considers the nature of the relationship between a CDC and student to be somewhat less formal and not constrained by dynamics of being a disciplinarian, as a principal sometimes has to be:

…having extra time and having the extra staff too just to listen to those kids or to give them an alternative which is not punishment but support... it could be someone that’s skilful, patient, tolerant, compassionate who will not view her role with these students as a jailer or as a controller but someone who’s you know, just as I describe, a CDC.... a compassionate, tolerant, understanding intuitive person.... But I get a CDC for a day a week and you know what I’m thankful for her... because she’s that comfort zone where the kids can be themselves ...[where it’s] between you [student] and the CDC.

In summary, students bring with them, and encounter, a myriad of problems as they make the difficult transitions through adolescence and middle schools into secondary schools. Teachers and principals, although empathetic and compassionate, are restricted in their abilities to effectively assist students with their social, emotional, and psychological needs because of multiple role demands, time constraints, and lack of professional training and services. Many principals, especially those with experience in exclusively Grade 7 and 8 schools, identify the lack of available support for students in this regard as a barrier to meeting students’ needs and offering the truly inclusive school they are working towards developing.

*Communication Barriers: Relationships with Parents*

Communication among educational partners is identified as central to developing the collaborative relationships required to provide and sustain an inclusive environment. Participants identify hesitation and even resistance on the part of teachers in communicating
with parents as barriers to this process. One such inhibiting factor on the part of some teachers is a reluctance to call parents attributed to concern that they will have to justify the school’s or their own expectations as teacher, when these expectations may differ from those of the parents. Taralyn explains:

It’s just that disconnect. For these children I think sometimes their parents haven’t been involved [and] I noticed an inconsistency of expectations between home and school, and that disconnect leads to the child believing that they don’t have to behave like that; they don’t have to comply... One of our challenges is to get the parents to buy into the program and model the expectations and have similar expectations that go between home and school, and often they don’t have that.

In many cases, principals report that some teachers feel defensive and uncomfortable, and even afraid to contact parents. Theresa, recognizes that some teachers are “scared” to deal with certain parents, but suggests nonetheless that this has to be overcome:

You know you always keep that in mind when a parent is raging mad, it’s because it’s their kid, and they want the best for their kid. You always have to keep that in mind; it’s not personal you know. It’s overcoming that communications barrier, that’s the big challenge all the time; people are scared to call home, scared to deal with parents, you know, and parents need to be respectful and I respect that too.

As the quotes above suggest, not all parents are respectful towards staff at all times and this may inhibit staff from wanting to collaborate and communicate with them. Inclusion however, as principals in this study suggest, requires ongoing communication and collaboration, processes that should always be conducted in a forum of respect, despite the fact that this may present a formidable challenge in some instances.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Occasionally, for a variety of reasons, teachers themselves may be interacting with students in a manner that acts as a barrier to inclusion. Teachers may, at times, act in ways that are disrespectful, confrontational, or otherwise not inclusive. This type of behaviour serves to form barriers that can pervade the relationships that students have with all teachers and staff at school, not just the relationship with the one staff member who may be acting inappropriately. Kirk shares the following thoughts about such relationships:

I believe the better the teachers are, the less problems we have. I think a lot of problems can be, not caused by teachers, but alleviated or amplified by teachers. Teachers who are confrontational or who don’t take the time to
support students cause problems. The teacher that builds relationships with kids and supports kids, helps and makes behavioural difficulties lessen.

There may be any number of reasons that account for such a teacher’s behaviour. It may be simply a matter of ignorance, or of misunderstanding around ambiguous terms such as respect and civility that may vary from one person to the next, including both teachers and students, schools, and cultural groups. Dale provides the following example illustrating this point:

Teachers have to understand the sort of cultural backgrounds of their students and what constitutes respect and what constitutes disrespect... [where] depending on your perspective and your values, that can influence how you perceive what is respectful, what is disrespectful, and what’s civil an what is not civil.

In other cases, Dale suggests that there may be “different tolerance levels and different perspectives on what constitutes respect and civility between teachers” and that this may lead to confrontations when a student experiences difficulty determining what limits may vary from one teacher to the next. In such cases, it is incumbent on the principal to ensure that the matter is addressed in a way that facilitates the development of both understanding and mutual respect, (the process of which is discussed in the Strategies chapter).

**Targeting Students**

Another barrier to inclusive schools is the targeting of students. As noted, there are often inconsistencies in understandings of what is meant by respect and civility, and there may also exist inconsistencies in the application of consequences for student behaviour that is deemed to be disrespectful or uncivil. Extending this problem, some students may be watched more closely by teachers than others in an effort to ‘catch them being bad’; a phenomenon referred to as *targeting*. Heidi explains:

When I first came to this school, there was a problem with students being targeted, and they were targeted by staff in the staff room. They would, a kid would do something wrong in the classroom and the staff member would come into the staffroom and say, “Did you hear what little Johnny did this morning?”… The whole staff now knows about it. And my perception of that is that, that kid then gets targeted by the whole staff because everyone is watching way closer than they normally would. And because everyone knows there has been an issue, that kid is being caught doing things that every other kid in the school yard does but is being caught more often. Therefore, the self-esteem goes down, and the kid feels they are being picked on and the staff
don’t see it as a picking on situation. That was happening when I came to this school, and I really didn’t like it.

Such targeting is an example of differential treatment that serves to label and single out a student in a negative way. Several principals suggest that targeting may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy where this type of action on the part of staff presents barriers, rather than supports, to student inclusion and success. How a principal may prevent or respond to targeting of students is discussed in the Leadership chapter of this thesis.

Being a Victim of Your Own Success

Two principals comment that their reputation for success has placed additional strains on their schools to meet the needs of challenging students. One of these principals, Stephen, states that:

Sometimes we’re a victim of our success because the teachers here are so good at what they do, we have a lot of social agencies encouraging their parents to switch their kids to this school which is good... but it’s really stretching the support we have too.

Chris indicates that students are being pulled out of other schools where they are not as successful, and transferring into his school because parents believe he had a more inclusive approach. Chris, a First Nations Person himself, indicates that:

It got to the point where I know a lot of parents were sending their children to our school because I was there. They would tell me that. They would phone me up and say “Chris, you know, I want to bring my kid over…”

Although having a reputation as truly caring and inclusive should be the goal of all principals and schools, when other schools in your area do not share in this accomplishment, it may lead to an influx of high needs students who require efforts and resources that place additional demands on an already taxed system. Addressing the needs of these at risk students becomes increasingly difficult unless additional resources such as a CDC, SW, or additional EA’s are provided along with the complement of teaching staff that accompany increased enrolments.

Hiring the Best Teachers

The data suggest that principals believe that not all teachers are best suited to teach adolescents. Not all teachers are well versed in and willing to implement inclusive practices.
Unfortunately, many principals indicate that current trends in district policies and hiring practices restrict the choice they have in hiring whom they believe to be the best teachers for positions in their schools. Hiring the right person for the position is deemed to be critical to the establishment of an inclusive school. Cilla succinctly suggests that “to have the inclusive school that I would want, I would want to pick my staff. That would be the first thing I ask for, and everything else would fall into place.” Unfortunately, not all principals are able to hire their own staff and may end up with a teacher on staff that does not adopt an inclusive philosophy.

Hiring policies and federations are two of the barriers principals identify as preventing the hiring the staff they would prefer. Acknowledging that there is some flexibility in hiring, one principal, Ashley, comments on her own transfer to a new school and suggests that she:

very much look[s] for good people and you bring them.... I was able to attract some very good teachers to this school, keeping in mind that it’s difficult with the push back from unions and the restrictions we have around that.

Ashley goes on to suggest that these hiring restrictions are:

…totally a hindrance. The teacher unions really make it difficult to try and get the very best people that you want into your building and I know that I do have a reputation in our community. Our educational community and people have expressed an interest in coming to work for me because they know basically what it’s going to be like working for me and I appreciate that. However, I do make attempts to get good quality, hard working people at the school. However, it’s not always that way that it plays out...because [of] the federations. The agreement we have is that you are going to go with the most senior qualified person.

As these quotes indicate, principals report that when hiring staff, it is more critical to hire teachers that adopt an inclusive philosophy over teachers that simply have seniority or subject matter qualifications. Any policy or protocol that impedes this choice is seen as a barrier to developing an inclusive school.

**Barriers to Addressing Specific Areas of Staff Development**

In addition to feeling constrained with their ability to hire the staff they want, several principals also report that they believe the Teachers’ Performance Appraisal poses limitations on their ability to complete formal reviews with staff on areas that they deem essential to the
development and implementation of inclusive programs and relationships. Heidi comments that:

A teacher can be a good teacher on paper by the performance appraisal. They can be covering curriculum, they can be teaching the curriculum, they can be doing it quite well, and they can come out with a satisfactory rating, but they still don’t cut it as a good teacher. You know because of all the other stuff, the way they treat students in the schoolyard, that is not covered in teacher’s performance appraisal. The way they deal with discipline, do they always send kids to the office, or do they deal with their own? Like a lot of that kind of stuff isn’t covered in the teacher performance appraisal. And so you can have this teacher that I was talking about who... in the classroom there weren’t issues, it was the non-instructional time that the issues came in, and they were major. But because it wasn’t in the classroom, I couldn’t approach the unsatisfactory teacher aspect because it wasn’t happening in the classroom. And the teacher performance appraisal didn’t give me enough scope.

These sentiments are echoed by Jonathon who comments on a teacher who was delivering an instructional program that he believes was not meaningful, relevant, or engaging for the students:

Actually as performance goes, I couldn’t give unsatisfactory, because somebody is delivering a program that I don’t like, I’m not sure that that fits into the TPA [Teacher Performance Appraisal] other than the curriculum part. But in terms of management strategies, he still had them. He dealt, you know, satisfactorily with most other things, so I’m not sure that the TPA would have served the purpose.

Although these principals view using the Teacher Performance Appraisal as a means to bring about pressure and change as less than ideal, they do feel that its relative ineffectiveness in the area of how students are disciplined outside of class is a barrier to bring about changes desired to develop or preserve inclusive relationships.

**Funding**

There were mixed opinions on the need for increased funding to assist with the development of inclusive schools. It is evident however that the general consensus is that although money will not make a school inclusive, it can help if directed to the right areas. Heidi, commenting on the increased funds that were made available to the school upon being designated as a Turnaround School, states that “We’re a turnaround school so we have lots of money. The money’s great, but the money doesn’t make an inclusive school.” What reportedly often acts as barriers with increases in funding are the guidelines and constraints
that accompany the funding. Funding comes with stipulations imposed on exactly how money can be spent which restrict the principals’ discretion in pursuing initiatives that they and the staff may identify as most beneficial to promote inclusive practices in their schools.

Cilla describes her view on the need for counselling services at her school and her frustrations with having to have her students remain on a waiting list because of lack of funding for counselling support. She explains that:

Really I would like to have someone from the board, like we have now but full time. I have a half time one but that means she comes a half day a week. They should be funded by the Ministry. Some type of counseling, because you just can’t do it all. You can’t do it right now. When they are not available or there is a waiting list, I’m the CDC.

Funding that comes with strict expectations, guidelines, and restrictions on how the money is to be allocated can serve as a barrier if principals and staff identify priorities within their school community that fall outside the designated funding areas. With funding and Ministry directives and deadlines, valuable teacher and administrative time may have to be directed toward expending dollars and implementing initiatives that are not identified as priorities by the staff. Instead of counselling or addressing factors related to school climate for example, the Ministry may be directing the implementation of literacy programs for low performing schools which in turn consume considerable amounts of time and energy. As Cilla suggests, principals may identify that a specific need is there, but if Ministry initiatives are not targeted to address those specific needs, they remain underfunded and often unaddressed.

*Burnout*

The multifaceted nature of teaching makes being an educator a challenging profession. The demands on time and on one’s emotions can be quite stressful. Several principals comment on how the responsibilities associated with being an administrator push their limits and how such stress impacts their ability to find a healthy balance in their own personal and professional lives. Without this balance, principals cannot maintain the degree of peak performance required of this position. Chris describes his typical workday as follows:

Well, my paperwork was done from seven o’clock or seven thirty in the morning, until eight thirty. And then I wouldn’t get home at night until about six thirty sometimes. So I did paperwork from early morning, and then late at night... my wife thought I was crazy but I used to laugh, I’d say from 8:30
until late in the day I did people-work... There was a price to pay for all of this. I burnt myself out.

Another principal, Ashley, puts work before her own physical well being, indicating that:

This is a terrible thing and may mean that I don’t last that long, but I have this little motto in my head that I work faster, work harder, work longer. Which is not great for me probably, physically. Because I think that over time, that will wear a person out... Like look at my desk. Like I can get up and like I will organize, and there’s things that must be done before I leave here today, but I can get up and walk away. I live close so I can come back. I can do things on my computer. Like I’m sick of the days I will be on my computer at 10:00 pm checking my emails. I am up at 5:30 and I’ll be checking them, before I actually come to school so I don’t ever really get away from it. I just spend a little bit of time away from it. But I like that. I like doing that. I’m probably not that healthy, but I do like doing that.

Job stress and the effects of long hours not only affect the ability of principals to do their jobs. Teachers, as well, are challenged to maintain an appropriate balance that will allow them to continue to offer the best of themselves and the most inclusive school experience for their students. Raymond comments on the importance of teachers setting priorities and finding an appropriate balance between work and other aspects of their life in order to fulfill their professional obligations to students:

I think that in education, we could so quickly and so easily lose our personal selves in education. I think that we need to make sure that our priorities are straight, that families are put first, and that our jobs are second. In some of these teachers, and I think it’s something that drives us within ourselves as teachers, is that you want to be there, you want to do what it takes in your school, and [for] the kids in your class too…. you need to make sure your priorities are straight; and that comes back to time. At our school everything is balance, if you are out of balance you are in trouble…. and that brings us back to the other teacher we were talking about, that just wants to suspend their kid, to get them out, because his personal priority is so high that he doesn’t want to fulfill his professional obligations to the students in his class. So he is out of balance. On the flip side, if you are out of balance on the professional side, and you’re spending 24/7 at the school, your family is suffering. We have a staff member in that situation as well, and I’ve had to have those conversations to try and get her to balance in the other way because her family life is falling apart. That is one barrier to the optimal school.

Raymond’s comments reflect the need to find an appropriate balance between personal and professional lives and to deal effectively with the stresses encountered in each.
If teachers or the principal are not able to balance their lives effectively, then this can potentially present itself as a barrier to developing the optimal inclusive school.

Summary

Despite the many barriers to students achieving success within schools, inclusive principals report that they feel very strongly that each and every student is worthy of educators’ fullest attention and efforts. As a few suggest, it is often those students who face the most challenges who warm a principal’s heart and are worthy of the most intensive interventions. All principals interviewed indicate that in an inclusive school all students are worthy of the best efforts of educators to help students overcome the obstacles and challenges that they have before them. This remains the case even when this involves sacrifice and risk-taking on their part as they extend themselves to meet student’s needs and enhance opportunities for learning.

Although principals identify a number of barriers that restrict their ability to develop their ideal inclusive school, they also suggest ways to overcome obstacles. In the next two chapters, I identify strategies that principals employ to help facilitate the development of inclusive schools. The first set of these reflect general strategies used specifically with students experiencing behavioural challenges (as opposed to staff) and the second set provide an overview of useful leadership strategies directed toward staff that inclusive principals use.
Chapter Six: Leadership Strategies Directed Toward Students

In this chapter on leadership strategies directed toward students, principals describe the many ways they attempt to overcome barriers and to build rapport and trusting relationships with students. Descriptions of program and instructional initiatives that principals (and staff) implement to best address student needs are also presented. Specifically, many principals report on the ways in which they attempt to reengage students who are disengaging from their schooling experiences and in doing so, show them that school can be a place where they experience both meaningful activities and success. Lastly, this chapter provides an overview of the ways principals address students’ behavior (including suspensions and alternatives to suspensions) and in doing so, how they attempt to offer a culture of care, respect and support to students, “even when they are at their worst.”

Inclusive principals report that they recognize that student needs are varied and individual, and that they cross a broad spectrum of domains. There is an understanding however that there are several common basic needs that must be addressed for all students in an inclusive school. As reported by several principals, students need “to be nurtured, to be happy;” “they need to know people care about them, that’s a big thing;” and that “some of them need to have an alternative to the same thing that all the others have because it just doesn’t work for them and it’s never going to work for them.” To address the needs of the whole person, principals report that they employ a number of strategies. Many strategies were related to each other in a variety of ways, allowing for categorization in one or several groups. This chapter describes the strategies principals report they use in order to address the wide variety of students needs they encounter in intermediate level schools. For reporting purposes, these have been grouped into three major categories of: 1) Rapport and Relationship Building with students as well as with parents; 2) a wide variety of Individual and Program Interventions; and 3) Creating a Supportive Culture and Climate for Students.

Rapport and Relationship Building

Principals interviewed in this study believe that an inclusive school culture has to be one that invites and embraces students rather than one that is perceived as alienating, threatening, or otherwise inhospitable. They report that it is important from the beginning of the school year for students to quickly come to see their school as one that is a welcoming,
safe place where they can find refuge and experience a sense of belonging. In order to facilitate the development of this sense, principals employ a number of strategies that are intended to, or conducive, to developing positive relationships with students. Ways to build such relationships include sending positive and supportive messages to students, building positive rapport, offering individual attention, being non-judgmental, and finally, nurturing relationships with parents and community. Each of these is discussed individually below.

**Message to Send to Students**

When asked about what principals wanted students to know about their school, responses were varied but share several common elements. Messages sent to students are implicit in the things principals both say and do, and are reflective of the culture and climate within a school. When asked directly about “the message you want to send to students” principals had a variety of responses that address several areas of school culture. The varied responses have similar notions of acceptance, safety, challenge and support, and of being valued, all of which are central to the sense of belonging principals identify as being so important. Principals believe that within an inclusive school culture, staff and students will be best able to build relationships of trust and positive rapport.

These messages are reportedly delivered in many direct ways such as announcements, assemblies, newsletters, posters, discussions, as well as through indirect means such as social interactions, comments, gestures, non-verbal body language, procedures and policies (i.e., how one handles discipline). Several of the comments principals share elaborate on these points. Stephen for example states that:

Well, the message we really want to send is that we’re all in this together and that if you have a particular problem as a student then we’re here to work on that. If there’s anything we can do to make you successful, we’re going to do everything we possibly can. We value you as an individual, you are a unique person, you may not be having the best time of your life right now, but that’s not your fault and we’re here to help you.

Dale maintains that it is important that students receive the message that “You’re as worthwhile as anybody and you are welcome here... and that it’s a good place to be, you’re safe here, and accepted.” These implicit and explicit messages are delivered to students in many ways. Chris comments on how he directly communicates his perspective with parents of students who are experiencing difficulties indicating that he:
…actively sought out parents of kids who were having problems and got them into the school and explained to them in great detail what our school stood for, what it was all about, what we were doing, why we were doing it, and so on... we always had for half or seventy five percent of the meeting the student there with them... and they got to contribute, they got to say what they thought. They didn’t just sit there. I’d ask them ‘What do you think? How do you feel about that?’... The biggest thing was, and quite empathetically I would tell them (parents), that we’re both here for the same thing: for the betterment of your child. You do it at the home, in the home community. I do it in the school community, but that’s what we’re here for.

The overall message to send to students is that conflict, confrontation, and failure are only pieces of a larger school experience. Alternatives are also possible, and at this school, there are opportunities for new experiences and new paths to take. Kirk sums up such possibilities, articulating part of the mission he envisions for self and staff: “Show them [students] an alternative picture of what life might be like. We want to take them down another path. If you don’t do that you’re taking them down the wrong road.” The message is one of encouragement and support, that there are alternatives open to you, that people care about you and your future, and that we are here to help and support you in selecting and forging an alternative path if you so choose. Inclusive principals believe that such messages are important to deliver so that students clearly understand that although expectations at school are high, encouragement and support with all aspects of their development as adolescents are extended.

Building Positive Rapport

In order for students to feel comfortable and willing to take the risks required to make changes in their own actions, it is considered essential that students and staff develop positive rapport and supportive relationships with each other. There are several elements of relationships that principals identify as key for the development of positive rapport with students having difficulties. Many principals believe the key to this development lies in a relationship-based mutual respect that is earned by the principal or teacher, rather than simply ascribed or demanded by virtue of position. This begins in many cases by modeling in the hope that respect from student toward teacher will be reciprocated over time. The key is that the type of respect that inclusion calls for needs to be earned, and not simply ascribed through positional authority. Cilla eludes to this in stating that “I don’t demand respect. I
never have. And I don’t demand respect from a student or a parent... what you see is what you get, and hopefully it will come back to me.” It is also evident that it takes time and energy to develop such a rapport and to develop a mutually respectful relationship. This can however be established through a variety of measures, all of which have at their core the message that as a student ‘you are of value and worthy of me investing in a positive relationship with you.’ By sending this message, principals and teachers alike are demonstrating that they are taking a necessary first step in initiating a positive relationship with challenging students.

Principals offer numerous examples of individual ways to reach out to challenging students and to begin to develop a positive rapport. Many believe there is always some unique way that they can find to make a connection with individual students. Dale shares her thoughts that:

I have firmly believed over the years that you can always find something where this student can feel part of a group. I think it’s absolutely critical. I think students have to feel connected. I mean they need to feel connected to the adult, or an adult, and adults in the building and they need to feel connected to events and activities. And they need to be connected with other kids.

Finding such connections is not always easy, but well worth the efforts because it often creates opportunities for the development of a set of relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

Kirk comments on the need for this rapport as essential for productive relationships, suggesting that:

It’s all aimed at making the child feel like they belong, like there’s a place for them in the school, and there are things they can do... One of the things, rapport, means we have a dialogue. Rapport means we have a relationship. How do you deal with people that you don’t have a relationship with? [If there is no relationship, students are] just things that you do stuff to, you fill with knowledge, you shout at them, and you send them home... That’s not what we should do... That’s why teachers are so successful, ‘cause they build a rapport with the kids. The kids know that they care, and kids can relate to people that they feel care about them.

Taking the time to individually build a student’s connections to school, to other students, and to staff is seen as a valuable means by which principals can send the message to students that they care about his or her schooling experiences and want to ensure that they are
positive experiences. Sometimes, this will be relatively easy and straightforward, and at other times, this will prove to be more challenging.

Dale comments on the fact that inclusion challenges principals to be consistent and remain committed to developing respectful relationships with students over time, and that this requires much more than a few half-hearted attempts at befriending a student. Dale elaborates:

Sometimes they can be the most challenging kids, no question about it. I think one of the things that indicate a level of inclusiveness with those kids is the respect that’s shown those kids even when they’re at their most difficult. And so, I’ll give you a concrete example. I can remember working with teachers who had difficult kids in their class, who were those kids who were behavioural difficulties for all kinds of reasons. And, in some cases, the teacher was absolutely befuddled as to what to do, didn’t know, didn’t have a clue but was very frustrated with trying to respond to this kid. And I can remember saying in this one particular instance, “Why don’t you try this?” The key to all of this is building a relationship with that kid one way or another. And have you considered taking this kid to the gym? Or, at lunch, just shooting some baskets with the kid? And if you want to do that; and I remember doing this, “If you want to do that, you know just before lunch. I’ll come in and take your class so you can do that. When you, when you’re out on yard duty, right? Don’t hesitate to grab a ball, throw it to the kid. And engage some other kids and just throw the ball around.” I mean, basketball’s one example; [there are] lots of others. The other thing that I found from my perspective as a principal was the key, again was to build a relationship with that kid and build a relationship with the parents of that youngster... you back up and you back up and you back up and you accommodate. You work with the teacher. You talk with the teacher. You try and draw in community people who may be helpful and useful in terms of supporting the kid and the family, all that sort of thing.

Although this level of support takes a significant amount of the principal’s time, Dale recognizes that if he does not help the teacher develop rapport with this particular student, as principal, he will likely be spending considerably more time throughout the year with the student down in the office for misbehaviour. Empowering the teacher in this regard is a strategy of choice designed to inform the teacher on how to develop positive rapport and problem solve with challenging students instead of relying on the principal to act as an ongoing mediator between teacher and student.
Individual Attention

 Many principals report that it is equally as important for them to establish a positive rapport with challenging students as it is for teachers. Inevitably, as principals, they are likely to have to deal with these particular students when they are in conflict or crisis so the same relationships based on trust and mutual respect is essential. One strategy principals frequently report as helpful in building this rapport is as simple as taking the time and making the effort to establish frequent, undirected contact with students. Dale indicates that:

The other thing that I found myself doing was dropping into classrooms, for that purpose, but also just to check in with kids. And not just to single, say one or two of those kids out, but also to check in with other kids as well, to see how they were doing and then, again, just establishing that contact. That’s a modeling piece, but it’s also a direct sort of contact with the kids that I think is useful in terms of building, sustaining a relationship with them.

The point to note here is that the principal is taking the time to seek out the student in order to ‘catch ‘em being good,’ as opposed to simply tracking them down to follow up on a disciplinary matter. Sometimes such a greeting is intended to afford the principal the opportunity to extend an invitation for dialogue or a discussion at a later time. Chris indicates that:

A lot of times I would walk down to their classrooms and just go talk to them, just say, How was your day? What are you doing? You just got here, you OK? Come see me later…. I encouraged my staff... I didn’t say thou shalt, but I hoped to set [an example]. I quite purposefully did it with the hope that they would catch on to the fact that it was a good thing. And many of them did. I can’t say all of them did, but certainly a number of them.

Other principals intentionally go out of their way to meet and greet students as they arrive in the morning off the bus. This serves the additional purpose of touching base with certain students to ascertain their mood or demeanor and determine whether a bit of a pep talk or other intervention might be required before the student begins his or her school day. Cilla indicates that if she knows the student is going through a difficult time she will often “meet a kid off the bus, just to say hello first thing in the morning.” She explains:

If you can catch them early enough, when they are getting off the bus and you know you have had a phone call that something has happened. I have parents call in. They all know they can leave a message and I listen to them first thing in the morning, that if we have to meet a kid off the bus because there has been a problem, then we will do that. Even just to say hello first thing in the morning, so that they have a friendly face... It starts the day. It can make or break it for a kid. [Author: And what message do you think that is sending to
students? That we care, that we care about them, and it’s important – extremely. They are safe.

This type of incidental interest and greeting serves to send the message to students that principals are interested, care, and that they are there to help students as needed. All of these incidental strategies and messages that are sent are reflective of a culture of care that aims to provide an inclusive environment to members of the school community.

An additional strategy that some principals report employing is the use of pacts between student and principal. These pacts are agreements or action plans that are established between a principal and a student to help the student deal with a specific problematic situation. These informal pacts or agreements typically lay out a plan or a course of action a student should take when confronted with a specific situation. The plan is mutually constructed and agreed upon between principal and student and once put into action, the students report back and debrief with the principal on how it worked. Dale describes such a pact with one student who found themselves in repeated confrontations with a specific teacher. He explains that:

I’ll give you an example of, and I did this several times. Say you were the kid, and you knew it perhaps wasn’t going to go well, so well with the teacher because the teacher was maybe a little bit frazzled, a little bit frustrated and at the point where you know they just wanted this all to be over with. And so establishing with the youngster some sort of agreement. “You know Bill, I want you to go into the classroom today, and what I want you to do is: Every time the teacher looks at you, smile. That’s all.” And then what I would do is, during the course of the day, bump into the kid in the hallway, “How’s the smiling going?” Yes. It’s a small thing, but it sometimes made it easier for the teacher. So you build almost a secret pact with the kid and how the kid’s going to try and modify a little bit of his or her behaviour at a given point in time. And it just takes some of the pressure off of the teacher.

This strategy acknowledges that the student does have some degree of control or influence over the teacher’s environment, and in the way that a particular day in the classroom will progress. Having students share responsibility for this, and then asking for his or her support in attempting to make this a positive day, sends a powerful message to students. It acknowledges that students have indeed commandeered power to, in some degree, manipulate the teacher, but more importantly that the principal trusts that this particular student will make positive choices regarding how they exercise this power and control. With this attempt at direct appeal, the principal brings the student into the equation
as part of the team and asks that they play their part in creating an inclusive classroom.

Each of these efforts at offering individual attention (classroom visits, ‘meet & greet,’ and the use of ‘pacts’) share the common thread of demonstrating to the student that they are worthy of recognition and attention when they are at their best, rather than simply when they misbehave and find themselves sent to the office. By taking the time to chat and visit with students, intentionally or incidentally, principals afford themselves an opportunity to meet and see the student under positive circumstances and offer recognition and reinforcement in this light. Such recognition is reportedly valued by students and contributes significantly to building and maintaining not only positive relationships, but a positive self image as well.

*Being Non-Judgmental*

Just as it is deemed to be important that principals be non-judgmental toward their staff, it is likewise essential for principals and teachers to remain non-judgmental toward students and to allow them to learn from their mistakes with an eye toward dealing more effectively with similar situations in the future. Chris comments on the value of keeping the focus on how to learn to deal with a similar situation in the future:

I worked with my staff consistently from day one until the time I left that school to make that culture a reality. It didn’t take long for students to understand when they got into trouble or they did something wrong, or they did something negative, that no one was always there to judge them and come down on them with a hammer. There was a lot of support, a lot of talking, and a lot of things. “Hey look, this time I’m going to cut you some slack, but here’s a better way, next time it happens, what are you going to do? How are you going to react?” If you do that often enough and over enough, the culture of the school changes. The attitudes of the students change. We went from having 87 incidents of some sort of violence in a week to maybe one or two.... [Author: And that took how many years?] One year.

Being non-judgmental does not mean that principals or teachers do not deal with transgressions. Rather, a non-judgmental stance allows them to take an impersonal approach to addressing the incident, not focusing on negative consequences, and allowing all parties to determine what can be learned from the incident and what can be attempted in the future to prevent similar situations from arising. As Heidi suggests, “We all make mistakes... learn for them and move on.” Inclusive principals recognize that new learning is the key, rather than negative consequence or punishment.
It is also understood that it is important not to make personal judgments about the student based on his or her behaviour. Ashley’s reference to the “need to separate the child from the behaviour, what the child did...” is echoed by several principals. Another participant, Dale, discusses the importance of informing the student that their behaviour may be judged and deemed to be unacceptable, but that he or she as a person is still accepted. Put another way, he accepts the individual as a person, but not their behaviour. Whenever suspending a student, Dale ensures that he delivers this message to students before sending them home. He explains:

One of my goals was always to be able to sit with the youngster and get to the point in the relationship; “Billy you know. You know what you’ve done.” And often the response would be “Yes sir.” And that kind of a response was based on the strength of the relationship, so I could say to him, “You know, I really like you as a person, but what you’ve done here is something I have to react and respond to, so you’re going home for a couple of days and when you get back, we’re going to have a conversation about this”…

Separating the person from the behavior in this fashion, and not simply judging the student by his or her behaviour, allows both the principal and student to maintain a relationship of mutual respect. By clearly indicating that it is the behavior that is not appreciated or liked, rather than the individual, the student is encouraged to maintain the relationship but change the behavior in the future. Following an incident, a student does not have to return to class or school feeling he or she is simply defined by past transgressions and has to start all over to rebuild relationships. Instead, armed with new learning and new strategies to prevent future occurrences, students can begin again with a clean slate.

_Nurturing Relationships with Parents and Community_

In forming relationships with parents, several principals, including Ashley, indicate that it is important for them to let parents know, and to come to the shared understanding, that “we are all here for the betterment of your child.” It is also considered important that teachers maintain frequent contact with parents and that they share with parents the positive as well as the not so positive information or news about their child’s performance, participation, or progress. Ashley shares the following thoughts on how to communicate meaningfully and respectfully with parents:

By treating them with respect. By having lots of communication with home, either through the agendas, through telephone calls. Letting parents know
when things are going well and letting parents know when you have concerns. Communication is really a key way of developing those relationships with kids and with parents, and it’s interesting to see the different levels of comfort that teachers have with communicating with home.

The very act of making contact and communicating with parents is in itself a sign of respect toward their role as parent. Frequent, positive contact sends the message that principals value parents’ participation and input into school-related matters involving their son or daughter and want to keep them informed as a member of its team. With established partnerships in place between school and parents, educators are seen to be better positioned to experience a positive working relationship with students.

In order to help facilitate a relationship with parents, some principals look for, or utilize, *connectors* to show their empathy or understanding for students’/families’ situations. Chris finds that his status as a First Nations Person allows him to connect with the Native community and assists him in his attempts to establish relationships with parents. Despite the fact that Chris does not physically stand out as being a person of Native Ancestry, he makes a point to share his status as a First Nations Person, where appropriate, as a way to make a connection to the local Native community. He explains:

Because my background is from such. I grew up extremely impoverished. I left home when I was thirteen. I have no problem identifying, and I would share that. I would make no two ways about it, so that they understood. Hey, whoa, whoa, this guy comes from where I come from. I know what you’re talking about. You know, I’d give them examples, I would look for a connecting cord, so it wasn’t me against them, or them against me. It was no, no, no, I’ve been there, I’ve done that. I know. I understand. I appreciate it. Totally. But that doesn’t make excuses for the child. You know, we can’t exclude that. We need to focus on what can we do to make it better.

This connecting cord does not have to be related to anything as central as ethnicity or race, and can include other aspects of commonality such as values, ethics, socio economic status, political views, interests, and so forth. The challenge for principals is to get to know students and their families and to identify commonalities that will unite them in working toward achieving their goal of facilitating success for their son or daughter. Other activities that reportedly serve to welcome parents into the school community and foster positive relationships include informal gatherings such as corn roasts, open houses, math nights, to list a few. One of the purposes for holding such events is reportedly to draw parents into the school and allow for informal interactions that can, and will hopefully allow principals,
teachers, and families to get to know one another better and in turn assist them in developing positive and mutually supportive relationships.

*Individual and Program and Interventions*

Principals report that they see themselves as being responsible, to the best of their ability, to meet the needs of the whole child, and to meet these needs regardless of whether the student is identified as exceptional and entitled to special consideration or not. Meeting broad needs in an inclusive manner in this sense is not viewed as exclusive to students who are identified as exceptional, but a right of all students. In response to how she prioritizes and allocates services and resources to students, Theresa comments that:

> It doesn’t matter if they are formally identified or not. If there is something we have in this school like assistive technology, a behaviour management plan or extra time, or hanging out in my office, whatever it is, we are going to use it.

This willingness to do what it takes to meet individual needs reinforces the message to students that ‘they see me and care about me as an individual’ and facilitates the development of respect and rapport between students and staff. Once rapport is developed and students know that their school is a safe place where they are valued and can make mistakes and still be respected, measures have to be in place to scaffold and support development and acquisition of new skills. Principals describe numerous strategies they rely on to develop these skills. These are grouped into the following categories: early intervention; focus on the whole student; social skills; wraparound services; valuing academics and maintaining high expectations; appropriate and differentiated instruction; and alternative programs/re-engaging/hooking. Each of these is discussed at length in the sections that follow.

*Early Intervention*

Inclusive principals do not wait for problems to arise or develop into a crisis and then respond to them with punitive measures; they anticipate and identify potential problems and intervene as soon as possible in a preventative fashion. This “setting students up for success” as Heidi suggests, ensures students maximize opportunities for success by beginning their school year on a positive note. Several principals routinely meet with staff in September to
address concerns they may have over students before they become an issue. Stephen describes the purpose of these meetings in the following way:

We, my special assignment teacher, the literacy partner, and my resource teacher sit down with every classroom teacher at the beginning of the year and look at their class list, and we go over each student in that class and talk about what they bring to the table. We talk about what our experiences are with that child, what their needs are, what are the kinds of things you can expect from that child, what are some of the past situations, what kinds of responses will work best with that child. There are students for example that do not respond well to any kind of direct confrontation and you can’t butt heads [with], you can’t go face to face with them cause it’s just escalating. So there are different techniques and strategies that we talk about right up front. So when a teacher has their class, they know who’s there, they know what will work best, and every teacher has their own strengths, their own personality and that has to come into play too.

The purpose of such a meeting is not to identify potential ‘troublemakers’ and then ‘target’ them and ‘catch them being bad.’ On the contrary, such early identification allows staff to implement resources and supportive intervention plans as soon as, or even before problems with behaviour arise. Kirk explains his intentions in holding similar meetings on an ongoing basis throughout the year:

We have an in-school support team that we convene and we refer kids to come up with solutions to problems. And then we have lots of informal things, like if we see a child in the office for things for two or three times, we call parents in and meet with parents and meet with the student, and we work with the teacher as well. We have an early plan and end of September reviews of students in classes to identify and ask questions about what’s being done for students.

It is important to note that this preplanning is reportedly preventative in nature in an inclusive school, and not in any way meant to be a means to marginalize, scapegoat, or target students in a negative way. In an inclusive school the ‘set ‘em up for success’ mantra always trumps a ‘catch ‘em being bad’ mentality.

In recognition of the fact that student misbehaviour is often noted by principals as being a response to frustrations over academics, early identification and intervention planning extends to academics as well as behaviour. Stephen uses an early identification strategy to identify problems of an academic nature that classroom teachers can then address through accommodations. Stephen explains that:

A lot of these students they may be struggling with the presentation, they may just be frustrated because they just can’t do the types of things they should be
able to do. So that’s one aspect, so it’s working with that particular child, the student the parent, bringing that team together to address the problem. The behaviour that you see in the classroom is a visible manifestation of some other problem.

Principals maintain that with appropriate academic supports in place, students are more likely to experience less frustration and greater success with academics and in turn be more focused and engaged in their learning.

Principals spend valuable time and allocate these staff resources intensely reviewing students who may present challenges, because they realize that behaviour is a result of unmet needs. Their belief is that if you address the needs early, then the behavior will change over time. Whether the needs are related to attention and recognition, academics, or social support, principals feel that it was very worthwhile making attempts to address these needs early on in the school year before crisis emerge.

**Focus on the Whole Student**

Principals consistently refer to their responsibly to focus on the holistic needs of the students rather than solely on the academic needs. Several of the principals’ comments echo Beth’s understanding that “we are teaching the whole child every day” and reflect an inclusive approach to holistic education. This is a philosophical stance that both guides their approaches to dealing with students in the school and which, to a significant extent, determines the types of programs and interventions that they adopt or implement for students with behavioural challenges.

Dale uses a framework that looks at four domains within which students may experience successes critical to overall wellbeing: community, academics, family, and peers. Although students would likely not be experiencing complete success in all four domains, Dale considers it essential that educators help the students be successful in at least two of these four domains. He explains:

I had this framework... there were four areas: How is the student functioning in the community? How is the student functioning academically? How is the student functioning in terms of the family? and How is the student functioning in terms of peers. And I always believed that... if I could help the student get stabilized in two of those we had a shot.... So I sort of looked at their needs from all those perspectives.
With the ongoing focus on standardization and accountability for EQAO test scores, many educators at the intermediate level feel pressured to view academics as their primary mandate, and view the other three domains as secondary and only a peripheral responsibility. Inclusive principals realize that without success and needs met in the other three domains, attempts at academics may be limited by the student’s preoccupation with fulfilling or reacting to unmet needs from the other areas. While reflecting on his belief that a school’s sense of purpose extends beyond academic pursuits, Dale comments that:

> It all depends on your sense of purpose, right? I mean the academic thing is important, there’s no question about it. But sometimes the reality is that sometimes kids are not in the position, because of the baggage that they’re carrying and the experiences that they’ve had, to benefit fully from the academic feats. And so I think it’s working in concert with all of those things that promotes the academic learning. But I think it’s a recognition that we’re talking about… a total person here....

The principals interviewed recognize the diversity in needs that students bring with them to school and respond with a variety of programs and interventions. Some interventions are related to specific academic needs, whereas others call for attention to the development of skills in other areas such as social or emotional coping domains. Regardless of the area of need, principals believe it is their responsibility to provide appropriate programming to the best of their ability. Some examples of how they meet such needs are presented in the following section.

**Social Skills**

Often students truly want to make it through their school day without conflict and confrontation but may lack the social skills required to navigate through the challenges they are presented with on any given day. Principals provided numerous examples of special programming (social skills groups) that they offer in their schools to help student develop new skills sets and to assist with their social interactions. In one case, Ashley describes the program one of her staff ran during lunch and recess for students who found it difficult to interact outside at such times:

> We have a social skills room set up on breaks, and the social skills room is for kids that can’t be on the yard because they can’t handle themselves out there or kids that need a break from the yard for a limited period of time... or it could be kids that are there because they’ve been referred short term for some
incident that’s occurred that, where they might need to get together as a group and work out a problem.... It’s a separate classroom..... And the ultimate goal is always to have them with the main group of kids because we don’t want kids segregated but sometimes they are just in a place where they are unable to control themselves and need to have just that little bit of more structure at that particular time. And what happens in there is that they may be role playing [or] doing some sort of problem solving to assist with knowing how to handle themselves the next time that they have that situation occur again.

Another principal, Maria, describes a similar social skills option run by an EA in the school, that they use as an alternative to suspensions and as a means to teach appropriate social skills:

We have a time out area of the school during the recess. [This is] more of a social time... where we actually teach those skills. So I wouldn’t suspend, I would say that student must attend this program and it runs at lunch time, and the student has to go there either as a consequence or as a preventive measure for the student. And they go in and it’s not just a time out. We have one of the EA’s who has volunteered to run a social skills group. So if they’re having troubles on the yard and they aren’t quite sure of the best strategy to use in that situation, they would learn about alternatives.

The ultimate goal of social skills groups during these times is not exclusion or punishment, but rather support and facilitation of the development of targeted skills. Such skill development will allow students to better cope with the challenges they face in making decisions and acting in ways that will lead to their successful participation in all aspects of their schooling experience.

Simply placing students in a classroom at lunch as a punishment for fighting on the yard is exclusionary practice. Alternatively, as in the instance noted above, Maria chooses to remove students from volatile situations where they are often ‘set up for failure,’ and instead temporarily provides them with instruction on social skills and conflict resolution. This type of intervention, when delivered effectively, is inclusive given the fact that it is preventative and in the student’s long term best interests. Other principals utilized similar strategies and initiatives to assist students with their behaviour during less structured times. One such principal, Raymond, describes a proactive initiative he had initiated to help students cope with less structured lunch periods:

I think we are getting proactive in terms of the things that are happening at our school to ensure that the kids aren’t finding themselves in difficult situations. For example, we have a program called ‘PALS’ that we run at lunch recess every day. PALS stands for Playground, Activity, Leaders in School. What
that is that the 7/8 students run activities for our Grade 1–6. They have activity days, there are announcements in the morning, the Grade 7/8 run it. The Grades 1–6 go, because it’s something to do and they aren’t standing around just getting themselves in trouble.

Although such measures require time to set up, and are not suitable for all, they may be useful in preventing problems from occurring with some students. Again, as stated by the principals, the key is not one approach for all, but rather, an individual approach to supports and intervention to matches each student’s unique needs and abilities. Echoing the need for such an individualized approach, Stephen reminds us that:

That child won’t change his behaviour unless we can provide him with the supports he needs to be the kind of person that he can be. He’s responded to different situations in his environment that we may not recognize... their vision of what’s happening around them may be different from what mine is. I need to know what their vision is. I need to know what’s there. I need to know how to change, how to provide an environment where that child’s going to be successful. So yes, we want him to be successful. We expect him to change. But he’s not going to change unless we scaffold that, unless we support that.

How principals scaffold and support this change will vary as it depends on the individual needs of students. What is critical across interactions, however, is that principals take into consideration individual needs and abilities and scaffold an appropriate intervention plan around those needs which will in turn set the student up for successful experiences.

*Wraparound Services: Use of Educational Assistants and Child Development Counsellors*

Several principals recognize that they cannot always meet student needs and commented on the need for professional services that could address those that were beyond the scope of what they can provide as educators. In these instances, principals identify their role as co-coordinator of a wide variety of wraparound services which typically vary as a reflection of individual student needs. Ashley explains that:

It depends on the kid... whether it’s, you know academic support, which it usually isn’t for those kids. A lot of the kids that are hard to support are very smart kids. Lots of times there needs to be communication with home, getting parents on board, referrals to outside agencies.

Ideally, schools should be able to focus on attending to academic needs of students and refer to and draw upon the support and expertise from other agencies to address the myriad of other student needs, be it the need for food, emotional or psychological support, and so forth. Unfortunately, many outside agencies frequently have long waiting lists and limited
resources that prevent them from addressing all but students in severe crisis. Taralyn empathetically expresses that:

The agencies are strapped too. They are no different than educators and they are strapped and they also have a lot of territorial issues... [which leads others to respond that] ‘that’s not my responsibility, doesn’t fit my mandate,’ and that would be one of our huge challenges.

Although principals utilize these services when and where available, many clearly express the need for full time staff to attend to the needs of these students and families at certain high needs schools. A second principal, Beth, confers with the need for increased service from professional agencies on a daily basis in the schools:

Well, I mean we have we have [Clearview] Child and Family services who are coming in with their school-based mental health programs. And that’s been phenomenal... We have a teacher who’s assigned to the school and a worker, a youth support worker that’s assigned to the school... But there are days in this building that if we had a social worker, if we had somebody that was very well trained to work with some of these kids, that would be a gift.... We do also have behaviour management therapists through the board which is wonderful. But what I guess what I’m trying to say it would be nice if we had a full-time person here. Yes. And that is something that would probably never happen. But if you were talking about the optimum? That would be it. That would be having somebody in the building all the time that we could resource to.

As these principals indicate, one of the problems with relying on outside agencies for student support is that they are often not accessible, or if they are, they are only servicing a select few ‘identified’ behavioural or high risk students. Principals express the need to have someone in their schools full time to do preventative work as well as to intervene daily with students as needed.

One school does have a full time Child Development Counsellor (CDC) who works exclusively with students’ social, emotional, and psychological needs. Jonathon, who is fortunate to have a full time CDC, describes how the CDC’s time is utilized:

We were down to 300 students last year. His [the CDC’s] daily regular caseload was around 85 which means 85 out of 300 students, almost one third of this population saw him regularly, being at least once a week, at least, for scheduled meetings. Another third, easily another third, were those students who had a crisis arise. And you know a class that needed the counsellor but needed it at this moment. The example of the guy who at the anniversary of his mom’s death needed that intervention from our counsellor then for a short period of time. So it was a short intervention. Then the last one third, we’ll get Sam [the CDC], we’ll do some bullying programs, we’ll do some social
programs as groups and going to classes and talking to kids about our problems that arose and... so they all seem to get his service some way or another....

Other principals who are not as fortunate to have dedicated CDC’s in their schools find creative ways to address these needs through reallocation of resources and re-designation of positions dedicated to non academic support services for students. In schools without a full time CDC, principals frequently rely on Educational Assistants (EA’s) with positive rapport and appropriate skillsets, and give them the flexibility to work with students with emotional, behavioural, or social skills needs. Some principals reportedly reassign EA duties to address such needs in the school, regardless of the primary designated responsibility of the EA. Keys to the success of EA supports are firstly, finding the right person, and secondly, ensuring flexibility in assignment and schedules so that the EA is available as needed. Rosemary explains her perspective on the use of EA’s:

I try to get the board to give us as many EA’s as possible and I try to give the EA’s as much flexibility with their schedules to work with these students because they can often be a little less formal than a classroom teacher. They have the physical ability to leave the room and go somewhere non-stressful. They can have a nice calm quiet way... so that sometimes a volunteer [EA] can come along at just the right moment start talking about baseball or something that will help the student to relax and then go back to class....

Stephen, in describing how he utilizes EA’s in such a capacity also sheds light on another important aspect of an inclusive school, that is, one of shared ownership of responsibility. He indicates:

We have Educational Assistants in the school who may have been generated by special needs students but they work with everybody in the school and spend a lot of time doing social stories [social skills development].... We’ve got a couple of Educational Assistants that are great with the students. Our Educational Assistants take ownership for all students in the school, the same way the teachers do. They’re not assigned to one particular child, and that’s board supported.

This strategy of capitalizing on the strength of all staffing resources to flex to the needs of students and the school extends not only to support staff but to the whole school community. Stephen explains:

Very much so, and it’s the same with our teaching staff. The teacher is not responsible for the 25 or 30 kids in their class; they’re responsible for the school community. We all live here we all work here. It’s all part of who we are, so we all have to do this together.
In summary, principals value and utilize CDC’s, and EAs in a variety of creative ways to ensure that individual needs are met and that each student is best positioned to navigate through the school day and maximize opportunities for learning. In doing so, educators are sending the message that students’ overall wellbeing is important and that emotional and psychological, as well as academic needs are important and worthy of attention in the school environment.

Valuing Academics and Maintaining High Expectations

As reflected in Theresa’s message to students “It’s not Ok to fail here,” inclusive principals encourage students to strive for their personal best and maintain high academic standards for students, as opposed to allowing students to sell themselves short by coasting through with little effort. Numerous other principals attempt to ensure that students know they are expected to put forth appropriate efforts on academics and that these expectations are indeed considered to be an integral and valued part of the school community.

This perspective was clearly reflected by the principals who provide homework for students who were on suspension. Principals indicate that they support, if not expect, that students will be provided with, and will in turn complete, missed work while on suspension. This ensures that students do not fall behind and return to class to face the additional challenge of catching up with missed lessons and work. Beth shares her perspective that “It’s important that the child knows that just because they have made an error in their behaviour, their academics are still extremely important, and that the people in this building care that they’re not getting behind and we want them, the students, to stay caught up.” This becomes especially important when, for example, a “mandatory suspension” necessitates a lengthy absence from school, as in the following case description where Beth allows a parent to come in and get homework for his son:

This particular boy, he is a very challenged little boy. He’s had a very rough, rough upbringing.... Anyway he decided one day to bring about 50, 22 gun shells to school. He was stealing at the corner store, so he had about 30 chocolate bars and gum in his bag. And he also had a drug pipe. And it had been told to me that he was smoking and sharing with his friends. Grade 8. So you know we brought him in and like I said, I have very good relationship with CAS [Children’s Aid Society] and with the police. So you know the police came in. They charged him. They took him out in cuffs. I came back in the office, had my little cry. Yes. I called Children’s Aid and talked to [a
worker] over there, and I said you know we need to meet over at Children’s Services, and got her moving. Because he had been seeing her, I guess, the last couple of years. So to get him back where he needed to be, which is at school, we had a couple of meetings. I met with the dad several times. Dad came in almost every day. We got homework ready, we got work packages, and dad was taking the work to the student. [Author: But on a suspension typically principals or teachers don’t send homework home. Why did you?] But we always do. [Author: Why do you send homework home on a suspension?] Because it’s important that the child knows that just because they have made an error in their behaviour, their academics are still extremely important, and that the people in this building care that they’re not getting behind and we want them, the child, to stay caught up.

Not only does this demonstrate to the student that a high value is placed on academics, but just as importantly, such action demonstrates that they want to see that students succeed. Accordingly, they gather and send work home to ensure that students are provided with every reasonable opportunity to keep up with the material being covered at school.

Several principals note that they offer in-school suspensions so that students can receive support with ongoing work and even allow them to attend certain classes in school through the day while on suspension. Taralyn offers in-school suspensions or suspensions that are applied to one or two classes only, allowing the student to continue participating in classes that are deemed appropriate:

I would say OK, what teachers need you in class so you don’t have to sit in suspension room? So your Family Studies teacher wants you in class; ‘cause often those kids often have a very much a hands-on timetable.... So you look for ways you can be flexible to support the kids to get them back into school, support them when they’re out of school.

This strategy allows the student the opportunity to continue in classes where he or she is experiencing success, but to take a time out from those specific classes that may be overwhelmingly troublesome for them at a particular time. Instead of having students sit at home or at the office during these periods, several principals find creative ways and means to provide a supervised setting that allows students to continue on with their work in a less stressful environment.

These examples illustrate the understanding that it is the behaviour that principals want to address and not the student that they want to punish. Principals acknowledge the fact that at times suspensions may indeed be warranted, or even required by Ministry policy, but
that an inclusionary response requires them as principal to look out for the student’s overall success and well being, despite the fact that he or she had broken some rule or were otherwise engaged in some form of unacceptable behaviour. Where a suspension away from school is warranted or mandated, finding creative and supportive ways and means to facilitate and assist that student in keeping up with academic work helps to ensure success and sends the message to the student that academics are important and educators value and support the student’s success in this regard. At the same time, the point is made that behaviours do have consequences, one of which might be social exclusion from friends and peers.

Appropriate and Differentiated Instruction

Many principals share the understanding that misbehaviour is often a reflection of frustration resulting from an inability to achieve desired outcomes. In many cases, it can be as a result of frustration over attempts to succeed at academics. Heidi suggests that:

Often they can’t cope with the work in the classroom and it is their way of getting out because they can’t do their work, and they don’t want their friends to know they can’t do the work, so they’ll misbehave to get sent out. It’s often self-esteem, they don’t think very highly of themselves. [Author: So how do we as educators and you as principal, try to address those needs?] Well, if it’s a kid who, the kid I was telling you about who stole the milk money, I finally figured out that this kid was getting sent out always during literacy – always. So you know, you finally clue in – well why is it always during literacy? ... We found out the kid was really low, which we knew, but we didn’t realize he was that low. So then... the child was identified as [having] a mild intellectual disability, ...I got him into a Grade 10 shop class for Grade 9 because that is his hook – his hands-on work, his mechanical abilities are going to be what keeps him in school... We kept him in school, and I saw him this morning at the bus and asked him how high school was, and out the bus window, he is banging on the window for me to say hello.

In many instances it is interest rather than ability that affects a student’s level of engagement and learning. In one such case, Taralyn reports how in her school they introduced a variety of interventions to reengage struggling students and make the school work more meaningful and relevant:

I would say strategies that you do as a teacher that you might find are more engaging. Looking at that differentiated instruction, allowing them to do, you know, the problem based learning things that are applicable. As I said, and I’m not trying to be stereotypical, but often these kids are boys, and you
know, so what is appealing to a boy at 12 and 13 years old as far as learning? You know... you bring the popular mechanic book in or whatever, something that can help to you know, light a bit of a fire... In education, you know we are doing a lot of things differently. Certainly in math, we have lots of manipulatives that are more engaging. So for some students who are hands-on types of learners, I do think that we are trying to incorporate different ways of instructing and assessing so that we can try to be more engaging for some of these kids. Ideally, we try to do as many things as we can to keep them in the classroom. And you keep coming back to preventative [strategies] like differentiated instruction, meeting their needs outside the box, hooking them in, and so on. And that’s why you’re not focusing more on discipline because you probably don’t have all those chronic, you know, repeat offences because you put the focus back on prevention and understanding their needs.

Taralyn also transitioned two of her Grade 8 students into secondary school early in order to ensure that the programming is stimulating and appropriate to the students’ interests and abilities. Although not feasible in many instances, when appropriate, this principal is willing to think outside of the box and take a risk in exercising nontraditional interventions for disengaged students. In this particular instance it seemingly paid off:

Last year I took two out of Grade 8 early halfway through the year, and they were just disengaged there... they weren’t doing anything. They weren’t doing anything for themselves. They weren’t doing their work. They probably got to move along anyways. So we brought them on conditionally on the fact that they made an effort, And you know, they responded to that. Both of those kids are [now earning] 4 out of 4 credits; there’s great success.

As an inclusive principal, Taralyn chooses to find an intervention option that best suits the student’s needs instead of continuing to attempt to force the student to carry on with the more traditional course of study. This ‘out of the box’ thinking is not always easy to act on, but where possible, inclusive principals are willing to take the risks associated with bending the rules or employing new non-traditional options and strategies toward achieving student success.

Another principal, Theresa provides an example of how she took a tragedy and helped students turn it into a meaningful culture building experience. This example involves disruptions to the normal routines and programming within the school; given the circumstances, this principal altered the curriculum and turned a negative into a positive for her students:

We had a student die here last year and the kids blew me away with what they did. Like within a day, they had raised $400 at least, and these were not the kids who you would assume like student council president. I’m talking kids
who have been kicked out of school five times you know, went around the school got money, went to a local garden place, got gardening stuff, called some people, got soil donated, went outside and started from scratch, and built a garden and planted it in his name. A kind of memorial service. Like I could cry just talking about it. Like unbelievable and what I talked about that day was what it meant to be a student at that school, and that’s I think what kids need to see is that they are all valued and that this is a good place and that everything has its issues, but you just have to sing that song, and I always say that to the staff. You can never say this isn’t the best place to come to school. You have to believe it to live it. And kids have to live it, you know.

Although this example is unusual, it attests to the value that the inclusive principal places on the interpersonal and affective aspects of students’ development. Theresa, and her staff, took the time to mourn and celebrate community within the school, and came together to offer support for one another and for another student’s family. Inclusive principals are quick to recognize the value of such endeavors and to fully support these differentiated learning opportunities when they arise.

A final example related to differential and appropriate instruction that is meaningful and relevant to student interests is provided by one of the principals, Chris. He describes how he took over and taught math lessons on the cost of vandalism to the school. He offered to free up teachers and teach the graphing segment of the math curriculum for all of the classes in the intermediate school. In doing so he reports he had three objectives. Firstly, he wanted to give his teachers some more time for planning. Secondly, he wanted to deliver the math lessons in a way that is meaningful and relevant to the students. And thirdly, he wanted students begin to think about the wider implications and costs that vandalism had to the school and to each of them. He explains that he went into each classroom with the following goal:

We wanted kids to do graphing in their math class in Grade 7 and 8. So I went in and I taught math to every single kid in the school, and I used our school budget. And I would show them our school budget and how much money we had to spend, and how much we spent on sports equipment and on fun things, and how much we lost through vandalism... I freed up my principal time and I went in, and I did that. Now I love to teach anyways, but it was a hoot, because I would get them doing all of these things then I would give them hypothetical situations. I would say, now if we can save eleven thousand, twelve thousand dollars this year... and we actually did this one year. We bought a stereo system for our school. Because the kids, the vandalism, the cost of vandalism went to almost zero. [Author: Down from?] Eleven thousand dollars. And that was all inside the classrooms, hallways and that.
The kids put up posters. We did all kinds of stuff. We got them involved. Once again, they were included, it was their school.

In adapting the curriculum in such a fashion, Chris is engaging students with appropriate, meaningful, and relevant material with which to learn graphing. Because it is likely that not all students will want to listen to discussions on the costs of vandalism, Chris attempts to address student misbehaviour by approaching the issues in a less direct way other than through confrontation and punishment. In a preventative fashion, he educates students and offers financial incentive for them to take control of their own behavior and reduce the damage and costs incurred through acts of vandalism. Chris suggests that “adapting curriculum in this fashion seemed like an effective strategy.” The reported drop in vandalism suggests that it was.

*Alternative Programs/Re-engaging/Hooking*

Principals acknowledged that by Grade 7/8 some students are already disengaged and acting out as a reaction to having to participate in an environment that they are not experiencing success or finding value in. Principals describe a wide variety of measures that they undertake to re-engage both individuals and groups of students and bolster their motivation. The intent is to offer these students something different or something appealing that will serve as a hook to spark their interest and help to change the students’ perception of school, as Rob indicates, from a place that is boring, to a place “where I can shine and find learning meaningful if not even fun, to me.” In elaborating on this, Rob provides a powerful example of how such a process of reengagement can be initiated by providing a disengaging student a chance to capitalize on her individual talents in the school:

We found out she was artistic... She would paint the windows around the school. She was absolutely brilliant at it, and she went from a kid that hated school and hated us, hated the teachers, hated me, to a kid that really liked the art teacher, and seemed to like and respect me at least, a little bit, could tolerate me anyway. And [she] would stay in class and behave herself so that at break time, at lunch time, she could work on painting the window. Apparently in her mind, she could see the whole picture on the window; she imagined the whole picture in detail. And then what she did was fill in the detail with a marker and a brush. And then I realized how that type of artist did it. [Author: But that’s not going to improve her EQAO scores…] Yes, it will. Yes, it will… because if I can give her an opportunity to express that and have kids say to her, “Wow”… now she feels capable of having success in school. When she’s capable of having success in school, she doesn’t have to
be the clown, she doesn’t, or won’t be the best, but she doesn’t have to be the best at being the worst. And then she’s willing to stay in class, she’s willing to put up with it... she’s at least willing to sit there [maybe thinking] “Keep my mouth shut, but you can’t make me listen. Teach me if you dare.” Then she sits, and then when she’s not being a clown, the teacher says something that catches her attention. Then she starts to listen more, and now instead of it being externally enforced learning, she has her interest peeked. Now it’s not constant progress, we have relapses, but now she's willing enough to stay in class. And now we have the chance to reach her, the chance to interest her, chance to teach her. And then pretty soon, behaviour seemed to drop off... she was getting affirmation, [and] not for being the class clown, or by embarrassing the teacher by saying something rude as she stormed out and slammed the door. She was getting affirmation from the kids and from the teachers, and from me, and I would set it up. I mean you would space it, when she’s painting there at lunch hour and a police officer comes into the school. “Come on here and look at this Constable, can you believe what she is doing?” And he’d go “Wow! I can’t believe it, that is absolutely awesome!” But she’d be 12 feet tall and bullet proof. To have a cop, which she hated, because a person wearing the same uniform had arrested her mother just three nights before. This creates a disconnect in her mind, or somebody from CAS. would be at her, a principal from another school, or God, anybody! And make her shine, and that’s what we all want. Mike, you want to shine in your job, I want to shine in my job. And what was I doing, I was just giving her what I want. I want to be treated with respect and dignity, and I was treating her with respect and dignity. I was saying “You’re awesome at what you’re doing.”

In this example, Rob and the staff at this school are ensuring that they capitalize on this girl’s strengths to engage her in some activity at school that leads to success and a feeling of accomplishment and pride.

In another example, Chris demonstrates to a group of challenging students that he values them and their contributions using a different non-traditional approach. Chris met with a small group of his students at lunch hour in a non-structured forum, simply to “get to know them better” and to provide a little extra positive attention. The following excerpt provides a description of how Chris, through these meetings, is able to develop rapport with the students and send the message to them that they do indeed matter at this school:

We also had what I call my poker club, where once a week I had all of these kids come to my office. Every single week they had to come in and it was a Tuesday at lunch. I’d close the door and I had a lunch and I would play cards with them. And we got to know them; we got to do other things. I arranged for a lot of them to go to special activities once or twice a year as a group. [Author: These were the difficult to manage students?] Yes. Well, the students, not only difficult, some of them were difficult, extremely difficult to manage at the onset, but by the end of the year, I can’t think of any one of
them that was really that difficult to manage. It was just a matter of spending
the time, taking the time.

Many other principals refer to the need to “hook” a student’s interest by capitalizing
on the student’s unique strengths and allowing him or her the opportunity to achieve
considerable success at something at school. The value in this is that each student is able to
contribute something or excel at something at school, and this in turn enhances his or her
sense of value and belonging. Some principals comment on the need to be quite creative with
programming curriculum delivery – stopping short of referring to this as modifications – in
order to provide such opportunities for students. In one example, Heidi describes how she
assigned the project of assembling a large number of tables they had ordered for the school to
a student who was encountering behavioural difficulties. When asked if “the teachers object
because he wasn’t in their class, doing the academics and the curriculum as he was supposed
to do?” her response was:

No, because they realized that this kid was never going to be able to do the
curriculum that they were doing. He needed differentiation of instruction and
this was the differentiation because maybe he wasn’t reading the novel, but he
was reading the instructions on how to put the tables together. And if it was
boosting his self-esteem and giving him a reason for learning, and a reason for
being here, then we were overcoming that. And then you start on the
schoolwork. You give the kid a hook, and you pull them in and then you start
working with them.

Through this particular project, Heidi had provided an opportunity for the student to see
value in what he had to contribute to the school community and to feel proud of his unique
skills and accomplishments.

Heidi also finds odd jobs throughout the school that she offers to students in order to,
among other things, give them a break and their teachers a break from routine, and to offer
some special attention and a chance to contribute in a meaningful way:

...he got into an altercation outside over the basketball, and to be honest I was
going to suspend him I thought you know he is in Grade 7... OK, we will try
something else first. So he helped my literacy teacher go through all her books
and level them, which is of course a literacy activity so it helped with literacy
– during his nutrition break, not during school time. So during the two
nutrition breaks and it took him, I think, three days to do that. He then came to
me and said, “What would you like me to do now?” And I said, “Well the
aquarium needs cleaning, you need to go to Mr. Carson and find out what to
do,” so he and two other Grade 7 boys gave up all of their nutrition breaks and
cleaned all the gravel in the aquarium. They were very excited because they
found a bottom cleaner that had lived in an inch of water all summer in the aquarium and was still alive – they were very excited that they saved his life. They then unpacked, I think it was, 50 big boxes of paper that were stored in the shed. They moved them from the shed, into the computer room and unpacked and stored them…. This was the behavioural kid... he has now been out for a week with no issues. He apologized to the other kid. He shook his hand, He promised that it would never happen again. They are in the same class. Things appear to have calmed down. They walked in together this morning. Talking. So it is going to happen again? Yes, probably… I don’t have a shop, but if I can get them doing physical stuff that is good for the school.... out of the school yard, which was my goal.

Others principals such as Dale give students responsibilities helping out with teams and events, if they are not fortunate enough to participate in other ways:

The message is, you know, you’re as worthwhile as anybody else. And you’re welcome here.... You’re reaching out to the youngster I suppose. Maybe that’s a good way to describe it... I always found it important to try and get them engaged in activities in the school, like a sports team for example, depending, usually a male. Even in a capacity of actually being part of a team as a member or supporting the team in some way you know like, being an assistant coach, whatever you want to call it.

Taralyn describes another program called ACES where resources are allocated toward sending groups of students off site to participate in outdoor service learning initiatives. This alternative program offers students a chance to experience non-traditional activities that may be better suited to their individual learning strengths and needs. Taralyn suggests that:

… the programs we put in place were very much hands-on experiential type program so the one that enlists the public school all the feeder schools and it’s called ‘ACES’ and it’s very much like an outdoor education program. [Author: Does it include all grades?] 7 and 8.... the ACES one has done quite well so it pulls in these students in 7/8. Historically all boys, but the program is very much geared to a literacy/numeracy type of focus academically. And then for part of the day and then after that, a lot of it is hands-on… At the marsh, working on building and building boardwalks. It’s a Ducks Unlimited wetland area and the groups come there and we have a great fall program. And so kids come there with their programs and these kids help. They help build self esteem, and they do a lot when you’re building boardwalks, and you’re building in a wetland area, and you’re helping with classes that are coming to the program. And you’re doing bird banding and, you know, doing water studies and stuff. It’s very, you know, sort of learning related so it has a great impact. Well it certainly is making the connections for the students....

One recurring theme emerging from principals’ discussions suggests that for some students at least, extraordinary programming options are warranted in order to help them
reengage and find a sense of belonging and value in school. Kirk provides the following example and rationalization of why this is warranted in an inclusive school:

We have a couple of kids, one’s in 7 the other is in 8. Both have a history of stealing and semi-violent behaviour. The 8 is an artist, and [with the guidance counsellor], we’ve let him go down to take pictures of the graffiti wall, the student, but he has to work with an artist now on developing collage art and graffiti. So that’s one thing he’s going to do. And the other student, he’s black from a family with a history of some troubled youth, and he wants to be a chef so he’s been to Valencia’s already, a posh restaurant.... [Author: Who facilitated that?] Well, I set it up with the guidance counsellor. And we have one of the teachers here knows a chef at the Old Mill, so he came here yesterday and the kids made food. [Author: So that’s all aimed at developing what for the child?] It’s all aimed at making the child feel like they belong, like there’s a place for them in the school and there’s things they can do.

Measures such as those provided in the examples above are only a small sampling of the unique opportunities that can be created or capitalized on to stimulate students’ interest and excitement and increase their participation in schooling. Principals suggest that this can be facilitated by capitalizing on students’ strengths and allowing each individual student the opportunity to shine brightly. This can often be accomplished by hooking the interests of a disengaged student in a way that appeals to their individual interests and talents. Principals understand that with motivation in place, and an enhanced sense that they have something meaningful to contribute, students are more likely to remain focused and willing to engage in the myriad of learning opportunities presented to them both inside and outside of class.

Creating a Supportive Culture and Climate for Students

Principals interviewed in this study believed that it is critical for students with behavioural difficulties to feel that they are welcome and valued at the school, despite the fact that they often do not live up to behavioural expectations. Toward this end, principals describe their efforts to facilitate the development of a ‘culture of care’ that permeates the school culture. It is expected that this culture of care is reflected throughout the school in each and every interaction that individuals have with one another, although it is acknowledged that in reality this is an ideal and rather elusive goal. Principals do help to develop this culture however by setting expectations around the following four areas: taking an individualized approach to discipline; allowing no targeting of students; providing
alternatives to suspension; and making suspensions useful. Each of these is discussed further in the following section.

_Culture of Care_

Inclusive principals understand that a culture of care has to permeate all that occurs in a school in order for students to feel safe and comfortable in the school environment. This culture of care applies equally to the way students treat each other, the way students are expected to treat teachers, and to the way teachers and the principal treat students – even when they are disrespectful and acting out. Principals suggest that their efforts at disciplining students under such circumstances are clearly not meant to be punitive. Instead, discipline is rooted in the premise that students need to know that limits are in place, that these limits will be enforced, and that students are expected to try their best to operate within these parameters. Principals agree there is a need for standards for performance with regard to behaviour, attitude and effort, and that consequences are called for when standards are not maintained. These standards, however, are not seen as universal but rather as flexible and varied depending upon the individual student and each specific situation. Efforts at discipline and consequences are intended to support students rather than to punish them and to foster the development of alternative perspectives and alternative choices for behaviour. What is important is the nature of how discipline is approached and how consequences for misbehaviour are addressed with students. It is critical that discipline be addressed in a respectful and caring way, rather than in a punitive, demeaning fashion. The following two quotes from principals illustrate such understanding. Chris shares his perspective that:

_The number one thing was that [what] we needed was the whole culture of feeling safe and secure within the school for all students. And students clearly understood what the expectations were, they clearly understood what we stood for as a teaching staff, and what the parameters were... That you do your best, you treat others with respect, you treat us with respect, and that you never were never fearful to come into the office and talk to us. Because there was nothing to fear. We were there to support you, to help you._

The second principal, Raymond, stresses the importance of clear expectations and the need to offer a similar culture of care:

_The bottom line is, no kid wants to fail. And a kid who has behavioural problems, if they know that you care about their success and they know that, you can’t fake that. If they know you care about their success and you get to
work with them, generally they work with you. Does that mean that they don’t have behavioural problems? No it doesn’t. But if you are clear with them, they know what the clear expectations are and what the clear consequences are, and you are consistent with them all the way through. They know what they can expect from you, and so they are more likely for [to experience] success.

Both of these quotes highlight the importance of respecting students and showing care and concern for them, even when they are at their most vulnerable moments, that is, when they have misbehaved or made errors in judgment. Inclusive principals consider these times to be ‘teachable moments’ and as opportunities to learn from mistakes. Learning from transgressions comes about in a variety of ways but is reported as optimal when encapsulated in this culture of care and concern.

*Individualized Approach to Discipline*

Principals report that students have to feel safe and secure within the school environment in order fully focus on learning opportunities. In order to have safe schools, many principals indicate that it is important to establish clear limits that set and define boundaries. The response for transgressions beyond these boundaries varies, but the limits remain somewhat consistent when it comes to certain things: namely, maintaining a productive learning environment, respect, drugs, and violence. Many principals describe expectations that can be grouped into four broad areas: that a productive learning environment is to be preserved; members of the school community are to be respectful toward each other; there are to be no illicit drugs at school; and that violent or aggressive acts are not acceptable. Principals share in the understanding that with these broad expectations in place, the intent of consequences for infractions is not punishment, but rather to provide learning experiences that allow the student to accept responsibility for their choices and actions, to learn from their mistakes, and to act differently in the future.

Also interesting to note is the recurring reference to ‘consequences’ rather than ‘punishment,’ and the distinction made between each. Inclusive principals prefer use of the word consequences over punishment, reflecting the understanding that consequences can be natural or logical and quite effective without having to be punitive. One key aspect of effective discipline is the need to be flexible with consequences and to treat each situation and student individually. Although the four basic expectations noted above are consistently
maintained, a one size fits all, common consequence for any infractions is clearly not in order in an inclusive school. The following interchange with Stephen illustrates this position:

[Author: It seems like you have a very individualized approach as opposed to “This is how we deal with students that are acting up.”] You pretty much have to. You develop a code of behaviour but your code of behaviour is flexible because it responds to students’ needs and their needs are very different. [Author: Now the Code of Conduct, if I may bring that up, didn’t really offer that flexibility for non-identified students, and yet you’re telling me that you have to have flexibility as an administrator. Have there ever been instances where you don’t follow that policy, the suspension policy outlined by the Safe Schools Act?] Oh, absolutely, all the time. [Author: Why would an administrator not follow policy?] In a sense, you see we’re here to serve the students. You’re not teaching curriculum, you’re teaching students, you’re not administering a code, you’re dealing with behaviour. We want all our kids to be successful, and if you’re just booting them out every chance you get... In a sense it’s not really going out on a limb because the board vision too is one that really supports student success. That’s what we’re all about. So you do everything you can to ensure that student is successful.

Another principal, Cilla, provides the following example to support this need for flexibility in dealing with students who might be misbehaving:

Well, consequences, you’d look at every child differently if you knew that they were having a particularly bad day because of what happened at home. For example, [in] one case, mom was picked up for drunk driving, step-dad had lost his license so mom spent her night in jail... They were a little off the next day, so you know, you deal with them differently. You give them some slack. You know there were a lot of kids being taken out of homes and taken to foster homes. If we are aware of it, we tend not to be so hard. I don’t want to use the word hard, but the expectations may be different that day. Or a lot of counseling. A lot of time for them to come in because they are angry, sometimes they didn’t know, so my room was used for that a lot.

This inclusive approach affords educators the flexibility required to respect students and treat them as individuals with different social or emotional needs and abilities, just as educators respond with differential instruction in response to students’ varied academic skills and abilities.

In applying consequences for transgressions, most principals suggest that consequences have to be logical and in proportion to the offence. Heidi explains that:

As soon as someone does something wrong there is a consequence, usually the consequence fits the crime. Yesterday a group of Grade 7/8 kids for whatever reason decided to spit on the picnic table, and then they tried to get another little kid to dance in the spit on the picnic table. I looked at them and said “What are you doing? You are going to clean this.” So I got J-cloths and I
divided the J-cloths and I got a bucket with Spic-n-Span and I made them carry the full bucket. And I sent them out there and that table had to be spic-n-span. And then they had to clean the bucket, get rid of the cloths, and put the bucket back in the custodial cart. [Author: And who supervised that?] No one, I sent them out there. I watched from the door, but they don’t know that I watched. [Author: Where do you find the time for this? Because this, the new start of a year, you have got all these responsibilities, why would you take the time to do that out of your day?] Because you take the time now, you will get the benefit ten-fold over the year. If you set the tone early enough in the school year, then you don’t have as many problems.

This once again illustrates the preventative nature of imposing natural, logical, and appropriate consequences in a respectful manner. Discipline and consequences are used as a means to an end so that students learn through consequences and in the future modify their behaviour accordingly. By intervening in such a fashion, and taking the time to use the experience as a learning opportunity rather than as an opportunity for exclusive punishments, the need for future interventions is reduced. As the above quote suggests, time invested today is time saved tomorrow.

Another example of how principals use consequences for learning opportunities as opposed to strictly punishment is provided by Jonathon in his description of a writing assignment he provides for students who are repeatedly late for classes:

We have a program, a series of readings and exercises for when it becomes a constant battle. If you’re [frequently] late for class... sometimes I can sit and talk to them about the reasons, but sometimes I can’t. So we have these alternatives to suspension binders that have these exercises in them... it explains to them the difficulty around the behaviour. Why being late is a problem. “What’s the big deal? We’re only five minutes late?” “Well, here’s the big deal, you know, it’s disruptive, the teacher has to start over, you’ve missed all this information, so on and so forth.” So that tends to help... We spend a lot of time finding out what the issue is. And if you can find out what the issue is, then you can help, at least help by understanding their problem.

When students’ behaviour warrants intervention, then action, similar to that taken in the examples above, is taken. What is understood to be critical, however, is that the response is not meant to be punishing but rather corrective, and where necessary, restorative in nature. All experiences, including the transgressions one makes, are perceived as learning opportunities, and as such, have the potential to bring about positive change. If students believe this, and accept that it is okay to make mistakes, it is considered that they will be more likely to take responsibility for their actions and move forward.
No Targeting

It is important to note that having clear expectations and consistent application for consequences does not mean that staff are attempting to “catch the student being bad” in order to teach them a lesson. In fact, just the opposite seems to be the case. Several principals comment on the need to ensure students are not “sabotaged” or “targeted” and being set up for failure in these ways. The following excerpt describes how Heidi, after being newly appointed to one school, put an end to what she saw as the targeting of two particular students and the profound impact this has had on the changes in the students’ behaviour as a result. Heidi explains:

People can’t believe the change in them. First of all, we stopped the targeting with both of these kids – we don’t watch them all the time. We let just let them be kids, and they are going to screw up and they are going to make mistakes... You know [to] one teacher last year, I said, “What do you want me to do, take him out and shoot him?” You know, is it going to matter in three days – that he did this? ... Stop the staff targeting. You start trying to train the child: “What should you have done? What could you have done? Why do you think you got in trouble? How could you change your behaviour so it won’t happen again?

In this instance, Heidi addresses the issue of targeting students in a general way through staff meetings and discussions and follows up with discussions with individual staff as required. This may likely have caused some discomfort or dissonance among certain staff that may have been introspective enough to perceive their own behaviour as harassment or bullying. Regardless of the costs to staff, Heidi believes it is critical to afford these targeted students the respect and safety they deserve. When teachers target students, principals are called upon to take tough stands and risk jeopardizing their relationships with certain teachers. Inclusive principals consistently informed me, however, that this is a price they are willing to pay in order to ensure that they were true to their philosophy that “students needs come first.”

Alternatives to Suspension

Principals clearly indicate that although there are instances when suspensions are warranted, they use suspensions as a last resort and typically only following a great deal of prior intervention. Stephen comments that “A suspension is an absolute last resort… It’s not a very effective as a learning tool if you haven’t done all the things you need to do prior to
suspending.” It is typical for a principal to have implemented a wide variety of interventions prior to actually suspending a student in all but the most extreme cases. Many principals express concern over the use of cut and dry approaches to discipline and Codes of Conduct (such as the Ontario Code of Conduct, 2007b) that mandate suspensions, and object to being bound by Ministry policy to enforce the implementation of suspensions. One principal, Theresa, refuses to obediently follow the Ministry policy and suspend students for “mandatory suspensions.” She shares her perspective that:

You know what? Kids are not black and white, and to me, a policy is a guideline. I am supposed to do what it says but... policy is not black and white. There are mitigating factors, and I always said as a professional, they’re hiring me to do this job. They have to trust my judgment and if they don’t, then I’m not going be here very long. I don’t know, but I’m not going to stop doing it the way I like. I am extremely passionate about this. But I if I see something I don’t think is right, I will do what I think is right and risk apologizing later.

Many other principals provide similar examples of when they refuse to follow policy and suspend students. The consensus is that students’ needs come first, even before policy, and that principals feel justified in making such independent decisions and will stand behind them. Most principals interviewed were not overly concerned over their decision not to follow policy, because they believe they can righteously justify their decisions as being in the best interests of students. As Beth put it, “Whatever is in the child’s best interest... my superiors know that I’m here doing what I think is best for kids.” For inclusive principals, this placing of students’ interests first is a recurring theme and a useful guide to rely on when making decisions and determining a course of action.

Almost all principals interviewed note the need to implement a host of preventative strategies prior to actually suspending students in all but the most serious cases. Where and when suspensions are warranted, inclusive principals consider options that will provide the most beneficial learning opportunity and be in the student’s best interest. Often times, this involves in-school suspensions as opposed to home suspensions. Stephen sees this as a natural extension of his district’s mission statement supporting student success:

If the suspension is something that’s going to lead to that success in everybody’s best judgment then fine, that may be what you have to do. If not then you need to take a look at some of those other steps. If you’re suspending a child to an environment that’s not very supportive, that’s not going to help them, then you might want to look at an in-school suspension before you do
an out of school suspension. There’s lots of other factors that come into play here.

Another principal, Taralyn, reallocated funds to hire monitors for an in-school suspension room because she used this so frequently as an alternative to home suspensions. She elaborates on one added benefit of this option: it sends the message to students that learning is valued. In addition, this option allows students an opportunity to remain at school in the in-school suspension room for most of the day but also leave to attend certain classes, where appropriate, so that they do not fall too far behind in their work:

We have monitors that are hired. Paid. And so we have an in school suspension room that would be supervised by this person... And so there is a whole system set up where the child goes and gets their work and then they are in the room and they have privileges to go out and you know, the teacher might say, you know, “I’m the shop teacher; I want Mike to be in my class.” And he writes that right on the report card. So for that period Mike gets to go to shop because its hands on. Like what can we give him, he is working on a building, doing electricity in a house.... [Author: What’s the message that sends to students? As opposed to suspending and you’re home for four days, what message?] Well certainly his academics are important and you’re going to fall behind if you’re at home doing nothing... The problem is at home... there may not be any support or any expectations as I said. So at least this way we have some control... This way, you’ve got your work; you’re going to be supervised. You’re going to be isolated, which hopefully will be enough of a deterrent that you won’t want to have an in school suspension again... We realize that [for] 7–12, I would say that [for] most people the social aspect of school is probably one of their top priority for being there.

Bending the rules by not following protocol on mandatory suspensions would seemingly place principals in vulnerable positions. Surprisingly, there is not much concern over this as principals continue to make decisions based on what they feel is best for the student rather than solely based on policy and directive.

**Suspensions**

Even inclusive principals believe that there are instances when a seemingly exclusive practice, such as home suspensions, are warranted. Once again, decisions to suspend or not suspend are made on an individual, case-by-case basis rather than by following a prescribed policy guideline. Cilla describes an instance where a home suspension was given, “because it was the right thing to do for the kid. It was fair. And if I felt they need to be suspended and they could get anything from it – yes.” Even though most principals did indicate that they
suspended students, they did so with reservations and concern for the effectiveness of such a consequence. Most report that they suspended as a last resort, or as one principal put it, “I only suspend if I’ve run out of options really.” Inclusive principals typically follow Beth’s guideline to “look at what’s in the child’s best interest.” The main concerns over home suspensions are that the student would fall further behind in schoolwork and that being unsupervised at home would not serve as a deterrent. Beth explains that “I’m not a big believer in suspension, because I know these students go home and… What are they doing? Are they being supervised? Are they being appropriately cared for?... Like it’s a quick fix?”

Even when there are home suspensions imposed, inclusive principals report that they frequently allow students to come into the school for academic related matters. Even though this is against policy which prohibits students under suspension to enter onto school district property, inclusive principals recognize the value of students in keeping up with their schoolwork. Demonstrating her commitment to student learning, Taralyn reports:

I always give them the opportunity to come in everyday at the end of the day, get a pass from the office and go see their teachers. So they always come in and meet with their teachers and [they] support them that way... You look for ways you can be flexible to support the kids to get them back into school, support them when they’re out of school.

These extraordinary measures are taken, because for inclusive principals interviewed, every student is extraordinary with individual life circumstances that warrant an individualized response, rather than a standardized response prescribed by rigid or inflexible policies.

In summing up the perspectives of inclusive principals on suspensions and policies that rigidly prescribe how educators should or must respond to behaviour, Taralyn notes:

In regard to suspensions etc.... we have to change because our society is breaking down so much in so many ways so we need to be more supportive. We can’t be black and white, there has to be more grey.

When asked about what message this flexibility and willingness to be supportive sends to students, her reply was “that you’re willing to give them a chance, that you’re an inclusive school. I think it shows that you’re a person first. I think it’s easy to be black and white.”

Inclusive principals indicate that it is important to consider parents’ needs and circumstances and to involve parents in the processes around suspending students as well. Communication with parents is ideally ongoing but is especially necessary at the time of suspension to ensure mutual understanding of the circumstances surrounding an incident,
conditions of the suspension, and a plan for re-entry. Upon returning from suspensions, principals frequently meet with students and their parent(s) in order to review the issue that led to the suspension and to develop a plan to move forward. Dale describes the intent of such a meeting this way:

Just to reinforce with the youngster that he or she understood the reason why they had to be removed for that period of time. Secondly, was to re-establish the relationship... It wasn’t a punitive conversation, it was a conversation about the process. And some discussion about what could we do that would be helpful to avoid this happening, you know, again... Sometimes that would be with the parent and the kid, sometimes just the kid. And in the interim I would have talked to the classroom teacher, about the incident and that kind of stuff, and what we might do differently when the kid comes back... Well I guess when you talk about inclusiveness around kids who are challenges in terms of behaviour, the relationship thing’s really important, and I wanted to get to the point [of] having a relationship with the parents, where I could call Dave [his dad] and say “Hey, Dave look, Billy’s messed up again, I have to send him home. And when he comes back I’m going to talk to him, and I’d like you to come as well blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” And, a good gauge for me always was in that situation where the parent would say I understand. Because what I would have done was a lot of groundwork with that parent beforehand. And the parent would understand that, in my, in my perspective I would hope that I wasn’t being negative about their kid. It was the behaviour that was the problem. And that I was quite prepared to do anything I could to support their youngster. But, there are limitations to what I can do. Yes, there are some things I have to do. And further on, we’ll get to some of the things you do even before then in building the relationship, etc.

Several principals indicate that they try to involve the parents in the response to an incident requiring suspensions. Some even indicate that they went along with parents’ requests to not send their child home but to have him serve an in school suspension instead. The important variable was that parents are involved in the process and that they feel that they are partners in the plan, as opposed to having to enforce or supervise a home suspension that has been dictated by the school. Raymond explains:

You have to [have] the conversation with a parent to say, “What is best for your kid in this situation, what is going to teach them that they can’t behave in that manner within the social structure of a school.” Overall, the parents at our school understand the direction I want to go. I’ve had parents say to me, “The best thing for my kid would be to suspend him for a day,” and okay I’ll do that then. But I’ve also had parents who have said to me “The best thing for my kid in this situation is for you to sit him in your office in front of you and make him do his work there all day,” and I’ve done that. I’ve had parents say to me “Keep him in for recess for a week,” and I’ve done that too. So a lot of
the times, it’s a negotiated consequence with the parent who knows the kid the best, on what’s going to have the best effect. It is very individualized.

Principals recognize that parental support is extremely beneficial when attempting to change students’ behaviour. Support of schooling and respect toward school and staff are not always a given with parents. In response, principals frequently have to work closely with parents and demonstrate to them that they are all working toward similar goals, and acting in ways that they believe are in the students’ best interest. This often requires ongoing efforts throughout the school year but is deemed to be crucial to the success of any intervention plan for misbehaviour. Regardless of the parents’ actions, what remains critically important is that students are not judged by their parents’ response to the situation. Regardless of parental support or lack thereof, inclusive principals never reportedly give up on working with a particular student. Theresa describes this commitment in the following example:

One student has never made it through a year without being suspended numerous times... Throwing things at teachers. His parents hated teachers, hated principals, everybody was “stupid.” … so I get here, and he had been in the office a fair amount I guess when I showed up... We basically started a plan just for him. We set some basic rules that we could agree on. One of them is you cannot tell me, you call your teachers stupid or idiot... I wouldn’t suspend him unless it was a phenomenal thing he did... but if he did something I would say, “You need to go home now, and you can come back again tomorrow.” And he would call me in about an hour, and he would say “Miss, can I come back now?” Or “Do I have to go?” and “I will go back to class now ‘cause I don’t want to go.” So I guess part of this success we had with him was that he wanted to be here, but most do... We just set the basics and he was treated respectfully and he could never say we didn’t help him. And we did want to help him. And I’d say, “Look what everyone’s doing here. We are all trying hard, and are you trying as hard as I am?” I spoke to his parents repeatedly, and I said “You know you may have had bad experiences before, but you can’t tell him that we are all stupid because if you want him to be here, he has to believe that he has to be respectful.”

In summary, it is clear from the responses on the topic of suspensions that these are implemented only under specific circumstances, and typically as a last resort. Principals want disciplinary measures to be effective, to have the student learn the inappropriateness of the behavior within the school context, and to offer the students alternative strategies and incentives in acting differently in similar circumstances in the future. Punitive home suspensions with minimal support or supervision offers little chance at achieving these goals. When suspensions are to be implemented, however, principals believe that it is critical that
the student be provided with work so that they do not fall behind on their academics. Principals also report that they work diligently to garnish parental support and cooperation in the supervision of their son or daughter while on suspension in order to send the message to the student that everyone is working together to move forward and beyond the issues at hand. Lastly, principals believe it important that they demonstrate to students and to parents that it is the behaviour in question that is unacceptable and problematic, not the student themselves. This is viewed as critical in sending the message that as a student they remain a valued member of the school community, despite their transgressions.

Chapter Summary

As exemplified thorough the descriptions of the various strategies principals employ to offer inclusive environments and experiences to students, respect is considered a key element. Inclusive principals consistently attempt to ensure that teaching, programming, and discipline are all respectful of the student and his or her skills and abilities. In doing so, students are “set up for success” so that they might experience a sense of accomplishment and develop confidence in their abilities to succeed at school. The overall goals for success are not merely academic but also reflect the student’s need to feel respected, valued and experience a sense of belonging within the school community. Inclusive principals attempt to create this environment where such a culture of care prevails in a wide variety of ways, but it essentially comes down to the way in which principals and teachers interact with, and respond to, every individual student each and every day – even when they are at their worst.
Chapter Seven: Leadership Strategies Directed Toward Staff

This chapter provides an overview of the strategies principals report using to facilitate changes in staff that will lead to increases in the inclusiveness of a school. Principals comment on the many ways that they share leadership within their school and select and groom staff to act in this capacity. Lastly, this chapter addresses principals’ hiring of staff to work in their schools and provides descriptions of attempts that they make in their schools to create a warm and inviting place where parents feel welcome and included.

For the purposes of this thesis, leadership strategies directed toward staff are defined as intentional actions taken by the principal to facilitate or bring about desired actions or outcomes primarily in teachers, but possibly in other members of the school community as well. The action could be as specific as scheduling monthly student review meetings with staff or taking a teacher to a student’s home to expose him or her to the type of lifestyle that particular student might be experiencing, or as general as spending as much time in the school as possible or preparing professional development opportunities around issues of social justice. Principals’ actions, or lack thereof, influence a school’s culture and climate in a variety of ways (Ryan, 2002). This study seeks to explore the wide variety of strategies that principals employ to create practices in a school that lead to the development of inclusive cultures.

In the previous chapter, I outlined strategies that principals use to offer an inclusive environment directly for students. In this chapter, I outline the many strategies principals explained they employ to engage staff in collaborating to create this inclusive culture within the school. These strategies, all of which are directed at creating an inclusive culture within the entire school community, include: listening; building trust; setting limits and expectations; developing a vision/culture; initiating change; sharing responsibility; selecting leaders; selecting staff; and creating a welcoming and inviting place for parents.

Listening

One of the hallmarks that seems to predominate the list of effective strategies reportedly used by inclusive principals is that of listening. Principals report that they actively listen to staff, parents and students in a variety of ways, including both the formal gathering
of information and data, (via surveys, etc.), as well as informal means such as discussions, through meetings, casual conversation, and observations.

Principals also report having a variety of reasons why they feel listening is a beneficial strategy for an inclusive leader. Among these are team building, developing rapport and trust, finding new information, and informing change initiatives. It is evident that listening is considered an essential requirement for inclusion, both as an inclusive leadership practice and in order to have a school that is inclusive. Principals are clear that the act of listening has to be genuine, and that simply giving others an opportunity for input without respectfully valuing and considering that input, is contrary to inclusive practice. Jonathon succinctly suggests that:

If you’re not listening, there’s no inclusion. You can seek information and you can ask people questions and you can say you are including them, but if you truly aren’t listening to what they are saying to you and what they are asking and they feel what’s important to them, then it’s not inclusion.

Listening and valuing input, however, did not negate the fact that at certain times principals recognize that the responsibility for final decisions remains with them, despite the staff contribution to the decision-making process. Jonathon clarifies this point:

Listening to me means that they are giving me the information I need to make a decision…. it’s the process; inclusion is the process for how I make the decision…. They are going to give me the information I need to make that decision, because if you’re including everybody, then that information has to be used. It won’t take them long to see if you’re not paying attention, if they’re just paying lip service to you, you’re seeking out information, they are giving it to you, but you’re doing nothing with it. It doesn’t take long for them to see that. Then, inclusion is over.

One may infer from this that when principals are not listening, or not using the information provided by staff, the ship will be going in all kinds of different directions instead of staying a course reflective of, and informed by, a unified vision. Although it is acknowledged that valuing and incorporating the ideas and input from others is critical, this does not mean that principals are then able to advocate themselves from any negative outcomes or from responsibility of the decisions. Jonathon explains:

The fine line is when I say it’s my decision, I will not turn around to them after they’ve had input into the decision… the higher above look at it as my decision; however, within the building, it’s our decision… if it doesn’t turn out right… I won’t turn back on the group and say “this is your fault;” that’s my problem. Ultimately, they go together. I think when I say it’s my decision, I
refer to that as, “This is the final decision, the final decision is my decision…” I will ultimately be responsible for that decision, not them. And really important, I think, in terms of inclusion, is to make sure that never happens, because you can never go back and say to the group “Now see, you made the wrong decision,” otherwise, guess what’s going to happen next time? No more. So you know, and I guess the word consensus comes up when I think of that process, so it’s a consensus decision, but once it’s finalized, then it’s my responsibility from then on to accept the legal and the professional responsibilities that goes with that.

Jonathon’s explanation acknowledges that principals are ultimately responsible for what occurs in the school, and cannot cast off this responsibility simply by suggesting that “it was the staff’s decision, not mine.” While maintaining this ultimate responsibility, however, it is evident that if principals want staff to commit to and participate with the execution of a plan or initiative, then it is critical that principals listen, value, and demonstrate the inclusion of staff input and ideas. In this manner, decisions made are shared decisions, without abdicating ultimate responsibility for them.

Creating Opportunities for Listening

The act of listening is accomplished in a variety of ways with no one means reportedly being more effective than another. There are multiple ways to listen and gather information with numerous opportunities that principals can create for this. Several principals share how important they feel it is to make themselves available for contact with staff, students, and parents, even if this is just to provide an opportunity to demonstrate availability and interest. Principals do this through a variety of means which may range from incidental things such as being in the school as often as possible, casual discussions with teachers in the hall, having an ‘open door policy,’ or sharing lunch or other breaks with staff. More structured ways to create opportunities for listening include surveying staff, parents, teachers, scheduling opportunities for open dialogue at staff meetings as well as during divisional team meetings, and even arranging open dialogue meetings with each staff two or three times a year. Creating a wide variety of opportunities to listen to staff, students, and community is important for principals because if genuine, it reportedly assists with the development of positive rapport and trusting relationships. Dale describes his desire to be present and visible in the school through his visits to classes and the positive opportunities and outcomes these visits provide in regard to relationship building with both staff and students:
Going back to the importance of building relationships with people including staff, is following up that meeting with informal conversations with the teacher, dropping into the classroom [and asking] How are things going? Those kinds of things… sort of augment that more or less informal formal process.

This incidental and non-direct contact with staff is reportedly quite beneficial in developing rapport, trust, and a more personalized relationship that facilitate an enriched sense of community.

Principals report that they gather information from staff in a wide variety of both formal and informal ways in order to make decisions around program matters, staff development needs, individual aspirations and abilities, and the like. Principals actively seek out needed information and maintain an openness and approachability which invites people to share information as they feel comfortable. Ashley indicates that:

I need to keep that in mind and knowing where they are and listening to what they need so that we’re not jumping ahead to something they can’t handle… It can be as simple as having a hallway conversation or it could be in an actual, say a staff meeting, or it could be when somebody comes in and talks to me privately. I also have a literacy coach here at the school who really has her ear to the ground and helps me to identify where we need to go and what we need to do.

Listening to everyone is indeed important. However, in all but the ideal fully inclusive school, people may not fully share their ideas, inhibitions, and doubts about initiatives or events, and so forth. As Ashley suggests, in some instances there are, at times, key people within a school who may have an ‘insider’s perspective’ which is typically wise to pay attention to. At other times, instead of one key person sharing insight on a particular matter, it may be several staff members who have input which proves invaluable to principals in making effective decisions.

The inclusive principal not only makes him/herself available to listen, but often seeks out input in order to gain a more holistic understanding of situations at hand. Jonathon discusses how he relied on others to inform him of program needs for a shop class, as his own expertise in this area is admittedly weak:

It’s more around a design and technology program for these kids…. We go back to inclusive, this is a really important part of inclusive leadership, is that I don’t know a whole lot about design and technology in Grade 7/8. When I came here, I knew very little. I knew nothing in fact. So it was status quo. But the information I gathered from, and I think that’s important around inclusive
leadership, the information I gathered from staff and students around the program told me that things weren’t the best for kids. The information gathered from listening to others allowed Jonathon to make a program decision that, although seemingly in the best interests of students, was not well received by the teacher responsible for the class. As noted previously in this paper, inclusive principals make decisions that are in the best interest of students, not simply in the interests of teachers. In this case, with no concessions being offered by the teacher, program changes that benefit the students but inconvenience the teacher were initiated. Inclusive principals recognize that difficult decisions such as these do at times have to be made, and that the outcomes will not be equally pleasing to all involved. Although inclusive principals strive for collaboration and decisions that are mutually made, they acknowledge that in reality, this is not always possible. What is critical in such circumstances, however, is that all parties genuinely believe that their voices are heard and respected, and that decisions are based on what is best for the students while at the same time being respectful to, if not wholly agreeing with, the teacher.

It is worth noting that when inclusive principals in this study come to a new school, they are not quick to make changes, but instead prefer to do a great deal of listening first. Decisions, such as those in the example above, which involve program change, were not made quickly. Fact-finding takes time and typically involves acquiring information from multiple sources. To walk into a school and abruptly make changes that may elicit resistance, can be quite detrimental to developing a positive working relationship with staff. As Rob suggests, “I think there is a little bit of wisdom involved in the fact that when I go into a school, I do a lot of listening and a lot of watching before I do a lot of changing.” Although change in the Jonathon example was necessary for the sake of the students, listening had afforded Jonathon the opportunity to gather sufficient information required to substantiate and support his insistence on alterations to the shop program.

Several principals prefer to meet more formally with staff in scheduled meetings to gather information. Some ask predetermined questions while others offer opportunities for open discussions. Both strategies allow the principal and staff an opportunity to dialogue about professional goals, program needs, ideas, and so forth. Such opportunities are often presented in staff meetings or more casually, as in the case with Kirk, in private scheduled meetings. He explains:
One of the things I did was talk about leadership with every teacher for half an hour to 45 minutes. I gave them a list of things to talk about or whatever they wanted. The question that everyone chose showed me what they wanted and I was very interested but it really opened the dialogue and talked a lot about wanting to talk. They wanted to develop their expertise. I want them to show what they know. I want them to change and to impact me. [Author: Did you meet with the Easy as well?] Yes, and our secretary. Everybody, everybody in the school, every staff member... because the support staff are treated like staff, all of them. I think it’s really important that we do that because you can’t be inclusive unless you include... And it was that dual piece that you’re different and we want to celebrate that difference, but you belong and we want to celebrate that belonging and identity.

In summary, principals value listening to all members of the school community including teachers, support staff, parents, and students for at least two main reasons. First, listening provides principals with information they require to make informed and appropriate decisions that impact the entire school community. Secondly, listening also leaves staff feeling valued and serves to develop rapport and trust between a principal and members of the school community. Dale summarizes this relationship between listening and trust quite nicely in the following excerpt:

> If your door is open or you are the kind of person who is prepared to listen, and not afraid of dialogue. And my sense is that teachers value that, and they build, you build trust with them they build trust with you, it takes a period of time, but it’s all based, I think, on the authenticity of your approach to problems to them, and what you actually deliver.

Although listening and valuing input in this regard can be quite time consuming, the development of trust that ideally ensues is considered as extremely important to inclusive principals interviewed in this study.

**Building Trust**

It is considered essential for principals to be trusted by staff in order for staff to feel secure enough in their working environment to take risks and grow as professionals. Principals attempt to create trusting relationships and environments with staff in ways that are similar to the ones they use to create trusting relationships with students. As a professional, and in the leadership capacity of school administrator, however, principals have to be exemplary models for staff, walking the talk so to speak, and modeling in ways they expected their staff to act. Principals also attempt to define and set the stage for respectful
dialogue between people in a variety of ways. One premise of this dialogue is that staff will be non-judgmental toward students and parents. Lastly, principals describe a unique relationship of being a ‘critical friend’ to teachers, honestly guiding them in a supportive and encouraging fashion through difficult and often challenging situations and times. Each of these is addressed in more detail in the following sections.

**Modeling: Walking the Talk**

Almost all principals discuss the importance of modeling for others the same type of behaviour and attitude that you expect from them. Principals indicate that cannot expect others to act in one way if they themselves use their own position to hide behind or excuse their own behavior. In an inclusive school, it is understood that actions that reflect respect, trust, care, and integrity (the Ontario College of Teachers Ethical Standards for Practice 2008) have to be consistently modeled by the principal if they are to become embedded throughout the culture of the school.

Principals indicate that just as teachers have to earn students’ respect, principals have to earn respect from their teaching and support staff as well. Positional authority only goes so far and is insufficient to allow one to fulfill the roles of an inclusive school principal. Respect comes from trust, which as indicated, comes from genuinely listening to staff and from “walking the talk” as Heidi suggested. This “walk” could take many forms but one central element revolves around the way a principal respects and treats others: both staff and students. Heidi explains the importance of her modeling the same respect for students that she wants her teachers to demonstrate:

> I think it’s just hard work, walking the talk, always being supportive, doing what is best for kids, and showing that you are doing what is best for kids as well. I think I tend to take the side of the underling. I think those kids, that don’t, you know don’t have what they need are the ones I tend to take under my wing.

In a similar vein, if principals are asking teachers to provide a safe and supportive environment for students, then several suggest that they should ensure they are providing a respectful, safe, and secure environment for their staff as well. Such an environment would be reflected in the manner in which a principal listens to staff and addresses staff concerns about a wide variety of issues. Stephen explains:
Well, not any one particular thing, but I think it comes down when you look at the classroom and you try to provide a safe environment for the student in the classroom so they’re willing to take risks, get something wrong, go back and reload and try again. As an administrator of the school we need to provide the same environment for the teachers, so they can feel comfortable trying things and if it doesn’t work, it’s not because you failed; it’s because you tried something that didn’t work and you need to reload and rethink and refocus and get going with it.

Allowing staff to make mistakes or acknowledging shortcomings without making value judgments reportedly facilitates the development of trust between a principal and staff. This trust allows members of the school community to be more comfortable with one another, which in turn reportedly leads to greater collaboration. Dale summarizes this relationship, identifying comfort and trust as key elements. He suggests that “there has to be a comfort level between you as the so called principal leader person, and the people that you’re working with. And they have to perceive that you in fact can be trusted.” Without this trust, staff members are unlikely to share and collaborate in the ways and to the degree that is required to develop and maintain an inclusive school culture.

In instances where a principal feels that a teacher might be disrespectful in the manner in which they interacted with parents for example, it is not enough for a principal to simply point this out to a teacher. Instead, principals find ways to provide an example of a more respectful interchange by modeling in their own interactions with parents. This can be done in a variety of ways and in numerous forums such as case conferences, parental meetings to discuss student behavior, and so forth. One principal, Dale, expects that teachers at his school will be open, accepting, and respectful toward parents and in turn, maintains these same expectations for himself in the way that he treats parents:

I guess there was modeling, that attitude, that perspective... So there were meetings, there was that kind of meeting I just described, the sort of informal case conference, whatever you want to call it... where you brought in parents. I always felt it was absolutely critical to model, on my part, for staff who are engaged in the meeting, an approach to parents that was open, accepting, and respectful. So that sort of became part of the fabric of the culture of schools that I was in. And I did that quite deliberately.

It is also noteworthy that more than one principal refers to the need and value of delivering an apology when appropriate, be it directed to students, staff, or parents. Recognizing that we are all human and that mistakes are made, principals expect from both themselves and their staff that apologies will be delivered. Rosemary suggests that:
Everybody loses their temper once in awhile. We all need to know that is going to happen, but apologies are also called for both to students or to parents. I expect staff and myself to apologize to parents, if necessary, you know to make up for it in some way or another.

As illustrated in this last quote, the perspective that is repeatedly shared is that if principals expect a certain change in behavior with a teacher or across an entire staff, then he or she will also have to be modeling that behavior. Being a principal does not allow room for hypocrisy. On the contrary, if anything, it places you on a pedestal and makes you more visible and hence more accountable than others.

Modeling is also considered to be an important strategy in relation to demonstrating the degree to which principals’ value classroom learning and all that goes into preparing for that. The inclusive principal has to demonstrate to staff and students that they, and hence the school district and community, value the learning that occurs in the classroom. If principals are forever absent from the school, or otherwise show little interest in the day-to-day proceedings within a classroom, then students and teachers may conclude that what they do throughout their day is not important to the principal. Inclusive principals frequently make their presence in the school and in classrooms known by attending team meetings and by being present in classrooms. Principals maintain such a visibility, as opposed to remaining closeted in their offices, in part so that they might share their enthusiasm for the learning that is taking place in each class and between classes. Stephen stresses the importance of being a part of divisional meetings, not as a manager to direct and guide, but as a contributing member of the team. He explains:

It’s important that I’m a part of the staff as well, not just sitting back saying “Do, do, do, you need to do this.” If I’m not doing the type of things that I need to do to be part of the staff, when the teachers are having their divisional meetings, I have to be a part of that. I’m not leading that meeting but I need to be there. I need to show I care, that I’m involved in that.

Stephen also notes the value of being in the classrooms with the teachers and students, participating in and celebrating what they are doing in order to model the value they place on learning. He indicates that:

If I’m not in teachers’ classrooms, if I’m not working with teachers, how can they feel valued? If my work here in the office, administrating, keeps me out of the classroom, I’m sending the message that this is the important part of the school, where really it’s the classroom. Where the students are, that’s the important part of the school, so I need to live that.
To live this, as Stephen refers to it, is to model for staff and students what one values; in this instance, the learning in the classroom.

Issues of mutual respect and privacy are also important to developing and maintaining trust. The data suggest that principals in inclusive schools want to empower their teachers to think and act independently and do not feel that they, as principals, have to make all decisions themselves or know every detail of what is going on in the school. In respect to teacher-student relations, principals have the expectation and trust the staff to know when to deal with matters on their own and when to seek assistance. Jonathon comments on the importance of this autonomy as it relates to the teacher’s need to build and maintain appropriate, confidential relationships with students:

If two kids aren’t getting along, or somebody… didn’t sleep the night before because mom and dad are fighting, you know, teachers will handle that… That’s again the inclusive part. That information… will let me know that. I just wanted to let you know that I met with a student, and sometimes they’ll give a name, and sometimes they don’t. Because there’s the privacy, and there’s the relationship between student/teacher, and the trust there that needs to be maintained. And I don’t have a problem with not getting a name unless it’s something that’s got to be reported… There were a lot of people when I came here that didn’t know they could do that - have that private relationship, confidentiality of information from a student. And we spent some time talking about what’s reportable, in terms of CAS [Children’s Aid Society], what I need to know, and what I don’t need to know.

In summary, inclusive principals have to model the same respect and trust toward teachers that they wanted their teachers to display toward each other and toward students. There are no differential or hypocritical expectations for staff and students, and the principal cannot model behaviours that they do not want their teachers or students emanating. Principals want staff and students to trust them, and in turn expect and empower teachers to create relationships where they can develop such trust between each other, their students, and parents. Empowering teachers in this regard to develop respectful and confidential rapport with students demonstrates the trust that an inclusive principal has for his or her own staff’s competence and their ability to act responsibly. In addition, this autonomy allows the teacher the opportunity to develop the rapport they require to establish trusting relationships with their students, relationships in which both parties feel valued and respected.
Facilitating Respectful Dialogue

One of the more significant precursors for developing trust between members of the school community involves facilitating respectful dialogue between individuals. This involves dialogue between all members of the school community including students, parents, teachers, and support staff. Respectful dialogue includes listening to others, taking turns sharing, not putting down others or their ideas, and no yelling or belittling. In several instances, principals indicate that they have confronted staff members who were not being respectful toward students, or those who were targeting students, and reminded them of the inappropriateness of such behaviour. Principals are quite forthright in stating that disrespect shown toward students will not be tolerated. In instances where disrespect is shown, principals typically meet privately with the teacher and discuss how the teacher’s behaviour is incongruent with the principles of inclusion. Such discussion is not meant to be disciplinary or judgmental on the part of the principal toward the staff, but nonetheless is intended to send the message that this behavior will not be tolerated.

To help provide a forum where individuals can trust that open and honest dialogue will be respectful, Maria uses a “talking stick” as a tool. As principal of a school with many First Nations students, she incorporates the use of this talking stick as a tool to facilitate respectful communication in meetings. Maria explains that:

An elder in our community gave me the talking stick when he knew I was asked to be a principal in the school. And symbolically on the top of the stick, the talking stick, is part of the different clans in the system. So you would have the bear clan, who’s the protector. You have the eagle… actually the eagle is carved at the top, and our belief is that the eagle takes our prayers and our concerns and flies the highest in the sky to our creator. So once we have the dialogue around what the symbolic meaning of this talking stick is and what it represents, well, I use it at all levels. I use it in the staff when we have our staff PD. I use it when there’s a conflict between staff members and I have to interject. My belief is that two people should be able to resolve their problem. If they can’t, then I need to be called in to help mediate it. So that’s my common belief here at the school. But also I use it with students. When students come in and they have a conflict that we will use the talking stick to resolve some of those practices. I use it with parents. We hold it and we pass it around so whomever needs to speak will hold the stick and they would speak until they are ready, and [it] teaches a lot of things. It teaches people to be patient. It teaches them to be humble. It teaches them to be respectful. Just in that sheer two or three minutes while that student or that parent or that teacher holds that stick. That’s been a good practice that we use at the school…. If we
meet in the staff room, we meet in a circle and everybody gets an equal opportunity to say what they have to say and they have to be trusting. They have to remember that we have dialogue. Good dialogue is open dialogue. It is allowing people to say how they’re feeling, but also good dialogue comes with problem solving and that common understanding that people should be able to get to the root of an issue and to be able to resolve it together without people feeling that they are being personally attacked. That whole basic understanding of the talking stick too is to problem solve and communicate in a more positive way and to not keep those things behind closed doors so where they just build up and people start to do their own things and the wheel or the circle gets disconnected. So that’s been a pretty successful practice here too.

In this passage, Maria identifies many of the elements that principals see as critical to respectful dialogue. Holding the talking stick gives the person the right to speak and to share what is on their mind without fear of being judged or ridiculed. It necessitates that others be patient and take the opportunity to listen, and optimally to consider what is being said. Finally, the use of the talking stick signifies that everyone is an integral part of the talking circle and that everyone has the responsibility to hold the stick, to share, and to help construct a path or solution to the matter under discussion.

Many of the principals indicate that they model the type of respectful dialogue and interaction they want to see between people in the school. These respectful interactions extend equally among all members of the school community including staff interacting with students and parents, as well as students interacting with each other. With these expectations in place, as articulated by the use of the talking stick or through other means, principals can increase the likelihood that dialogue remains respectful and productive and that it will leave participants with the feeling that they are listened to and that their input is valued, even if the outcome is not completely what they may have wished for.

**Being Non-Judgmental**

Many principals recognize the value of respectful dialogue and communication and the importance of the need for principals to listen to staff. Just as importantly however is the need to remain non-judgmental. Being non-judgmental essentially means that a principal remains open, supportive, and understanding of staff, as opposed to accusatory and authoritarian. As Kirk explains, teachers “had to develop and gain trust as well”, and this is not likely to be facilitated if a principal is judgmental and punitive when a teacher makes an
error in judgment or for example, responds to students in a disrespectful way. Development of trust can only be achieved if principals are non-judgmental when acting on information observed or provided by others. Kirk elaborates:

We try to be open. The thing about leadership is that the more decent we are with people the more open we are with people the more we treat people properly, that they are reasonable human beings and professionals and can make decisions, then the more open they are to talk and share. I don’t think it’s a judgment if you have a difficulty with a student. I don’t think that shows a fault with you; it shows that we need to work on helping a child. I think it’s the focus on the child that’s really key. To me, leadership is about creating a climate for dialogue, creating a climate of dissent, the ability to question you know. It’s about the ability to hold your hand up and say, “I did that wrong and I didn’t do that very well, I’m sorry.” It comes down to communication...

This non-judgmental perspective may offer some staff the security they need to express themselves openly, as opposed to having to consistently maintain a professional persona even in the face of extremely stressful situations. This is important when on occasion the stress of the job begins to impact a teacher’s emotional or psychological wellbeing. During such times, if the staff has an established comfort level and trust with the principal, they may use the principal as a “sounding board” or to vent some of their frustrations in the context of a professional dialogue. Beth explains the value of such a relationship and process:

With some of the issues we’re dealing with, we have a lot of involvement with CAS and we have some pretty difficult situations that we’re dealing with the children here. They [the staff] know they can come in this office, close the door, and, you know talk to me... They know I’m not going to be judgmental. That I’m here to listen... I think I’m a good listener.... They know they can come into this office, and like I said, close the door and have a cry or whatever.

Cilla echoes a similar perspective and the need for teachers to be able to trust that they will not be judged as less competent if they experience difficulties in their work. She explains that “If they were having difficulties and just wanted to come in and say I had a horrible day, and I need to tell you about. And I wouldn’t pass judgment because we have all had horrible days.” Principals who are able to establish a degree of trust and a comfort level with staff that allows for such open exchange of ideas, feelings, and emotions set the conditions for dialogue that are conducive to collaborative problem solving. Through such dialogue, principals and staff can address small issues before they become overwhelming and problematic. Such dialogue also contributes significantly in sending the message to staff that
‘I care about you as an individual’ and that ‘I value your well being as well as that of the students.’

It is also noted by several principals that this strategy of being non-judgmental has to be extended by principals and by teachers to students and parents as well. If an individual does not want to be judged him/herself, then it is expected that students and parents alike will be extended this same courtesy. Stephen explains:

Parents, who we deal with in a negative or adversarial way, are often parents who have had a negative experience, and this is a talk we have with teachers in the school at the beginning of every year almost. If parents come to the school, they’re coming to the school because they have the best interest of their child at heart. Their experience in their principal’s office and their teacher’s classroom might have been extremely negative. They’re uncomfortable walking into the school, they’re really uncomfortable walking into the principal’s office. Often that uncomfortable, nervousness, leads to aggression, and sometimes if you’re defensive, that’s a problem. You need to accept that the people coming to your door have the child’s best interest at heart, and not take what they say personally.

Principals report that to help resist becoming defensive in such situations, they keep the focus on the child and apply the same principles of inclusion (respect, care, value, belonging) to each unique situation or encounter with staff, students, or parents. They do not judge the parents or their motives, other than to assume that their motives are to do what they believe is best for their son or daughter. Extending this courtesy allows principals and teachers to focus on the student and address the matter at hand. Cilla explains how she keeps this focus:

Well, I listen. I’m not judgmental. Especially with parents I talk to them not as a principal but as somebody that cares about their child. I’m fair. I believe I’m fair... I care about them... I treat them how I would want to be treated if I was in their situation - with respect. I listen.

Listening effectively allows principals the opportunity to better understand parents and to understand students’ unique life situations and stories. With understanding, principals can come to respect and accept each individual for who they are without judgment. This respectful positioning sets the stage for meaningful and respectful dialogues that help build trust between individuals by keeping the focus on the most important part of the equation: the students themselves. In sum, being non-judgmental helps principals to develop relationships where both staff and parents felt safe in sharing concerns before they became unmanageable
and in developing a degree of trust that is conducive to effective collaboration and partnerships.

**Being a Critical Friend**

Another strategy that builds trust is the establishment of a relationship between principal and staff akin to being a “critical friend” rather than as a “boss.” One principal, Beth, believes that it is:

> important that they [teachers] know that we’re all [a team]. They don’t see me here as the big boss, even though some of them call me that. You know they joke, but I think they see me as a critical friend.

Beth continues further with her explanation of her understanding of a critical friend as:

> someone who has their back. Someone… that will be will be there for them. If they, if they need that support... And as a critical friend, I mean I can go into their classrooms. Maybe friend isn’t the right word because I don’t really, well I do though Mike. I mean, all of the staff here they know if they need something from me they can come in those doors and say, “You know what Beth? This happened.” ... They know that I’m going to talk to them about it. Inside their classrooms, in the hall, wherever. I’m examining critically, honestly. That’s not to be negative. There are lots of positive things that you know you can look at... [Author: So critical doesn’t just mean negative?]

Absolutely not. No, I don’t see critical as just a negative, not at all as a negative.

As Beth describes it, the principal as a critical friend is someone teachers can turn to for feedback and support when needed. This support is offered in good times and in bad as it were, hence the reference to both the terms friend (positive support) and critical (direction or counsel needed on important matters).

One key element of being a critical friend is honesty. Beth eludes to the understanding that staff members need to have enough confidence in their principal to trust that the feedback that they are receiving is genuine and honest, with no hidden motives or agendas behind it. Armed with this feedback, staff members are then free to make informed choices and decisions that will ideally lead to professional and/or personal growth and development. Beth’s comments reflect the interrelationship of listening, respectful dialogue, non-judgment, and a critical lens. All of these strategies help to establish trusting relationships between staff, which in turn help to define the culture in the school as an inclusive culture.
Setting Limits and Expectations

Principals are clear that there are limits to what they will and will not allow in their schools, despite their desire to respect teachers’ independence and autonomy. As a general guide, if a teacher’s behaviour reflects an inclusive philosophy and the vision of the school, principals generally are willing to allow teachers as much independence and flexibility as each wanted. If, however, the behaviour of a teacher is incompatible with the principles of inclusion, then a line has to be drawn and action taken. According to the principals I interviewed, there is no tolerance for teachers engaging in two specific sets of behaviours: being rude or disrespectful to students or targeting students.

Respect

The key phrase that comes up repeatedly in regard to the way teachers are expected to interact with students is “respect.” Actions and behaviours were consistently considered in the context of “whether they were respectful to students.” One principal, Cilla, in describing the setting of limits states quite succinctly that:

If they [teachers] were disrespectful, I mean no, I won’t accept that. I will not accept them being disrespectful. And I work with them.... you have to keep the pressure on and not tolerate them being rude to kids. I mean we will come in, I’ve written letters. I won’t tolerate it.

Principals are quite clear and articulate of what is not considered to be respectful. Behaviour deemed to be disrespectful and inappropriate includes yelling at students, targeting students, and belittling students. All principals report having to address this type of behaviour with staff in the past and are adamant in their stance that this will not be tolerated in an inclusive school. Chris indicates that disrespect is clearly non-negotiable. He explains his reasoning for this tough stance in the following way:

My goal is that you need to feel good about yourself and working here, and you make sure that this never happens again. You don’t talk to anybody that way. Because if we do it, that gives them license to do it.

Chris raises two points worthy of note here. First, an inclusive principal wants all members of the school community to feel positive about their participation and work and that includes how teachers feel about their contributions to the school and education of students. Second, a staff cannot model one type of behavior but demand another from students. Just as principals
have to model respectful behavior to teachers, teachers are expected to act in a similar fashion and model respectful interactions with all students under all circumstances.

Not every teacher adopts a respectful stance toward all students all of the time, however, and in some instances teachers may find themselves engaging in a conditioned set of disrespectful, patterned responses. Jonathon provides an explanation of how he approaches such staff members who are disrespectful toward students, but notes that although he attempts to approach the matter in a respectful manner, there is little room for ongoing tolerance and disrespect is dealt with swiftly. Jonathon explains:

I think that yes there’s a bottom line, but it’s also a respectful bottom line, I think. In the sense that if I have somebody who’s not respectful, we’ll talk. We’ll talk. And I’ll go back to, “We agreed, as a staff, that this is the type of environment that we wanted in the school, and you were part of that process.” Yes. It’s about vision. Yes, it’s just what we, as the school, want in an environment, and respect of others is important. I mean, you walk the talk. And you know, if you’re not walking the talk, and you’re going to be disrespectful to anyone, a staff member, or parent, or a student, you are the professional member, they are a child. And I think with 7/8, sometimes we lose focus. These are still kids; they are 12–14 years old. So remember that and sometimes that needs to be done. You have to remember that these are kids, they are just kids so..... Yes, I take the approach “Can I help you?... can I offer some suggestions or advice or whatever?”... and I’ve had the point where it didn’t stop, and I said “I need to meet with you, you’re going to need a union representative.” And you have to go that route. That’s as far as I’ve ever had to go.

In Jonathon’s example, the notion of ‘walking the talk’ is again referenced as an important form of modeling; in this case, teachers modeling respect toward students. Jonathon suggests that if the school vision reflects that persons are respectful to each other, as an inclusive school vision would, then educators have to be professional and model respect to students, even if and when that 12–14 year old student is not being respectful to a teacher. Principals and teachers cannot expect students to be respectful to them if students see the teachers acting disrespectfully. In a similar fashion, Jonathon also reminds us in his quote above that the principal must be respectful in the way that they deal with disrespectful staff. They must maintain this respect, while ensuring that the message of help or assistance is extended, but at the same time assert that the disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated.

Most principals interviewed for this study look at each situation uniquely and attempt to find the root causes of disrespectful behavior, rather than simply labeling it and prohibiting
it. Reflective of being a critical friend, the inclusive principal wants to help the teacher address his or her own needs or concerns just as the teacher does with a student. Discipline and consequences are seen as secondary to the primary strategy of intervening in such a way that allows the teacher to confront and address their own issues that might have led to their disrespectful behaviour. Several principals allude to this as does Kirk in the following passage:

I think one of the things we have to get people to do is to understand their frustrations... we provide programs for people, for teachers, for substitutes. We have sensitivity training, behaviour management, all kinds of things. Teachers’ issues often come from a lack of control, a lack of ability to do the job, a feeling of being overwhelmed, a feeling of being burnt out.

Another principal, Dale, indicates that he would attempt to help the teacher address his or her behaviour by pointing out to them the message their behaviour is sending to students. He indicates that he would:

…sit down have a conversation with the teacher. And then say, “What are your frustrations?” Getting to the point where you can begin to talk a little bit about possible solutions. But it has to be, it has to be confronted because it sends a message not only to that kid, it undermines maybe the work that other people are doing with that youngster. [Author: What message does it send to the student?] That you’re not welcome, you’re not accepted. You’re just a, you’re just a pain in the ass, you know.

Dialoguing with the teacher as a critical friend, and possibly creating a little dissonance, may help teachers to re-examine their behavior and come to see its incompatibility with an inclusive philosophy. Armed with new insight, teachers might then be motivated to change their perspective and alter their actions in a manner that more closely aligns their behavior to their philosophy, or at least to that of an inclusive school and its vision.

**Targeting**

The second type of behaviour that was not tolerated by inclusive principals is targeting students. This behaviour is described as an intentional or unconscious attempt on the part of a teacher or teachers to “catch a student being bad” and respond accordingly with punitive responses. This type of behaviour leads teachers to scrutinize some students’ behaviour more so than others, to watch certain students more closely, and to intervene in instances where they might otherwise have not acted with different students. Getting caught misbehaving and finding oneself repeatedly in trouble can lead to a sense of disillusionment
and a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure and negative self image. After moving to a new school and observing that some students were seemingly targeted in this way, Heidi soon addresses this type of behavior by setting clear limits around acceptable practice in this regard. She begins by addressing issues of school culture head on. She explains:

I began by first of all, starting with the staff culture, the school culture – we are not targeting kids, we are not centering out kids, we do not talk about kids in the staffroom. If you have a problem with a kid you talk to an EA, to the principal, to special ed teacher. You do not talk to other teachers who are not impacted by this kid.

The limits are clear, targeting of kids will not be tolerated. Principals have a variety of ways of setting such limits, ranging from collectively developing expectations through meetings and discussions with staff, to meeting individually with staff and insisting that certain behaviours are incongruent with an inclusive philosophy and that they will therefore not be tolerated. With this global expectation in place, principals can thereafter deal individually with staff members who they believe continue to target students unfairly.

Developing Vision/Culture

Principals use many strategies in the development of a vision for their school, but one key element is the involvement of all partners. It is clear that a school’s vision is not simply the principal’s vision of what a school should be like, and if it is, then it would be ineffective at best. Although the school vision may reflect the district vision or mission statement, and may indeed reflect the beliefs and the ideas that a principal might have for the school, it is clear that an effective vision encompasses much more than that. Stephen explains how he understands visioning to be a critical element of school leadership, which requires people to imagine the type of school they would ideally like to create:

School leadership to me means visioning basically. It means looking at the bigger picture, setting a goal, taking a look at what we want our school to look like, what expect from our teachers of this school, what’s the perfect stereotypical St. Patrick teacher, what would be the ideal, and the same with the students. What’s the ideal St. Patrick’s graduate? What do we expect our students to look like? ...We, as a board team, as a system team, [we] spend a lot of time working on visioning, what our belief system is, and the board has really spent a lot of time working on that... the kinds of things you believe in, what you expect would be.
In order to be useful to members of the school community in providing a sense of direction, the school vision has to be reflective of community needs, interests, and values. This community includes not only teachers and parents, but students as well. Accordingly, inclusive principals seek input from all school community stakeholders when developing or revising the school’s vision. This is often accomplished through surveys, meetings, dialogues, and even retreats. Stephen explains the need to involve others and how he solicits input and involvement into development of his school vision in the passage that follows. He believes that parents’ input is:

very important, because in a sense, this is a service industry, and we serve this community, their children are in our care. They are the first educators of the children. They know their children better than we will. They spend a lot of time with us but the parents really know them better than anybody, and if the parents are working with us, we’re going to be successful. But if we’re at crossroads and don’t have the same vision we’re not going to get there.

In order to help develop the vision, Stephen as well as others survey parents and students and ask them about the kind of school they want, what they like and dislike about the present school and so forth. He explains:

Prior to that we’ve done a lot here at our school just surveying the parent community, even surveying our students: What do you expect? What do you like? What don’t you like about the school environment? What would you like to see in a perfect code of behaviour? What are the kinds of thing you would accept? What kinds of things don’t you like? How do you want to be treated? And we did that with staff, with secretaries when I first came here. That’s how we started looking at vision, and then from there, we really spent the better part of the first year doing that.

Sometimes surveys cannot provide the depth and breadth of information required, nor do they allow for discussion that many principals believe to be essential for formulating a well developed foundation for a vision. In order to facilitate opportunities for such discussion, Stephen goes to great lengths, even organizing weekend retreats off school:

Well, usually they [parents] help us with the vision: What do they expect from us? What would they expect a teacher at this school to do for their children? We do retreats with every grade for example, from Grade 1 all the way up, which is unique to our board. We don’t do that everywhere else, but this community demands that. They want that. That’s what they expect us to do. So that’s what we do. We’re together in this.

Inclusive principals recognize and value such input from parents, students, school council, teachers, and so forth but often find themselves faced with the challenge of unifying
this into one common vision. As Kirk explains, the challenge lies in ‘making connections’ between different perspectives and in unifying these into a vision that each stakeholder can relate to:

I think that inclusive leadership is the opposite. It’s fine for leaders to have visions. It’s fine for them to strongly articulate those visions and to involve people with them in the debate, but other people have visions too and what we have to do is build connections between [what] we all believe and what we all think. It’s not about dictatorship, and it’s not about looking like it’s not dictatorship... That’s one of the issues. I hated that as a teacher when you have some bull-shitter who would say, “You know we’re all going to sit down in a circle and hold hands and share a vision, we’re going to develop this together.” And of course, you don’t do anything, but they could’ve written down on a piece of paper six months before what we’re going to come up with! I remember doing a school mission statement like that and he knew exactly what he wanted and that wasn’t leadership and people see right through it.... But that’s not enough, what we really need to do is share the vision, the pedagogy that we have. I provide leadership on that. I provide ideas, but I’m not going to ignore what people think. And neither is [it] a cookie-cutter approach. We can share things and we can share ideas and build a vision without everyone being the same. So what a leader, a leader in an inclusive sense, always accepts that regardless of what they do, there are always other ways of doing things... and I think we can generally agree on what better practices are but how we use them, how we combine those practices, how we build them into what we do, is personal. And we need to accept that people are different. And we need to accept that people have different views, and how we build bridges between somebody with different views is what a leader does.

Making these connections and building bridges between different interests and views is key to developing a successful vision for these inclusive principals. Although there are a variety of ongoing ways and means by which principals accomplish this, the most commonly reported element is that principals believe it to be critical that they solicit and value input from all stakeholders and seek to have this represented in a variety of ways in the articulated vision. Inclusive principals recognize that participants who do not see their ideas represented in the vision will not be committed to toward working toward common objectives.

*Initiating Change*

Principals acknowledge that introducing change initiatives often takes time and energy, both of which are scarce commodities for most teachers. However, they also recognize that they are responsible to oversee the implementation of a wide variety of
Ministry and district initiatives, as well as school-based initiatives. Such initiatives often necessitate changes in understanding and or practice, some of which will likely be embraced by staff and students, and others that may likely elicit resistance. Principals rely on various strategies to facilitate change in their schools’ climate, culture, and practices. To assist them in the implementation of change, inclusive principals rely heavily on three key strategies: pressure and support; the use of data; and creating dissonance.

Pressure and Support

Many of the principals interviewed note that there are times when pressure and support is required to bring about desired change. This is the case regardless of whether the change involves implementation of new initiatives, change in protocol or ‘the way things are done here,’ or even changes that are required in behaviour. It is important to note, however, that whenever the need for change is mentioned, it is accompanied by reference to supports that will be provided as well.

One area where pressure and support is often required is in the implementation of certain initiatives or programs mandated from the district or Ministry. Although principals report that staff input and buy-in is invaluable to the success of change initiatives, it is also recognized that there are instances when mandates leave little room for discussion or negotiation as to whether a given initiative should be adopted. Ideally, the merits of an initiative should be apparent enough to facilitate staff support and buy-in. Unfortunately, not all staff members will always agree with the merits of mandated initiatives, and for a variety of other reasons, including workloads and the sheer number of change initiatives, staff may not support the implementation of new initiatives. In such cases, and where there is resistance, one principal indicates he meets the resistance and deals with it head on in a matter of fact fashion. Although this is not entirely reflective of a fully inclusive approach, wherein teachers would ideally have input into the decision to adopt an initiative or not, this particular principal makes attempts to include staff as much as possible in the plan for implementation in order to facilitate a sense of ownership. Chris explains:

We discussed it, I explained what the initiative was, why the initiative was taking place, and then… I would throw it open for discussion. And we would get all of the fears and all of the information, and all of the things out on the table that we would be able to take a look at. And from that, we would pick
out, usually me, I would pick out the things that I would see the hindrances. Things that would be roadblocks to implementing what it was. And then I would say “OK, now we’ve had our say, we’re familiar with everything that the board wants. Let’s get one thing straight, it’s going to happen. It has to happen because it’s been mandated. We don’t have a choice in this, so we’re not going to waste any time arguing whether or not we’re going to do it. Is everybody ok with that? Does everybody understand that? Because I need to know now if you don’t.” And then we would go from there. That got things out of the way immediately. Like negative things. Because now it’s been established that we’re doing it. So the second part of it would be, “OK, let’s make it as painless as possible. I need your ideas. I have some, but I want to hear yours first.” And then I would get input... As long as it meets the board’s guidelines, it doesn’t have to be my plan. When you do it in that manner, the students, teachers, whoever’s working in the school, they take a lot more ownership. And things will go more quickly, more efficiently, more effectively, because it’s their plan, it’s their activity, it’s their initiative.

Chris recognizes that, as the principal, and as an agent of the district, he has responsibilities that he cannot ignore. Acknowledging and accepting this, he addresses the bottom line of what has to happen and then includes his staff in determining the most effective manner in which to implement the initiative. Although not ideal, this respects the authority of the Ministry and districts to impose mandates and initiatives and allows staff the opportunity to tailor the project in a manner that is best for the students at their particular school, given its unique culture, strengths, and needs.

Principals report that they apply several forms of pressure and support in order to facilitate change in certain instances and with certain staff. Raymond describes in detail how he encourages a teacher to change the manner in which he disciplines students. As part of this process, Raymond offers support and incentive, as both he and his vice principal go into the teacher’s classroom for a two week period to restructure the dynamics and provide the teacher with some much needed modeling. He explains the process as:

Again it’s a whole process... I am talking at different ends of the spectrum again, because when you get to a point like that, you are at the end of the spectrum. What I mean by that is that if you get to the point where you are thinking of writing disciplinary letters of expectation to the teachers, you have tried a whole different range of other things... The mentoring stuff, for example, I have a teacher on our staff who is having a difficult time with Grade 8 boys in the classroom. I had conversations with him about the age group he was teaching, the characteristics of the kids that age, offered workshops, etc. I went in and observed the classroom, gave him suggestions, thoughts and hints of different things he could do and continued to work through a process like that. He didn’t go to the workshops but there were
board workshops and outside workshops offered to him both on school time and on his own time. He chose not to go. Ultimately, I ended up having the VP take over his classroom for a two week period [to] model behaviour management for him, and at the end of the 2nd week, [he] slowly give that position back to him for behaviour management. Since then, things have been much better. [Author: How did you find the time for that, between you and the VP?] We prioritized what was important. The kids were being treated improperly and weren’t being taught in the best possible manner, and that was a necessity. It is one of my non-negotiables. So the VP and I both made the time. And did other things suffer for a few weeks? Absolutely. But that’s what was important - myself and the VP being in the classroom and running a behaviour plan is pressure. There’s no other way to call it other than that. Say somebody is coming in to take over your behaviour management to demonstrate how it can be done differently. Expectation was that he would change and adapt what we were demonstrating to him to be his style. [Author: Workshop opportunities, modeling, going in, alleviating and putting in some structure for discipline. Getting the class under control. That was the support. What was the pressure, and what tools do you have for the pressure?] The pressure of the behavioural letters, Teachers’ Performance Appraisal, which I did use. I wrote up two different Teachers’ Performance Appraisals, one that was satisfactory, that was contingent upon us running through this plan for the two weeks, or the unsatisfactory; and he could choose whichever he thought was better. He chose satisfactory with support, which we then put into practice for the two weeks. We were in his class 100% of the time for two weeks, and he kept satisfactory and has that on record. His practices have certainly changed, and he’s better for it. That doesn’t mean that there aren’t any problems. Does that mean that we need to continue to have conversations about kids that age group and what we do? Yes.

One of the added benefits of showing this support is that it demonstrates for other teachers in the school that the administration is there to help, to be supportive of teachers as well as supportive of the students. While keeping students’ interests first, they are willing to do what it takes to help the teacher become successful. This is in effect “walking the talk.” What the administrators are conveying to teachers is that they value you, they support you, and they want you to succeed here. Commenting further on this, Raymond responds to my question “What did the other staff think of all this, as far as all the time and energy going to those students or staff who were being disruptive?” indicating that:

Most of the staff didn’t know the half of it. We didn’t publicize it, we didn’t say what was going on, there were a couple of staff members who saw it happening and asked a few questions, but I think that they felt it was very positive that he was getting the assistance that he needs. And people that did know, have consequently come later and said that there is a huge difference. [Author: Do you think any of them offered him support as well after the fact?]
After the fact, I would think that yes, some of them did. With the other French teacher, I saw evidence of that. With a couple of the classroom teachers, some of them asked him if he wanted them to stay in the classroom for a little bit and show him what they did with their behaviour management and their classroom [and] what worked for them for their particular classes. [Author: We talked about pressure, why didn’t you just put pressure on this guy to just transfer out and say this isn’t working?] The VP and I talked about it, and the bottom line is he was transferred to us in that manner. He was flipped to us because someone else didn’t want to deal with the difficulty. That isn’t fair to him, and it’s not fair to other students in other schools. So he has to figure out if he can cut it in this profession and do what is best for himself and for the kids in his classroom. In the end, [if not] find another profession. So I felt that it was my responsibility to help him.

As illustrated here, another key point is that administration is attempting to be respectful of the staff that needs the assistance by not letting other staff know the extent of the problem. Instead of shaming them into accepting help by embarrassing them in front of their colleagues, they intentionally keep the scope of the problem to themselves and offer incentive through the teacher appraisal process. The message being sent is that expectations will remain, but just as principals are committed to helping all students regardless of the degree of need or how this presents itself, as inclusive principals they are committed to helping the teacher because they are a valued member of the school community as well.

Another principal, Ashley, expanded on the point that there remains the need to be respectful to the staff as an individual, despite the fact that their behaviour is unacceptable and out of necessity, has to change (in the following case they were disrespectful to students). Being respectful necessitates that principals look beyond the behaviour to the cause, and then offer support in addressing the teacher’s needs. Ashley explains:

Well, I would speak privately to that staff person, and I definitely have had that problem in the past but I would very closely monitor the situation, and I would seek, depending on the severity, I would seek a support for that, support for that teacher. [Author: What do you mean by that?] You know whether they need the support of their union, whether they need to have some assistance from the EAP program, whether they need to simply have a conversation with me about how they should be talking to students. If somebody is disrespectful it goes a lot deeper than just usually having a conversation with them. It’s basically, it’s part of who they are... I used to think ... it would be the best thing for you to do, to get on a transfer list and to be out of my hair. But then I started to think about it differently and started to think about embracing that person and enveloping them with support, and not just support but pressure - like that whole notion that Michael Fullan has of pressure and support, and accepting them as part of the team and helping.
Helping them along. And so rather than discarding those, letting them know that they are a valued member of the team. Like I’m the first one to say “You know I’m not perfect. I don’t expect you to be, but there is a level of professionalism that I expect you to uphold and I do have high expectations and I do want you to be doing your absolute best so that your kids can achieve.”

Rob echoes this caring concern in his description of a rather lengthy, seven year journey of support for a teacher. When asked why he persisted in trying to help this teacher instead of simply trying to have the teacher fired or transferred he replies:

It comes from caring. I believe I can honestly say that I actually cared about the people and for the people I worked with, and they knew that. They knew that I cared... I can think of one person I worked with for seven years, and finally at the end of seven years, she actually had something that she would actually call classroom management. Now, key with that was... she was receptive to my input. But what caused her receptivity to my input was the way I presented the input. It was done very clean, very supportively, very kindly... It was a process; it was a seven year process. But the difficulty, the deficiency in classroom management, and by the way...another principal, another administrator might have ended the process after three or four years and thought that she was as good as she was going to get, well she wasn’t. It took seven years, by the end of seven years, she was doing a good job. [Author: Why didn’t you end after a few years?] Because it didn’t take two years to develop that process, that problem. And it’s not going to be cured in two years...

In delivering pressure and support, principals often walk a fine line. Too much pressure or not enough support may just as easily lead to alienation and rebellion as it would to commitment toward change. Rob notes that pressure typically has to be applied incrementally and with respect, rather than in one forceful nudge or push. Recognizing that change takes time, and that persuasion often works better than force, Rob describes his perspective on change this way:

It comes from another one of my philosophies: you can’t push a rope. You can’t push a teacher into doing something. You can gently pull, you can guide, you bring them toward you, but if you try to push, you’re going to get nowhere. Now, how do you do these nudges? Well let me say, it’s small and gentle increments. If a person is not responsive, then you up the heat. You up the heat by doing things like change of assignment. Now change of assignment can be a good thing, or it can be a punitive thing. And they both have their advantage, and you need to know which you’re aiming it for.

What remains consistent throughout the application of pressure and support toward necessary change is the respect extended to the individual teacher(s) throughout the process. Teachers
appreciate being valued and reportedly respond much better to a “nudge” or a “pull.” Respectfully encouraging and supporting a teacher, while still insisting change is required, will reportedly be much more effective than pushing for change in a top down authoritarian manner.

A final form of pressure is illustrated through two examples of the use of administrative transfers. All principals who talked about transfers indicate that these are used as a last resort, and as Raymond discussed above, they will not initiate a transfer in order to simply place a problem teacher somewhere else. If, however, pressure and support offered over time is not proving fruitful, principals indicate that as an alternative to initiating disciplinary action through the Teachers’ Performance Appraisal Process, a transfer that might allow for a fresh start and a new beginning may bring about desired change. Rob describes his experiences with such a transfer as follows:

If they are not successful there, then we’ll have to talk about where they are going to be successful. I have also had some administrative transfers, done very few, but some. Where I have had teachers moved out of my school, [it’s those] who just needed a shake up. I have had teachers moved into my school that just needed a shake up. I have seen teachers come from another school, to my school; they had difficulty in the other school, and have done amazingly well with me. I have had teachers leave me, not doing well, then go to other schools and do amazingly well in the other school.

Similar to the example above, Stephen describes a transfer that was mutually agreed upon because the staff member did not fit in well with the philosophy and vision of the school:

To be really frank, the last case I got was an Educational Assistant that was really… and basically it was a transfer. You know, [I informed here.] this is who we are here. You need to be a part of it. As teachers, we cover for each other and pick up the slack when somebody has a problem or bad day or whatever. When somebody on staff needs to go for an appointment, somebody else will cover. My Educational Assistants cover for teachers. We really work together and this was a particular staff that was really union oriented. Very much “This is the effective agreement, I’m following these rules.” We talked about it. [We] did the best we could, and basically it was a question of this is who we are, this is what we try to do, and if you’re not comfortable with that, then maybe you’ll have to look for another place. [Author: And did they opt for that or did you have to transfer?] Six of one, half a dozen of another. But I consider that to be a failure too… It’s almost like a suspension. If I’m taking a staff and selling them down the river and saying you don’t fit with our culture get out, then for me that’s a failure. I need to be working with that person so that you know… I consider that, well, basically a failure, there’s no other way to look at that; I wasn’t successful.
What is really telling here is that the principals viewed the necessity for an eventual transfer as a failure on their part. They considered a transfer a failure because they were not able to offer the degree of support required to allow this staff to grow as a professional and experience success as a teacher in this inclusive environment. This again reflects a non-judgmental perspective towards others which is commonly found in inclusive principals.

In sum, through various means of pressure and support, inclusive principals facilitate change while implementing initiatives, making improvements in the way staff interact with students, and improving classroom practice and pedagogy. The key to success of change initiatives, however, reportedly hinges on the degree of respect with which principals addressed resistance. While being firm in maintaining their expectations, inclusive principals value a respectful approach that nudges, encourages, pulls, and supports teachers, while leaving their dignity and pride intact.

**Use of Data**

Principals are frequently called to facilitate change, as new Ministry or district initiatives are introduced, or as new paradigms and methodologies are adopted in the field. Where there is resistance to new initiatives, principals report that they rely on the use of data as a means of pressure and to counter resistance and assist in bringing about change from within. Principals indicate that they use data from a wide variety of sources including staff, parent, and student surveys, EQAO scores and ratings, EQAO school review reports, student marks and promotion statistics, attendance records, disciplinary and suspension rates, and so forth.

Although the reliability and validity, and hence the utility of data, may vary depending on its source, several principals report that it is useful in identifying areas of concern and generating dialogue among staff. Dale describes how in his school staff uses tracking district data for literacy and numeracy as a catalyst for staff discussions on ways to address issues of differentiated instruction and overall student success. Dale explains that:

It really goes to the heart of you know, falling back to the very culture of the school... although the focus is on literacy and a little bit on numeracy... [data] can then be applied to lots of other things. So for example, we were talking about strategies for dealing with kids who have behavioural challenges. What’s to say that that couldn’t be a focal point for dialogue around changes? In terms of differentiated instruction as far as the environment, product and
processes go, that would be useful for those kids or that one specific kid, because it becomes a forum where that kind of thing can be discussed. …You get a tracking board and you’ve got a kid in Grade 7 who’s functioning at a Grade 3 or 4 level and, the question becomes, well what’s going on with this kid? Well OK, well, is it just behaviour or is it just home? Well, what are we actually doing that’s making a difference for this kid? Recognizing we’ve got a responsibility here, so what is it we can do? So that gets you into the differentiated instruction piece which hopefully makes the kid feel more successful, which makes the kid feel more connected. That helps in terms of moving the kid along academically.

Dale suggests that presenting staff with data can open up discussion by creating a forum for dialogue and problem solving. This data, as in this case, can be specific to one student and their individual progress, or more generally to the progress of groups of learners in any given school. The key point is that data can often be used by principals to identify issues that staff can then begin to discuss and address. Dale explains how data collected at his school are used to facilitate dialogue and collaboration among staff regarding their practice:

A lot of literacy and dialogue around tracking boards and all that kind of stuff. I think that holds incredible promise…. It’s lovely to talk about what they’re doing in terms of their classroom practice. And I’ve seen it happen where, basically doors have opened. Walls have come down and teachers are much more engaged in dialogue around what they’re actually doing, and more importantly, what the impact of that is on kids. Those kinds of tools, as they get refined, I think hold incredible promise for generating that kind of dialogue, opening it up, and promoting it [by] giving teachers other tools that they need to be able to meet kids at the, the point where they are as opposed to where they [the teachers] are.

Dale highlights the importance of opening up and promoting dialogue between teachers to the point that as he puts it, doors have opened, walls have come down, and teachers are much more engaged around dialogue about practice. This cannot happen however without the pre-existence of a respectful environment where teachers feel safe and do not feel they are being judged. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, the inclusive principal facilitates the creation of such a culture over time so that such benefits of mutual collaboration and support can be reaped.

Maria describes how she gathers data from multiple sources to help in her own developing understanding of the complexity of the challenge before her in addressing high suspension rates at her school. In this instance, Maria relies on staff, students, and parents to provide information that she would use with staff in addressing their concerns:
When I first came here... behavioural incidents were extremely high here at the school. Part of the problem when I looked the number of suspensions in the school the number of students being sent out of the classrooms and you know stay in my office, I’m thinking, I’ll never be able to resolve this unless I have the support of everyone in the school. The support of the students, the support of the parents, the support of, you know, the teachers. And so we had a one night brainstorming session. The staff said you know what do you feel is our greatest most challenging issue that we have here in the school and of course behaviour was the biggest and through there then we got into teams and started to talk about well these are the things that really bother us; these are the things that we know we need to change here in the school... So we surveyed the students and then we surveyed the parents and then from all that data the staff and our SAC [School Advisory Council] our parent council, we kind of just segregated that data and started to look at trends... we need to look at bullying, we need to look at classroom management, we need to look at simple things like how students are moving in the hallway. We need to look how we can support each other, classroom to classroom, so that our behaviour incidents came down. We need have clear and concise rules and protocols in the school. I think staff needed to go back and look at what our mission and vision was here at the school. So when we looked at all the information, we really felt that we needed to [do] this together. Every staff had to buy in and participate.

One of the key points highlighted by Maria and echoed by several principals in this study is the need for full participation and ‘buy in’ from all of the staff at the school. Although principals did provide three examples of instances where certain staff members in their school did not share in a common understanding or agree with a certain approach to dealing with students, the overall reports are that there is very little resistance to action plans that result from such wide consultation. When Maria was asked to clarify what she means by ‘staff had to buy in’ and whether she encountered resistance, her response was:

No resistance, because I believe the problem was big enough that they knew that nobody could do it on their own. You know the one EA and teacher who are outside on yard duty felt that they couldn’t do it by themselves. The lunch room monitor felt that you know even though they were trying to implement some rules and basic practices it wasn’t happening either. So I think they realized that this was something that the whole school had to do... really looking at your data and thinking you know when you’re suspending 100 students a year, are we really doing what we’re supposed to be doing here? So we started to ask those good questions, you know, are we fixing this problem? Are we perpetuating it? Is this a good practice that we’re using in the school? So we were able to really ask those good questions to each other at staff meetings and really emphasize that it was non evaluative. We were not here to evaluate anybody or what we are doing, but rather look at the practice that we’ve for years used and started to question that.... I need to see the whole
part and I need to see what operates the school and for all of use to do a self reflection. How do you think we are doing in this school? So evaluative in terms of well, yes, we need to evaluate where we are and is it making a difference, and are we, you know, are these practices we are using in classroom management practices working? What are we doing when a student has a problem in the classroom? How are we addressing that? What are we doing in assessment? What are we doing in terms of leadership for our students? What are we for engaging the parents? When we start to look at those components, yes we evaluated ourselves but it was non-evaluative from a principal to a teacher.

Maria identifies the need to use data to bring an issue to light, to place a question on the table for discussion; in this case, are suspensions helping students? She also notes that it is the practices at the school that are being evaluated, not people. This is a distinguishing feature of an inclusive environment; the behavior is seen as separate from the individual. That is to say, one may not value the practice or the behaviour if it is counterproductive to school goals or vision, but the person is still valued and welcomed as a member of the school community. This applies to students as well as teachers and in the instance Maria describes above, we can clearly see how the other staff members are valued, despite the fact that their practices have to be evaluated, some reconsidered, and changed.

Although some sets of data may hold greater validity than others depending on their source, one principal Theresa suggests that “You have to look at data, because it’s not arguable, you have to look at facts. For many years, we haven’t done that.” Not all data is viewed as equally revealing, however, and principals are quick to caution that data from multiple sources is required in order to gain a solid understanding of the matter of inquiry. How one collects data, and from what or whom it is collected, varies. Inclusive principals look beyond the data provided by test results and EQAO scores and seek input from parents and students as well regarding their experiences with the school. Inclusive principals value this input, viewing students and parents as partners in the educational experience with a voice to be shared and respected. Theresa shares her perspective that:

We believe that we had number of kids that were disengaged. We did surveys. We found that we had quite a high proportion of kids who didn’t participate in school activities and that complement of kids also tended to be kids who didn’t do well.

Theresa indicates that in response, she and a group of teachers worked with students to develop a number of unique and non-traditional extra-curricular activities that were
suggested by students who were not participating in the more traditional sports oriented options. This reflects the willingness of staff to challenge the status quo and attend to student interests and needs in non-traditional ways. Even if these initiatives and endeavors require additional effort and resources, in this instance at least, principal and staff believe that student engagement is important enough to overall success that they are willing to make the sacrifices for all students, not just the majority of students who would appreciate and were talented enough to capitalize on the traditional and predominant sports related opportunities. Theresa describes one such initiative that reflects this which developed as a result of surveying students about their own interests and needs:

We also did one [survey] on engagement and that’s where that information came from... We started some new clubs like we started a computer gaming club... There’s quite a group of kids who don’t play sports and who don’t get involved in students council or drama but they don’t have a place in the school. And many of them are capable but they just don’t fit in and they really lack that social interaction. That kind of kid tends to gravitate to computers. So we set up a computer gaming club and the whole intent of it is not just to sit and play games. One of their sessions was learning how to program and make their own games. So we went to the board and we got special permission and I said we will raise some money for them. [Author: Why do you need special permission?] Because it’s always an issue to put software on a computer and to let them [students] do things. So in many schools, they said, “Absolutely not.” I thought, you know what, we believe this is important. I don’t care about the rules... I have a guy, as a teacher, who was a computer technician, and he won’t let anything bad happen. And I trust him and they have to trust him, and if something bad happens then I will take the rap and pay for it out of my own budget. But I want this.

There are several other descriptions of similar initiatives which reflect the “out of the box” thinking that principals believe are important to participate in so that the school can cater to individual interests of disengaged students more effectively. Whether it is related to teaching practice, discipline initiatives, extra-curricular activities, or other matters, inclusive principals often present data to challenge staff to reflect on current practice. In an inclusive environment of collaboration and non-judgment, staff can openly and honestly reflect and engage in dialogue that facilitates required change in practice. While the data collected from multiple sources often allows staff to identify such issues that need to be addressed, at other times, inclusive principals have to be more direct in presenting issues that will lead to dissonance, discussion, and eventually facilitate change.
Creating Dissonance

In addition to using data as a means to shed light on areas that are in need of change, several principals describe instances where they intentionally create cognitive dissonance in order to facilitate change. This dissonance can be generated either within the whole staff, or with individual staff with regard to either their perspective or behaviour. In one instance, a principal attempts to develop understanding and empathy in a teacher by forcing this person out of their comfort zone and intentionally creating cognitive dissonance. Dale explains:

I’ll give you an example of a teacher who was experiencing difficulty... She had values that were somewhat at odds with the community values and some of the values that these kids were bringing to school. And there was a time when a kid was late... in this school where there were two First Nations communities. Sometimes I’d go to the community pick the kid up... I did that for a lot of reasons. One is ‘cause I want the kid in school. Another reason is I wanted, you know, the people in the community to recognize that going to school’s important, and we want them to be there. So this teacher was struggling and was getting increasingly sort of negative about the kids. So there was a young lad whose father was doing two years less a day, mother had split, there were alcohol related problems. With that, he was living on his own in a house in one of the communities. So they used to have parties at the house. I’d been over once. And called him, he still had a phone. “Ronny, I’m coming to get you.” “OK, Sir.” I said, “Get a shower.” So I went and picked him up, went into the house. The front door, and there’s a sort of foyer. People running all over the place. OK fine. So Ronny gets in the car. We have a nice conversation on the way back to school. And happened another day. And this teacher was complaining, complaining about it and I said, “Here’s what I want you to do. Take your car. Go get Ronny.” And she came back, and her comment to me was, “You son of a bitch.” I said, “Well, did you see anything?” You know it was a, I guess sort of a door opener to a conversation. Because she really didn’t realize where some of these kids were coming from... She sort of came from southern Ontario. Really didn’t know much about it. So I thought it was kind of a, maybe it was a bit of a nasty thing to do, but I thought, hey, you know like, go see what Ronny’s doing...

By sending this teacher to the student’s home, Dale is attempting to enlighten the teacher on the life situation of the student in the hopes of generating greater understanding and empathy toward what this student’s lived experiences entail. This, in turn, might, at least in this case, lead to dissonance as the teacher comes to the realization that this student could not reasonably meet the expectations of the Ministry of Education to “come to school on time, prepared, and ready to learn” (Ontario Code of Conduct, 2007b). Instead, this particular student comes to school with a host of unmet needs that do not position him equitably to
begin the school day as many of his peers might; that is, well rested, well fed, and feeling secure. With this understanding, the teacher will then hopefully be willing to discuss ways in which the school can better address the holistic needs of this particular student. By putting life’s realities directly in front of the teacher in this respect, Dale is forcing her to at least acknowledge a reality that is not part of her own lived experience. In an inclusive and caring school, the teacher then has to reflect on his or her understanding and practice and decide for himself or herself what they are willing to change for the well being of the student.

Cilla is principal in a school with a high First Nations population and a reserve close by. She uses school meetings and planned visits to students’ homes to enlighten the whole staff on the life situations that some students find themselves in outside of school. Her attempts are intended to create empathy, but also to create dissonance and foster a willingness to discuss ways in which educators might best address the needs of such students. Cilla describes her motives:

Sometimes I bring them in for interviews with the parents. I’ve also taken teachers to homes, so that they can see... We had one boy that was in trouble, so I didn’t want to go by myself, and they [a teacher] went with me. [Author: And what was their reaction?] A lot of times, they are surprised, especially if you just bring in some of the family members; a lot of the times they bring in more than one. They bring in an advocate, or someone who is driving them, or lives in the home as well. And when you’re sitting down, and talking to them, I normally lead the discussion, and it may not be a discussion right away about their child. It might be about something I know they are interested in. And the teachers get a different view of these kids after they have met the parents. And a lot of times it works. I have suggested workshops and PD for teachers, sometimes readings...

It is important to note that both Dale and Maria provide follow up discussions and support for staff following instances such as these that create unusually high degrees of dissonance. Instead of simply leaving staff struggling with their dissonance, support in the form of dialogue, information from articles, and so forth is presented as a means to facilitate both personal and professional development. In summary, creating dissonance in these and in similar ways is used as a tool by principals to facilitate growth and development and bring about individual or collective change in understanding or behaviour. When used appropriately, inclusive principals consider this strategy to be a legitimate catalyst for facilitating a willingness to grow in understanding, and reflect that development in a change in attitude, behaviour, or teaching practice.
Sharing Responsibility

The principalship is an administrative role in which the principal acts as an ‘agent of the district.’ As such, the principal is accountable to the district for what goes on in his or her school. Most principals interviewed in this study are clearly aware of this and do not try to shrug responsibility for what goes on in the school, despite not having direct control over all that transpires in a school. Almost all look for opportunities to share leadership and decision-making, despite the fact that they will ultimately be held responsible for decisions and actions that are made even if they might not have been directly involved in those decisions. This, I suggest, involves considerable risk-taking and trust on the part of principals. Principals report that within an inclusive leadership framework, not all leadership roles have to be filled by one person exclusively. Often, many persons can assume leadership roles while working on a committee or a project. Even where there is a ‘team leader’ or a ‘chairperson’ appointed for reporting or organizing purposes, the leadership may remain shared within the group and among all group members. Jonathon describes such an arrangement the following way:

It’s a real delicate process that I go through. The first thing I do is I put it out to who wants to do it first. It’s an open invitation. From there, I tend to then discuss with those who are interested, the expectations and what’s required... Then it comes right down to what I will do. What I tend to do is... I may pick a leader per say because I have to have one, but we may do some shared responsibilities. So yes, we have a team leader, for the sake of somebody maybe doing an agenda and running a meeting, but in terms of the actual responsibilities it’s kind of shared among those who want to do it. So people aren’t felt left out, they still have an opportunity to lead something to a certain extent, to co-lead it... That’s kind of our way of doing it.

Under this umbrella, all members can participate or ‘co-lead,’ without one person or another assuming the sole power of decision-making or direction setting typically associated with more traditional conceptualizations of leadership. Another participant, Stephen, explains this principle as he refers to how his staff ‘distributes’ the leadership amongst themselves:

One of the things that makes them very successful is that they’re not the leader in the sense that they’re running everything; they distribute their leadership as well. [I am] looking for strengths on the staff and each person brings something to the table. That’s part of my role is to model that for them. They’re treating the teachers the same way. Everyone has ownership, everybody is part [of a whole].
As Stephen suggests, inclusive principals seek out ways and means to share responsibilities typically associated with the role of a ‘leader.’ From the vantage point of the principals I interviewed, this sharing of leadership in its various forms, reportedly serves to engage staff and capitalize on their unique individual strengths and abilities. Maria explains that:

My role is to ensure that I am steering the course for the rest of the teachers that are here at the school. We are all staff members and parents and students that I’m put in charge to steer the course or the direction that is determined by the team... To me, leadership is not me determining what the path is. To me, leadership is that we are all determining that path. My job is to support it, keep it in the right direction and understand the rationale of why we’re choosing that and making sure that we have good research data and momentum and the resources and support we need to enable us to get from Point A to Point B. So in the school, I know from my experience when I used to teach that the principal used to set the direction, and we just kind of all followed and everybody kind of did their own thing. When I look at the framework, now it’s one where everybody is developing your leadership skills so it doesn’t mean that I necessarily have to do everything, that I give the skills or meet or assist in setting that direction. But giving those staff members the leadership to be able to lead things in the school... I would try and nurture everybody with an opportunity to be a leader on a project... Now there are some teachers that have more skills and experience and are able to run a meeting and stay the course. Of course I would choose those ones and I would say “you know what I think you’re ready to do this.” So I would encourage that, mentor that role in the school... In the school, everybody has an opportunity to be a leader in whatever form they could be.

The challenge for inclusive leaders is to create this culture where all staff (not just teachers) believe that they play a role in leading for change. Whether the staff member is coaching a team, chairing a team meeting or sharing ideas in a staff meeting, their actions and contributions are valued and listened to. This key element reportedly leads to a greater willingness to collaborate amongst staff as each individual realizes that they are indeed bringing about and leading changes in the school communities in which they work.

Selecting/Grooming Leaders

Sharing Maria’s belief that “Every teacher leads in the classroom....” numerous principals allude to the potential within all individuals to act as leaders in a variety of ways. Maria elaborates on this point stating that:

My philosophy is that anyone who walks in through these doors, even parents, students - that we all come special gifts and talents, and sometimes we don’t nurture that in individuals. And I think it’s my job to seek out those, and say,
“You know you have the capacity to be able to do this, and we will support it because we all have ownership of the decisions and the teaching that we make in this school. And I think everybody needs to be a lead. You’re talking about the teacher; the teacher is the lead in the classroom. I am not the lead in there; the teacher is the leader in there so every staff that works with a child is a leader. Those students are looking up to that teacher, or that individual, or the EA, or that custodian, or the secretary. They’re looking up to them cause they’re the ones coming with the skills or gifts and the knowledge to be able to help that student or that parent problem solve and come up with some solutions.

An inclusive principal develops this potential in others, helping each to recognize that they themselves are leaders in their own right.

Another role of the inclusive principal is to further the development of this leadership potential in others, and to invite them to participate in more formal leadership roles that are best suited to each. To help facilitate, teachers assuming additional responsibilities, principals often engage in what several principals describe as ‘grooming.’ Not meant to by coercive or manipulative in any way, grooming is geared toward helping teachers recognize and capitalize on strengths and talents they have. Inclusive principals recognize that all teachers have skills and talents that uniquely equip each of them to potentially assume a particular set of leadership roles and look for these in their staff. One principal, Beth comments that:

Every staff comes.....with a, with a talent. Like everyone can do something well. You know it may not always look the same, but everyone can do something well and we have staff in the building that like to that like to explore, that like to share, you know. If you give them something they go with it.

Beth, further states that she is “Looking at staff and finding those key people... [giving] just kind of a little bit, you know, gradually here and there... a little bit more responsibility” A second principal, Rob, in recognizing individual strengths, capitalizes on these in the following way:

I have a teacher on staff who is a literacy specialist, so I empower her. And each person on staff I attempt to affirm in the area of their strengths. And then, their strength spreads to the rest of the school as a model.

An effective inclusive principal nurtures the leadership potential in staff while acknowledging that each staff brings with them a complement of unique skills and talents that may be effectively utilized within a variety of leadership roles.
When queried as to whether these were always the same key people being groomed and assuming leadership roles, Beth’s response was “No. Not always. We have different people for different roles.... gradually a release of the responsibilities from me to her.” When asked whether she felt threatened by releasing such responsibilities, the response was:

Oh absolutely not. No... I think that’s great. I think as long as the staff respect whoever it is, and I think that’s why it’s good to change it around, because I think it’s important to distribute that leadership so everyone sees that they can step up to that.

Beth’s quote illustrates the purposeful distribution of opportunities for leadership to multiple persons. This is intentionally done for two reasons. First, to demonstrate that all persons have the potential to assume leadership roles, and secondly to build cadres of persons on staff who feel prepared and can actively assume leadership roles in the future. These leadership roles can range from initiating a professional development initiative for the entire staff, to serving as an acting administrator when the need arises. The critical point is that inclusive principals recognize the leadership potential in all staff and attempt to foster this by encouraging staff to participate in various roles throughout the school community.

In determining who might be best selected for one leadership role or another, Ashley lists several criteria:

Well sometimes I use various criteria. Sometimes I will look at the person that is eager to be developed. Sometimes I will look at the person that needs to be developed and sometimes I will look at the person that’s most likely to share ideas when they are sent off for PD especially when they are going board wide for PD sessions....

Ashley acknowledges she had “planted the seed” and had “been grooming a person to assume a leadership role in a curriculum initiative for the school” and that there were presently “a couple of other staff on school that would be ready to go.”

Sharing responsibilities and opportunities for leadership roles is another hallmark of inclusive leadership. Inclusive principals are not threatened by giving up or sharing power and control; on the contrary, they actually invited it. Common among their perspectives is the understanding that by sharing responsibilities, members of the school community will develop and enhance their sense of value and belonging that will in turn lead to greater fulfillment in their role and in their commitment to the school.
Strategies for Hiring and Placement of Staff

Many principals believe it is critically important to hire staff that will support and promote an inclusive culture. Although hiring policies and protocols place restrictions on the selection of who principals can hire, several principals indicate they have ways to “work around” these restrictions. Heidi explains the challenges presented by certain restrictions and her particular strategy in circumventing these in the following way:

I’d like to be able to hire the best person for the job - the best person who would fit the school culture, who would fit the school team that we have built, not just the next person on the seniority list. Now, I have been really lucky, because you know – do you want me to say this – you know you can get around it. You just design your job application, your posting to fit the people you hope are going to apply, that you would really like to have. You can do that sometimes. Sometimes you can do that. Sometimes you can’t.

Although not all principals would likely be comfortable with this practice, the principals I interviewed maintain that they “put kids’ interests first,” and in the case of hiring of staff, they believe that it is more critical to hire teachers that adopt an inclusive philosophy over teachers who simply had seniority or subject matter qualifications. Ashley shares a similar perspective and strategy and suggests that, as a principal, she wants to hire the right person for the job rather than simply the most technically qualified or senior person. To achieve this, she suggests that:

You can do a little bit of fiddling with your postings... because the federations, the agreement we have is that you are going to go with the most senior qualified person, and the third piece of that is that you’re going to look at special criteria which usually can be debated when it comes down to somebody wanting to come to the school... Well I would say 15–20%, I’ve been able to really do some fiddling with.

Where there is ‘fiddle’ room which can afford principals’ discretion and flexibility in hiring, most principals are quite clear in their understanding that what they are looking for in a staff member is a person who will form a good fit within the culture of an inclusive school and in their relationship with students. Kirk stresses the fact that:

To me, one of the keys for that particular age group is more than to be a good teacher, you need someone with a connective ability. Someone with a lightness of touch but sometimes a heavy hand as well. They need a really light relationship with kids so they feel like they can breathe, and have a little bit of freedom and aren’t in jail, but you also need the “This is the way it is sometimes” piece, so they can set the boundaries. And we have that, three really great intermediate teachers, all different.
Kirk continues, explaining that picking the right teachers is especially critical in the intermediate grades and that core teachers at this level are of particular importance. He suggests that:

So your 7/8 teachers in your school should be really top notch, so your homeroom teachers have to be really solid in 7/8. They have to be really good teachers and caring teachers as well, good people with an interest in kids.

Inclusive principals recognize the difference teachers can make with challenging students and seek to hire the people expert over the subject expert. Taralyn stresses that she is looking for the right ‘person,’ not subject qualifications. She indicates that her preferred strategy is that:

We always hire people first. We didn’t hire for a position, we hire people. I think good people can teach anything within some limits... I don’t think I could go into a shop, but you know our disciplines are such that if you put good people in place, you have a better staff and a better school community that meets the needs of students as opposed to, you know, people that have those math qualifications...

Taralyn sums up the importance of hiring people that had the right philosophy and the right characteristics; in her words, “the three P’s.” She states that:

You look at the people you are putting in these programs. These are people that are... they just have that inclusive philosophy. They are very supportive, meeting the needs of all students, recognizing that students are very different and trying to do things differently to try and engage these kids. So we were very, very careful... You want to pick people that weren’t confrontational, weren’t teachers that weren’t, that wouldn’t escalate and incite and confront. So you always want to pick personalities that I always thought as the three P’s – they had personality, they had passion, and they had a presence.

Hiring teachers who have an inclusive philosophy means that they would most likely be in support of, and be committed to, enhancing an inclusive culture at the school. Principals feel strongly about hiring teachers who share an inclusive philosophy and are willing to seek out potential candidates and even circumvent policy in order to have a well suited candidate on their staff. Ideally, all teachers they hire for Grade 7 and 8 positions would possess personality, passion, and a presence that allow them to relate well with adolescents, to avoid confrontations, and to make students feel valued and welcome in their classrooms. Selective hiring of teachers possessing these attributes over teachers with seniority or other qualifications is viewed by many principals I interviewed as justified because students themselves are considered to be the ultimate beneficiaries of such actions.
Create a Welcoming/Inviting Space for Parents

Another aspect of developing an inclusive school is ensuring that the school is perceived as a warm and inviting place by parents and visiting members of the community. Many aspects of the school are identified by principals as contributing to this atmosphere. Included among these are the general appearance of the front of the building and the foyer upon entrance into the school, signs on the doors that direct parents to the office, sign in procedures at the office, the manner in which the visitors are greeted by the office administrator or staff in the halls, and the comfort of the foyer as a waiting place.

As a security measure, most school districts now require that all visitors to the school building report to and sign in at the office, in part, so that staff knows who is in the building at any given time. Many parents, who had previously been permitted to enter the school and meet or greet their son or daughter at their classroom door, now find themselves with their access restricted as they are redirected to the office. In response to this, many principals have arranged or even remodeled the area in the front of their office (typically) to provide a more hospitable and more comfortable area for parents to wait for their kids or to wait for meetings. The intent is to send the message that although access may be restricted, parents and visitors are still welcome in the school, and we want you to be comfortable while here.

There are many ways in which principals attempt to have their schools remain inviting spaces and to make parents feel welcome at the school. One principal interviewed, Ashley, has two computers in the lobby for exclusive use of visiting parents or community members. Others have comfortable couches and chairs that extend a warm and welcoming atmosphere and provided a place for parents to sit down and relax while they wait for meetings or for their son or daughters day to end. Several school foyers have displays of books on parenting, education, and so forth that parents can sign out and borrow as they would from their local library. On tables, outside the office in one lobby, Ashley has placed several brochures providing information on the role and function of the School Advisory Council (SAC). She indicated that she has placed them there with the hopes that parents will become informed of the value of SAC membership and how they may become a part of the committee and participate in that aspect of school governance. It is interesting to note that this particular principal has taken money out of her school budget to have these pamphlets
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have identified and described numerous strategies that inclusive principals report that they employ in their leadership endeavors in order to facilitate or enhance the development of an inclusive school culture and climate. These strategies are distinct in that they describe ways and means by which principals intentionally bring about changes in teaching staff and in the school environment that lead to the development of a more inclusive school. Principals identify that an inclusive school develops as a result of continuous efforts to create a climate of trust and mutual respect among all members of the school community. Trust can be developed in a variety of ways but has as a prerequisite the requirement that a principal actively listens to members of the school community and values the perspectives of others in a non-judgmental way. Listening leads to dialogue and shared understandings as the community builds or revises a vision of what the inclusive school will ideally look like, and how the school community as a whole can chart a course to develop such a school.

Both macro and micro changes which may be called for as this vision is implemented in both philosophy and practice. These changes become embedded within and come to define the culture that members of the school community experience in their day to day interactions when in the school. Where there is resistance to needed change, principals rely on a variety of means to facilitate new understandings and support from staff. These measures include the use of data to identify inconsistencies with philosophy or vision, pressure (setting limits and introducing cognitive dissonance) and adequate support where needed. This guidance and support may come in a variety of forms, be it from the principal as a critical friend, or as a provider of needed professional development and the like. If there is a central thread that ties these strategies together, it is the philosophy of including, valuing, and respecting all members of the school community. If a principal seeks to develop an inclusive school, then his or her initiatives and efforts in bringing this about must be inclusive in nature. The strategies have to bring about change from within, honouring and respecting the individuality of the staff, while capitalizing on the unique talents and strengths of each. The strategies that
principals shared reflect their efforts to spread these specific messages, to ‘walk that talk,’ to
demonstrate through modeling and through their actions their own willingness and
commitment to respecting and supporting all members of the community on their journey to
becoming the very best that they can be.
Chapter Eight: Discussion

This study was undertaken to explore how principals make sense of inclusion, and how they, as inclusive minded principals, attempt to facilitate the inclusion of Grade 7 and 8 students with behavioural challenges within their schools. Of particular interest are the ways and means in which school principals attempt to shape school culture and facilitate the development of inclusive schools for students who are acting out behaviourally and often find themselves frequently ostracized and excluded in schools. Documenting these inclusive practices and strategies will add to our growing knowledge base of best practices for facilitating the development of inclusive schools, not only for students who are acting out behaviourally, but for other groups of marginalized students as well.

In the first part of this chapter, I provide an overview of exclusionary responses to student misbehaviour and the effects that such responses often have on student development and educational outcomes. As an alternative to exclusion, I highlight elements of inclusive responses to student misbehaviour as described by principals in this study and supported in the literature on inclusion. These inclusive responses are reflective of principals’ understanding of inclusion as a philosophy, a process, and a product, each of which is discussed in relation to one another as components of a principal’s holistic understanding of inclusion and inclusive leadership. This chapter then turns to principals’ reports on how they attempt to re-culture schools and develop ever more inclusive environments, and in doing so, how they overcome the many barriers they face in this process of bringing about change. This is followed by an overview of the strategies principals use to facilitate the development of inclusive cultures and climates in their schools, many of which are directed toward teachers, and others that are intended for students. This thesis concludes with a critical assessment of the commonly held assumptions about the traditional mandates of schooling and a call for a more equitable and inclusive response to the diverse needs of the students who educators are employed to serve.

This research is both significant and timely as exploration of matters related to inclusion is an area recently identified as a focus of the Ontario Ministry of Education. In the recently released Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009b), the Ministry calls for “education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the
broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (p. 4). Implementation of an inclusion strategy is necessary at this time because unfortunately, research demonstrates that not all students experience such an inclusive environment in Ontario schools (Dei et al., 2007; Ryan 2003, 2006a, 2006b; Solomon & Palmer, 2006). Based on observations that students are excluded in a variety of ways both physically as well as socially in schools, Ryan (2006a) concludes that “too many (students) are forcibly removed or remove themselves. Too many find themselves unable to identify with, or participate meaningfully in the curriculum, favored pedagogies or decision-making processes” (p. 23). Certain groups may be particularly vulnerable to such exclusive practices in schools. In particular, boys, and impoverished and minority students remain “more likely to be punished, excluded, and controlled than to have their problems addressed in a therapeutic manner” (Walker et al., 1996, p. 197), contributing to the development of alienation and disengagement from the schooling experience. Solomon and Palmer (2006) suggest:

[As] youths become alienated from a school structure they perceive as not representing their interest, they develop a vibrant, dynamic nonconformist, counter-school culture that is threatening to authority structures… [and that] to maintain some measure of power and control in their schools and communities these students developed distinct sub cultural forms of behaviour as a response to top down, imposed control. (p. 193)

This response may lead to a spiraling of negative interactions that often result in the intervention of police in schools (Solomon, 1992) and eventual early school leaving (HDRC, 2005).

Schools themselves may pathologize and silence (Shields, 2004b) other groups of students who find themselves marginalized by markers other than those that are generally visible such as gender, ethnicity, and color. For example, students who are acting out behaviourally may be silenced and pathologized if their behaviour is considered ‘deviant’, ‘problematic,’ or as Kunc (2000) suggests, if it “doesn’t fit the mold.” Behaviour that deviates from the prescribed provincial or school policies such as the Code of Conduct (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b), for example, may be viewed as problematic or challenging at best, and most often punishable by the imposition of legitimized exclusionary sanctions, “including medication, or removal from their classroom” (Kugelmass, 2004, p. 24).
Exclusionary responses to misbehaviour, such as suspensions and expulsions, and violations of behavioural standards and codes of conducts reflect a deficit mentality (Valencia, 1997). Such a perspective places the onus of responsibility for behaviour solely on students as opposed to the adoption of a more holistic view that understands behaviour as an interaction within, and a response to, one’s environment. This deficit mentality view, as explained by Portelli and Vibert (2001), “conveniently allows us to blame the individual… and ignore the larger social and political realities in which teachers, students, schools are immersed” (p. 76). This narrow view of holding the student fully accountable, without taking into consideration other factors and influences of student behaviour, blinds educators to the possibility of other perspectives that may facilitate more equitable and inclusive practices in schools.

Adopting a critical perspective requires educators to look beyond the students and to question the systemic and structural patterns of events, power, social dynamics, and discourses that are in place and operating in a manner that facilitates and perpetuates these dynamics and patterns of student behaviour. Clough (2005) suggests that exclusion is morally necessitated and structurally indicated, that it is in itself a reflection of the world within which we live, and as such, not to be hidden. Educators, however, are prudent to explore existing patterns of legitimized exclusion and examine their own role in the development and perpetuation of this cycle. In adopting a critical stance, educators are called to not only identify and expose unfair or unjust practices, but to attempt to rectify these as well. Approaches in education reflecting an inclusive philosophy can and should be identified and used as models in an attempt to offset or minimize the effects of exclusionary practices that remain embedded within our educational system as well as society as a whole.

Research into inclusive practice is not new but historically, as Ryan (2003) notes, “over the years, those who explored inclusion did so from a perspective that revolved around student (dis)ability”…. and that it was not until “more recently, however, those interested in inclusion have expanded the concept to encompass not just (dis)ability, but also other axes of disadvantage such as age, gender, class, and race/ethnicity” (p. 17). The present research adds to our understanding of inclusion and “axes of disadvantage” by suggesting that in addition to these above, educators in an inclusive school must consider an additional, rather salient axis of diversity: the diversity presented by students with behavioural challenges who
have unfulfilled needs and/or are lacking the cultural and social capital to navigate through their school day without disruption of routines, rules, and established norms.

This study suggests that instead of simply blaming students for their behaviour, educators need to understand that disruptive students have distinct needs that might at times place them in a position of disadvantage in the educational setting, just as age, sexual orientation, gender, class, color, race, religion, ethnicity or (dis)ability might at times disadvantage them. In the latter instances, educators do not simply punish and exclude minorities that cannot meet a particular standard; instead, they are called to program for students’ needs, celebrate their uniqueness, and facilitate their success. This research study suggests that students who are disruptive deserve no less, despite the fact that they cannot be aggregated into a homogenized group and easily identified by labels or visible markers such as those which are protected from discrimination by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code. Despite this lack of homogeneity, just as other marginalized groups of students are, these students need to be welcome, valued, and supported as opposed to being punished and excluded. Exactly how principals facilitate the development of inclusive schools wherein such basic needs of students are best addressed is an area of inquiry further explored in this study.

**Principals’ Understanding/Sensemaking**

Principals were selected as participants in this study because it has been recognized that in their position as principals they “exert substantial influence…. and school leaders still have the capacity to influence the day-to-day action of teachers and students perhaps more than any other single individual” (Ryan, 2003, p. 8). This study explored inclusive principals’ understanding, that is, their sensemaking (Evans 2007, Weick, 1995) of the principles of inclusion and how these direct their own goals and actions as inclusive leaders in intermediate schools. Research such as this into principals’ sensemaking is becoming increasingly valued as noted by Evans (2007), “There is growing interest in the cognitive aspects of school leadership. Specifically, more studies focus on how school leaders frame, derive meaning…. enact various contexts and identities to construct meaning of, define, and act upon the emergent issues of schools” (Evans, 2007, p. 160). This study explores these
elements in relation to contexts, identities, and meanings of issues relating to students with behavioural challenges.

In a similar manner in which Evans (2007) “centralizes both sensemaking and race within the contexts of school leaders’ work...” (p. 167), this thesis centralizes both sensemaking and behaviour within the contexts of leadership in inclusive schools. Like Evans, this study explored school leaders’ sensemaking by examining “their own words, which reflect their perceptions about race [behaviour] and demographic change but also reflect those things that they paid attention to, ignored, or valued in their role as school leaders” (p. 168). These understandings, the sensemaking principals rely on to guide their actions, provide insight into how principals come to view the world in which they are immersed, how they interact in that world, and how they facilitate the development of ever more inclusive schools.

Principals’ Understanding /Sensemaking of Inclusion as a Philosophy, Process, and a Product

Principals interviewed in this study often referred to three, interwoven yet distinct aspects of inclusion when sharing their understandings: 1) inclusion as a philosophy or set of values and beliefs, 2) inclusion as a process, and 3) inclusion as a product. These three ‘P’s of inclusion (philosophy, process, and product) were most frequently discussed in an interwoven fashion but when the data was segregated, distinct understanding of each aspect emerged.

In its simplest form, an inclusive principal’s philosophy directs the process which influences the product. An inclusive philosophy consists of an individual’s set of core values and beliefs about inclusion – about matters related to social justice, equity, and the value of individual human beings. The process of inclusion, as related to leadership, encompasses the ways and means by which this philosophy is applied to one’s workplace (although this is not to suggest that a truly inclusive minded individual can separate work from personal domains). And finally, inclusion as a product represents the multiple outcomes of the various attempts at facilitating inclusive environments. It is important to note that these three components are not static or ever complete. That is, they continue to evolve over time as they change in response to situation and circumstance. In addition, neither is ever completely realized, completely actualized as fully inclusive in either philosophy or product. This is to
suggest that an individual can never have a fully inclusive philosophy or a school can never really be fully inclusive, because what is meant by fully inclusive is only a concept that itself changes and evolves over time and across individuals and circumstance.

The remaining paragraphs in this section provide an overview of each of these three aspects of inclusion in order to provide a clearer understanding of what is meant by each, and of their interrelationship to one another.

**Philosophy**
An inclusive philosophy is understood as coming not only from mental constructs but also from a person’s core values: a reflection of an individual’s ethics, morals, values, and beliefs. An inclusive philosophy does not stem from a policy but rather from a principal’s sense of moral purpose and his/her understanding of matters related to social justice and equity. It is described as a set of principles or understandings that are informed by the human heart (Palmer, 2000) which cannot be separated from who one is as a person. The philosophy is distinct from process and product in the sense that philosophy is not itself influenced by, but certainly does influence the process and the product. The philosophy largely determines leadership style and influences the processes of facilitating the development of inclusive practices. These processes in turn influence the product: the degree of inclusion experienced.

The philosophical beliefs of principals in this study reflect an understanding and commitment to ensuring others are included and treated with respect; as though they are valued and have something meaningful to contribute to the school community; as though they belong in this school community; as though they are welcome in this community regardless of their challenges; and that each person matters and that others care about their wellbeing.

**Process**
The process of a school becoming increasingly more inclusive school is ongoing. Certain processes and strategies, many of which are initiated and directed by an inclusive leader, can assist in this evolution. Several of these strategies are critical and are discussed further in this chapter. A school’s vision for example guides decision-making and practice as it provides a representative picture of what kind of an inclusive school the particular community wants,
and in this regard sets targets and goals to work towards. The developing of a collective vision is one process that a principal can initiate to bring about change. The process of actualizing that vision is guided by leadership and it is the effectiveness of this leadership that will greatly influence (but not solely determine) the product, that is, the degree to which the school culture and lived experiences of all members of the school community reflect the principles of inclusion.

Having a collective vision of what an inclusive school would look like is considered as crucial to guide educators in their decision-making and actions. Inclusive principals believe, however, that visioning alone is not enough, that creating a vision is only one small step toward developing an inclusive school. In fact, visioning is considered to be a never ending process of becoming – the degree of inclusion is reflected in the actualizing of an ever evolving vision. A school’s vision changes as do its members and their individual and collective beliefs about what they want their school to represent and look like. The vision has to be created out of the philosophies of the individual members of the school community, not a textbook version of what someone else’s ideal inclusive school would be. Inclusive principals recognize that although visioning is important, the philosophy from which this vision emerges is the foundation of action. It is the philosophy that guides the vision, and not the vision that guides the development of the philosophy. As such, inclusive principals believe that the degree of inclusiveness reflected in a school will be more an outcome of the philosophies of individual members of a school community than of the school’s stated collective vision.

Inclusive processes do not always lead to a product that reflects a school’s vision however. A school administrator may adhere to the principles of inclusion and engage in inclusive leadership practices, without this ever resulting in an inclusive school. The philosophy and practices of a school principal may be inclusive, but for a variety of reasons, the school may not reflect an inclusive culture or climate. Individual staff, or an entire staff (parents and students as well) may resist attempts to support and adopt inclusive philosophy and pedagogy. There is no guarantee that the modeling and support of an inclusive principal will result in a vision, culture, or practices within the school that are inclusive. Indeed, according to principals interviewed in this study, inclusive principals will not determine the vision but will be facilitators for the development of a shared vision, whatever that is to be.
The inclusive minded principal may influence this developmental process by building bridges (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) between differing viewpoints, for example, but he or she will generally not impose their own vision upon others in a prescribed fashion.

This perspective is reflective of the understanding that a school administrator does play an integral but not absolute role in setting a school’s vision. Principals help shape and create this vision, in part by modeling the type of interactions they want to see in others (Crowther, 2002; Fullan 2002a, 2002b; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2004; Waite, 2002). This modeling is deemed to be essential; principals cannot build an inclusive school if they are not inclusive leaders. If the principal is not using an inclusive leadership framework or style, he or she cannot then turn around and direct their teachers to be inclusive toward each other, students, and parents. As the principals I interviewed in this study indicated, there is no room for hypocrisy and “walking the talk” in this regard is critical if others are to follow your lead.

It is important to note that in this thesis, reference is intentionally made to principals facilitating the development of an inclusive culture rather than principals developing an inclusive culture within a school. This differentiation respects the fact that that principals in this study acknowledged that as with the school’s vision, it is the entire school community that defines its culture rather than one specific individual however positioned he or she may be. The principal, in his or her position of power and influence, may, through action or inaction, facilitate or block certain initiatives, endeavors, and practices which might foster inclusion and the development of an inclusive culture. Principals do not develop this culture on their own, however, and consequently, mention of their individual leadership role is phrased as “facilitating the development” rather than “developing” an inclusive school culture. This reflects the fact that inclusion is a shared experience and that its existence or non-existence is a result of the efforts of a collective rather than solely of an individual (Ryan, 2006b). All participants share in the shaping of the school culture, as they are all part of the practice within a school, and as such, responsibility for the development of an inclusive culture and/or inclusive school is shared by all.
Product

The product of the principal’s philosophy and his or her efforts toward the process of bringing about change to an ever more inclusive school is the school culture and the practices that emanate within the school on a daily basis. This culture and these practices will determine how each and every member of the school community experiences their schooling. If individual members of the community (students, teachers, parents) feel respected, welcome, valued, experience a sense of belonging, and can achieve success within the schooling environment, then one would consider that the school is providing them with a relatively inclusive environment. However, if individuals are not experiencing this, then the degree to which their needs are not being met reflects a non-inclusive environment. This highlights another key point which is that a school or classroom may be perceived as inclusive by one individual but as not very inclusive by another. A fully inclusive school as a product is an ideal. A school is unlikely to be providing a fully inclusive experience for all community members, all of the time; nonetheless, the goal of achieving full inclusion for all remains an ideal that inclusive principals strive toward creating.

In order to provide an inclusive school experience for students with behavioural challenges, educators need to assess and address individual students’ needs regardless of what they may be. Principals in this study identify a broad range of needs that contribute to student alienation, despair, disengagement, all of which were seen as precursors to student misbehaviour. In sharing their understanding of these diverse needs and how they as principals attempt to address these needs in schools, principals provide rich descriptions of their interwoven understandings of inclusion as a philosophy, a process, and a product.

Re-culturing Schools: Inclusive Schooling

Inclusion and inclusive schooling have been the topic of much research and discussion for the past three decades and continue to represent different ideals for different interest groups. The philosophical tenets of inclusion do however have at their roots the notion to include, which “implies being a part of something, being embraced into the whole” (Villa & Thousand, 1995, p. 6). Expanding on this notion, these same authors describe inclusion or inclusive education as “an attitude — a value and belief system — not an action or set of actions. Once adopted by a school or a school district, it should drive all decisions
and actions by those who have adopted it” (p. 6). Pearpoint and Forest (1992) discuss this notion of inclusive values and how they are expressed in an inclusive school:

The important underlying values of an inclusive school [are] the ABC’s (Acceptance, Belonging, and Community) and the three R’s (Reading, Writing, and Relationships). An inclusive school values interdependence as well as independence. It values its students, staff, faculty, and parents as a community of learners. An inclusive school views each child as gifted. An inclusive school cherishes and honors all kinds of diversity as an opportunity for learning about what makes us human. Inclusion focuses on how to support the special gifts and needs of each and every student in the school community to feel welcomed, secure, and to become successful. Another assumption underlying inclusive schooling is that good teaching is good teaching, that every child can learn, given the appropriate environment, encouragement, and meaningful activities. (in Villa & Thousand, 1995, p. 8)

Inclusive education calls for a school restructuring (according to Villa & Thousand 1995) wherein educators come to believe and are committed to inclusive principles that reflect:

that each child can learn and succeed, that diversity enriches us all, that students at risk for failure can overcome that risk through involvement in a thoughtful and caring community of learners, that each child has unique contributions to offer to the community of learners, that each child has strengths and needs, and that effective learning results from the collaborative efforts of all of us to ensure the success of each student. (p. 9)

Building on these principles, participants in this study consider an inclusive school to be one in which all community members feel included, in which they feel welcome and experience a sense of belonging, and in which they are valued in their own unique ways. Within such a school students, parents, and staff members feel safe, secure, and listened to, where uniqueness and differences are celebrated, and most importantly, where all students are respected, “even when they are at their most difficult.”

This position clearly reflects a respect for individual differences that transcend normal boundaries presented by traditional codes of conduct and standards for behaviour. Such an inclusive perspective recognizes the fact that not all students are positioned the same and equally equipped to meet behavioural norms or fit into prescribed molds. Respecting these differences, in both students and staff, inclusive principals see this not as a threat or as a burden to be cast out, but rather as a “gift,” an “opportunity,” a “challenge” for them “to be who we are”, that is, to practice their philosophy of inclusion. In an inclusive environment, a culture of care exists where individuals are valued for their uniqueness and the contributions they are able to make rather than perceived as liabilities and a drain on resources. In
actuality, the most challenging and seemingly troubled students were reportedly often the ones that teach educators the most about themselves and challenge them to develop their skills as educators.

These foundational tenets of inclusion are seen by principals in this study as critical to the well being and full participation of all members of the school community and especially important to those members who are set apart from others because of their behavioural challenges. In order to develop inclusive communities, and have these communities accessible and embracing of the most marginalized in schools (including behavioural students), the Ministry has identified the need for “re-culturing” schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 3). Re-culturing, as Sergiovanni (2000) reminds us, is both complex and difficult, requiring that both individually and collectively held meanings of experience change. Re-culturing calls for “deep change” which necessitates that “the basic metaphor for the school itself be changed to that of a community. And once this is done, leadership strategies and change forces must be matched to the unique cultural requirements of schools understood as communities” (Sergiovanni 2000, p. 164). For Sergiovanni this deep change “requires the reconstructing of existing individual and collective mindscapes of practice” (2000, p. 148), described as implicit mental frames through which the reality of schooling and our place in it are envisioned. In relation to this study, deep change is required in order to create school communities and cultures where behaviour that falls outside of the traditional school cultural norms is understood in a different light. With this understanding - an inclusive understanding – educators will be better positioned to address student needs such as the need for a sense of belonging and positive identity within the school.

Sergiovanni’s mindscapes are similar to Evans’ (2007) sensemaking and the principals’ own understandings that were investigated in this study. In each of these three cases, what is called for are changes in school cultures as reflected in changes in relationships, teaching practice, and student learning (Fullan, 1991). With a re-culturing of schools toward a more inclusive approach to embracing and valuing all learners, regardless of need or exceptionality, marginalized students will be better positioned to experience a sense of belonging and find a positive identity within the school experience. Sergiovanni (1994), drawing on the works of both Villa and Thousand (1995) and Erickson (1966),
concludes that this positive identity and sense of belonging is critical and necessary to provide people with the identity they need to function successfully as individuals:

Belonging may free us to climb to the next level of needs, but it is first and foremost an end in itself—a way … that we find meaning and significance in our lives and a way, according to Erikson, that we strengthen our own personal identities. It appears that the “I’s” depend on healthy “we’s”. (p. 67)

For Sergiovanni, this ‘we’ that is found in a sense of belonging to community in schools motivates students and provides them with protection from negative influences elsewhere.

Adding support to this contention, Oldenquist (1991) argues that it is our nature to be social animals, “to be socialized and brought up belonging to and caring about the good of our families, clans, tribes, [schools], towns, or countries” (p.107). This sense of belonging is essential to our human being and its absence causes alienation. Individuals can find belonging families in school communities, or even in gangs. Unfortunately, Oldenquist believes that many students do not find belonging in families and could not be “reared in a way more antithetical to the development of sense of belonging, social morality, personal responsibility, work ethic, and a sense of engaging in useful and meaningful activity” (p. 97). Kunc (2000) suggests that in addition to home, many students do not find this sense of belonging at school either. He refers to those students without such sense of belonging, those receiving only “conditional acceptance” in schools, as the casualties of exclusion, and suggests that:

many of the current problems facing children and youth at risk (e.g., gangs, suicide, and dropping out of school) are the casualties of an inflexible, insensitive system of education that systematically (perhaps unintentionally) destroys the self-esteem and self-worth of students who do not “fit the mold.” (in Villa & Thousand, 2005, p. 5-6)

Without such a sense of belonging, individuals all too often turn elsewhere to fulfill this basic need – be it with other ostracized peers, gangs, or drugs, etc. Sergiovanni (1994) suggests that while it is certainly the case that “Schools alone can’t fix the problems of society. Schools alone cannot mend community where community is broken. But schools can provide substitutes by becoming communities themselves” (p. 62). Principals interviewed in this study identified this need to belong as central to the well being of their student’s emotional and psychological health. Accordingly they seek to develop inclusive school communities where each and every student can have this basic need for belonging fulfilled regardless of
the degree to which their needs disadvantaged them from meeting the provincially set standards for behaviour.

Inclusive principals report that they have a responsibility to go far beyond merely meeting the needs for students to belong, however, and believe that the entire school culture has to reflect a community that attends to a wide variety of students’ needs, even those not necessarily expected to fall primarily within the responsibilities of school (food, clothing, safety, belonging). Contrary to this inclusive school approach, however, is Kunc’s (1992) description of a traditional school as one wherein:

The curricula and the structure of our schools are based on the assumption that children who come to school have had their psychological and safety needs met at home. Students, upon entering school, are immediately expected to learn the curriculum. Successful mastery of schoolwork is expected to foster the children’s sense of self-worth, which in turn will enable them to join the community as ‘responsible citizens.’ Children are required as it were, to learn their right to belong. (p. 381)

This is not the case, however, for the inclusive principals interviewed in this study. Inclusive principals believe that students have a right to belong, not that they have to learn or earn this right, and that teachers have a responsibility to attend to a wide variety other needs such as those of a social, emotional, or psychological nature. If these needs are not attended to in an inclusive school, then as one principal suggests, as educators “we have failed.” Sergiovanni (1994) recognized, as did principals in this study, that “In a society where loss of community seems real, schools become an important place, for some the only place, where students needs are met” (p. 68). Inclusive principals in this study are committed to meeting these needs, to the best of their ability, regardless of whether a particular student is identified as having an exceptionality or not, as defined by the criteria for exceptionalities set out by the Ministry of Education. In addressing these needs the challenge before principals is threefold: to help all students recognize this uniqueness and their own value as an individual; to address individual students’ academic, behavioural, and emotional needs; and third, to capitalize on each student’s strengths, thereby helping him/her to tap into his or her potential and become the best that he/she can be, or as Rob, one of the principals put it, find a way to “let ‘em shine.”

Inclusive principals in this study acknowledge that if students do not experience a sense of belonging and of being valued in the school then their commitment to the school and
to their academics will be negatively affected. Accordingly, principals aim to develop a school culture that values and fosters a wide variety of conditions believed to be critical for full participation in schooling. The value of such facets of schooling experience are highlighted and supported by Guhn’s (2009) review of the literature which found that:

having reciprocal friendships within one’s school is associated with higher academic achievement, pro-social behaviour, and less emotional distress (Wentzel et al. 2004), and that trustful relationships among students, teachers, parents, and the wider school community are closely related to student outcomes (Bryk and Schneider 2002). In fact, based on the growing research evidence that children’s academic and social-emotional development are inseparably intertwined (Zins et al., 2004), a number of research institutes and school districts in North America (e.g., CASEL3) are supporting initiatives that foster emotional and social competences in schools. (p. 341)

In order to achieve these outcomes, inclusive principals interviewed rely on a number of strategies that are directed exclusively toward teachers, others exclusively toward students, and some that re directed toward both groups. All of these strategies, however, have as a common denominator, the intended outcome of increasing the degree of inclusiveness within the school community.

Increasing our awareness of inclusive principals’ sensemaking of inclusion as a philosophy, a process, and a product adds to our growing understanding of how principals can bring about change in school culture so that all students, including those with behavioural concerns, share in an inclusive school experience. Inclusive principals in this study identify several key strategies they rely on to help facilitate the development of inclusive school cultures. Before discussion of these, however, several barriers that principals face in their never ending quest to facilitate the development of inclusive cultures in their schools is provided.

**Barriers to Inclusion**

Having a principal with an inclusive philosophy will not necessarily guarantee the development of an inclusive school. Despite good intentions, there are a great many barriers that act to prevent or impede the efforts of principals and teachers to facilitate the development of an inclusive school culture. Among those most frequently cited in this study are the availability of time; standardization and measures of accountability; and the lack of available resources and professional services available for students in need.
Time
One of the most limiting barriers reported in this study is the availability of time. Time is perceived as an extremely limited resource and as such is considered a valuable commodity by principals. To be an inclusive leader takes plenty of time. Adopting an inclusionary approach to principalship is not the most time efficient way to lead an organization, although participants in this study believed it is the most effective in the long run.

Educational leaders often feel as though they are spread way too thin and that most of the matters that they attend to have little to do with education or directly helping students (Hopkins, 2003). Large quantities of time are required to gather information, give voice to all participants, and to work collectively with all members of the school community to develop shared vision and understanding of purpose, etc. In addition, competing with the needs for a principal’s time are: new and ongoing initiatives from both the district and the Ministry of Education; dealing with crises or “hot issues” (Gilson, 2008) that arise; time spent on paperwork and reporting procedures; and other administrative routines and demands that were frequently considered as little more than nuisance accountability measures that took valuable time away from what principals considered to be more direct and meaningful activities. Each of these activities requires significant amounts of time which impacts the length of a principal’s work day, many of whom spend up to 60 hours per week on the job (Archer, 2002). Several principals in this study comment on experiencing difficulty in finding a healthy balance between work and personal time and the negative toll this expenditure of time engaging in school related work is taking on their personal life outside of school and several report. Reflecting this, Hyatt (2006) notes “Someone has to help a really conscientious principal say ‘it’s time to go home’” (p. 3).

Standardization and Measures of Accountability
The pressures brought about by the focus on standardized assessment and accountability measures are also reported as presenting significant barriers to inclusion as principals and teachers alike struggle with their attempts to find an appropriate balance between standardized curriculum and assessment, and meeting individual student needs. In this study, many principals acknowledge that their teachers would like to be able to address individual
student needs more fully, but are constrained by the fact that there simply is not enough time in each day to allow them to deliver the curriculum, prepare for literacy and numeracy test measures (EQAO), as well as to address students’ more holistic, non-academic needs. Fortunately, for those students who fall beyond the margins, principals in this study consistently indicate that, regardless of pressure from the Ministry to raise EQAO scores, it is important to address individual basic needs (emotional, social, safety, belonging, physical) before focusing on general academic learning needs and standardized outcomes. Echoing this, Guhn, (2009) questions the current focus on academic measures of success, noting that:

> academic achievement… grades or test scores have been used as a (sole) criterion for school success or failure. This notion, however, falls short, if one wants to evaluate school success more holistically. Physical health, mental well-being, social support, or professional success, to name a few, could also be used as criteria for assessing school success. Recently, the notion to use other criteria to assess school success has indeed become more prominent, especially since research provides evidence that children’s emotional and social skills are related to later academic achievement (Caprara et al., 2000; Wentzel 1991a, b; Wentzel & Caldwell 1997), to reduced delinquency (Hawkins et al. 1992; Loeber 1990), to greater well-being, better health, and professional success (Greenberg et al. 2003; Izard 2002; Weissberg et al., 2003). (p. 341)

Although the Ministry has identified the emotional and social aspects of schooling as critically important (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b), the current preoccupation with, and focus on, the value of standardized test results and measures of accountability for students’ performance only serves to negate their importance and presents barriers to inclusion. EQAO publicly posts numeracy and literacy scores for schools, and in doing so, creates a competitive milieu in which EQAO outcomes are the prize. According to Tschannen-Moran (2007), “Higher standards and greater accountability have fostered conditions of distrust and blame” (p. 100) and has introduced a competitive milieu among schools as performers and losers. This presents challenges for schools in geographical areas where there are more needs in certain non-academic areas (lower SES, violence prevention, nutrition) which principals and staff have identify as being critical to address alongside academic learning needs. Principals and teachers may identify emotional or social needs in individual students and want to address these, but because of the focus on measures of academic outcome, they are pressured to leave other needs unattended to. Inclusive principals maintain that meeting students’ holistic needs remains a priority but express an increasing
tension over the competing demands to address these and the pressure from districts and the Ministry to show more immediate results in improved testing scores.

Herein, lies the disconnect between what the Ontario Ministry of Education states they recognize as being of value, what they actually assess as measures of an effective school (EQAO scores) and what some students actually experience at school. The Ministry, in its Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009b), indicates that:

students who feel welcomed and accepted in their schools are more likely to succeed academically... and thereby enabled to reach their highest potential... [and that] student achievement will improve when barriers to inclusion are identified and removed and when all students are respected... (p. 2)

In contrast to this ideal, Cullingford (2005) identifies hierarchies, the unfair competition imposed by testing, and the perceived bullying and being picked on by teachers, as precursors to student humiliation, alienation, and resulting disruptive behaviour, all of which serve to put barriers between students and success at school. If the Ministry really values students feeling welcome, accepted, and respected then they should surely standardize test measures for these, through school climate surveys for example, and publicly post these results alongside EQAO scores. With a greater political focus on such affective measures, it is possible that districts, administrators, and teachers alike would feel more comfortable in allocating resources to create conditions that enhance these elements.

Critics are prudent to ask why the Ministry does not evaluate and publically post school climate results and may be left wondering whether these findings might simply be too revealing. Quite possibly, based on the responses expressed by the principals participating in this study, if these elements of school climate were more effectively addressed so that all students did indeed feel welcome, respected, and valued, student engagement would likely increase, and as a result, there may be a corresponding increase in EQAO scores as well.

Attempts at standardization can also be seen as presenting barriers to inclusion as standardization tends to both de-individualize and alienate students because by their very nature they restrict the allowances for individual differences both in learning and in behaviour. The fact that the Ontario Code of Conduct mandates conformity to standardized rules and imposes mandatory consequences for specified infractions takes away the principals’ ability to take into consideration extenuating circumstances. This de-individualization does not reflect the tenets of inclusion that suggests that persons be treated
as unique individuals. The Ontario Code of Conduct even prescribes exclusion (suspensions and expulsions) for students under certain circumstances, although recent amendments that allow principals to consider *mitigating circumstances* and rely on *progressive discipline* are reflective of a slightly more inclusive approach to discipline.

Where the Code of Conduct still currently falls short, in my opinion, is in its continuation of a hierarchical understanding of the notion of respect, which mandates that respect be given to “all members of the school community, especially [italics added] persons in positions of authority” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 4). This differential application of respect, where teachers are especially deserving of respect, is incompatible with an inclusive philosophy that views all persons as having equal value, worth, and deserving of equal degrees of respect. Keeping this distinction between students and authority figures in place makes it all too easy for educators to assume that they are deserving of more respect than students, and by deduction, that students are somehow worthy of less respect. Inclusive principals do not uphold the view that persons in authority are especially entitled to respect, but instead maintain that respect is to be afforded equally to all.

*Lack of Resources and Professional Services*

Despite good intentions, principals recognized that there are unfortunate but realistic limits to how inclusive one can be. There are limits to the resources of time, program options, staff, and skill required to address the needs of some students. With regard to both staff and students, there are instances where the resources were simply not available to address severe needs. As McLeskey & Waldron (2000) suggest:

> If students think they are part of the learning and social community of the school, many potential behaviour problems will be prevented [however]...It is important to recognize that in any school setting, there are some students whose needs cannot be met in the general education classroom. (p. 104)

Even inclusive principals recognized that there are limitations to the amount and effectiveness of the services and resources they and their staff are able to provide students and families. Principals echo the research conclusions that suggest that despite best intentions and a willingness to try and provide for all students, “some students will require academic and social skills, social and family service, counseling or psychological therapy, and pharmacological treatment which may require prolonged, if not lifelong support services”
Principals in this study acknowledge that some students presented extreme needs that are realistically not able to be met in the traditional classroom environment. They concede that for these students it may be appropriate to have them temporarily attend a specialized educational program where staff are best trained and equipped to address extreme behaviour and student needs. Although exclusionary in theory, placing a student in a specialized class in a more segregated setting may actually be the most appropriate and most inclusive way to address his or her needs. Such a setting might prove to be the least restrictive environment for a particular student in an environment that individualizes a program and sets the student up for success by removing what he or she may perceive as extremely restrictive elements of a traditional classroom. In such a setting, with individually tailored interventions and adequate counselling, it is anticipated that a particular student would be able to have his or her needs better addressed, which in turn would lead to greater development and success in their schooling experiences overall. Following such a placement, he/she would return to their home school and hopefully find themselves as a welcome part of an inclusive school community.

Despite these and the numerous other challenges and barriers before them, inclusive principals are relentless in their commitment to facilitating the development of ever more increasingly inclusive schools. To achieve this they rely on a great number of leadership strategies that reflect many of the principles of inclusion. Many of these strategies are applicable to everyone in the school while others are more relevant to individuals, or groups of staff, students, or parents. Some of the most common strategies for staff and students are discussed in the following sections.

**Inclusive Leadership Skills and Strategies for Staff**

Although there is no single archetype of the ideal inclusive principal, participants describe several key skills that they believe are essential for inclusive leadership. These include the ability to think systemically and see the whole picture, to be able to observe and listen effectively to what others are really showing and telling you, to be empathetic and compassionate, and lastly, to have patience not only with people, but with process and progress as well. These skills are seen as essential for most importantly creating a collective vision that would effectively guide the school community toward the development of an
inclusive school. Various strategies inclusive principals report relying on to facilitate growth and development are related to effective use of resources, setting of priorities, setting non-negotiable limits, modeling, developing community, listening to the entire school community, developing a common vision, and building trust. Each of these is discussed in the section that follows.

**Effective Use of Resources**

Because individual students have different needs, principals report that they often had to allocate resources differentially. That means distributing scarce resources, such as EA assistance, between competing groups of deserving students or teachers. Often times there are no special education laws that mandate service provisions for these students, as they are not formally identified as ‘behavioural’ nor are they likely to have a parent advocacy group speaking up for their rights. If these students were formally identified as ‘behavioural’ students, then they would have a legal right to access resource assistance and secure modifications to their programming. Unfortunately the needs of many students with behavioural challenges go unaddressed in non-inclusive schools because these students remain unidentified and as a consequence, under serviced (Kauffman, 2005).

Principals in this study, however, recognize that students with behavioural challenges have genuine and legitimate needs. They recognize that equity does not mean same for all, and as such, they often act as “champion for the underdog” by ensuring that the needs of those with the least support were attended to. Several of the participants consider this to be their most important role as principal: to help those students at risk and prevent them from failing. As Ashley suggests, its “those at risk, those hard to serve, those are the ones we need to be putting our support towards.... [because] fundamentally that why we are here. [It] is to help the kids that are not successful.” The important point is that inclusive principals juggle and prioritize resources based on student need, be it academic, social, or emotional, rather than based solely on policy or politics. In many instances, volunteers can be solicited to assist in coordinating programs such as breakfast clubs, and in other instances principals can empower other support staff such as EAs to offer social skills groups, etc. Some principals in this study actually shuffle resources and are then able to hire a full time CDC to counsel and assist students in addressing their non-academic needs.
**Setting Priorities**

The daily life of a principal is filled with competing demands for time, energy, and other scarce resources. In order to determine how to allocate resources, inclusive principals participating in this study adopt a student-centered approach as their barometer. Numerous principals state that in prioritizing the allocation of time or other resources “students come first.” If a crisis with a particular student arises, principals attempt to put aside what they are doing and attend to the matter at hand so that it does not escalate into a larger problem. Principals attend to the situation even if it means they fall behind in other administrative duties such as paperwork. Many principals make these choices, despite the possible negative ramifications because they believe that they have a moral responsibility to place the students’ interests first and foremost above all other interest groups. Inclusive principals in this study reportedly frame decisions based on what is in the student’s best interest, and rely on this as a guide to setting priorities and making decisions believing that in the end, they should not be criticized for such decisions because the needs of a student come first.

Prioritizing and allocating time to addressing students’ needs over other more administrative related duties and responsibilities is common among inclusive principals interviewed. Principals justify allocating their time this way by reiterating that their purpose is to “serve students” and they are simply doing “what was best for the students” at that particular time. Given that that they direct so much of their time to student related matters (prevention as well as intervention), many other responsibilities assigned to principals are frequently put aside. One way to deal with the sheer number of responsibilities and the limited amount of time available is to share responsibilities across the school community. Inclusive principals are not threatened by distributing their responsibilities in this regard, and actually groom teachers for different positions of added responsibility depending on the teacher’s own individual skills and talents. As Gilson (2008, p. 93) points out, “the key is to find the other people who are good at those jobs, and then let them shine!”

According to the participants being an inclusive principal often necessitates that a principal put students’ needs even before their own personal needs, frequently resulting in considerable sacrifice, be it in investment in time, energy, and even emotion. Inclusive principals work long hours, often encroaching into the time that would typically be devoted
to one’s own personal or family life. Such sacrifice is not strictly altruistic however as inclusive principals often find that their positioning allows them to impact significantly on the lives of certain students, an impact from which they often derive considerable personal and professional satisfaction. Principals report they are able to make such a significant difference with some students because they take the time to really listen to students and respond to their needs accordingly. In doing so, as described by one research participant, principals are sending the message “that I care enough and value you enough to listen and to help you with the challenges you face,” even though these challenges are not necessarily academic! Other principals describe the benefits of making a difference in students’ lives and “turning them around”, “changing their mindset”, or giving them a “new sense of direction” as the “ultimate reward in education.”

**Modeling**

One of the most frequently cited strategies inclusive principals report implementing is their intentional modeling for others in the school community. This modeling is intended to have three purposes: 1) to demonstrate for others the type of attitudes and behaviour they expect to see; 2) to demonstrate to others that they themselves can walk the talk; and 3) to build trust. The principal must be able to model inclusive practice (walk the talk) and in so doing, he or she develops trust among members of the staff and student body. This trust is considered to be critical in order to allow others to take the risks required to examine their own philosophy and practices and to work toward developing more inclusive practice themselves.

Appropriate modeling is intended for and directed towards teachers, students, as well as all other community members. Sergiovanni (2007) identifies the provision of such modeling as a crucial role of the principal; “he or she (is) engaging in the most important enterprise of the school... experiencing, displaying, modeling, and celebrating what it is hoped and expected that teachers and pupils will do” (p. 8). One key area for modeling is in the degree of respect shown toward students. Rudduck and her colleagues (1996) have consistently found that students report being more or less motivated according to whether they are treated with respect. Inclusive principals maintain that if they or if their teachers want to be respected by students, then they have to first demonstrate respect toward the students – even the students who challenge their authority. Inclusive principals in this study
believe that if students feel respected, they will be more likely to work collaboratively with teachers and principals to address any challenges they find themselves faced with. Inclusive principals model respectful ways to interact with both students and parents across a wide variety of situations. The expectation for staff is that if you see the principal acting in this respectful manner, even when the student is at his/her most difficult and trying moment, then it is not asking too much for others to act respectfully in a similar situation.

Research in support of this contention suggests that appropriate modeling of successful practices of dealing with problems can be encouraging to teachers, parents, and students and may leave them feeling safe to follow the principal’s lead (Ben-Avie 1998; Emmons, Efimba, & Hagopian, 1998; Noblit, Malloy, & Malloy, 2001). This ability to model, to “walk the talk” as it was referred to on several occasions by principals, is a form of “servant leadership” described by Greenleaf (1977). For Greenleaf, as is the case with inclusive principals in this study, the principal is a servant first. They cannot expect staff or students to act in ways they are not willing to act themselves; hence, they lead by example. Sergiovanni (2007) suggests that servant leadership (modeling what one expects from others) is the means by which principals can earn legitimacy required to lead. It affords principals an opportunity to demonstrate that they can walk the talk; that they themselves are willing and capable of doing what they expect from others.

This leading through modeling can only be done if a principal is a classroom principal as opposed to an office principal (Louv, 1990), that is, one who is visible and engaged within the school building throughout the school day. For Louv, classroom principals are instructional leaders; they model and free teachers up and interact with students, just as Chris in this study did when he took over teaching math lessons by graphing examples of how the costs of vandalism impact the schools budget. Another principal, Stephen, modeled in a similar fashion when at the end of the school day, while students were boarding the bus in a downpour of rain, he walked the students to the bus keeping them dry by covering groups of them up with his umbrella. Although Stephen remained unprotected from the rain with no raincoat, he did this willingly as several Educational Assistants and teachers kept themselves dry while huddling with groups of students under the alcove. At the end of the school day, I observed Stephen go outside and casually take an umbrella from an EA, relieving her of the responsibility to walk students to their busses in the rain. Stephen did
this as though it was nothing altruistic, but rather as something that anyone would do under
the circumstances (keep others dry at the cost of getting soaked yourself). In sacrificing his
comfort for the sake of staff and students, Stephen, acting as a servant leader, is
demonstrating that he cares, he is willing to sacrifice himself for the well being of others, and
that students and staff come first even if it means there is discomfort or cost to himself.

**Building Trust**

Inclusive principals recognize the importance of modeling as a means to establish trusting
relationships with members of the school community, be it teachers, staff, students, parents,
or superintendents. Principals attempt to ensure that the entire school community can
confidently entrust them with the care of students, and that stakeholders know that students’
safety and well being is of paramount importance. This priority guides each interaction and
every decision that inclusive principals make throughout the day.

Inclusive principals demonstrate that they care not only for students, but for the well
being of staff as well. Modeling this ethic of care has to be consistent, throughout the entire
day, toward all members of the school community in order to develop and sustain trust.
There is no room for double standards or hypocrisy in this regard. As Tschannen-Moran
(2007) suggests:

> Effective school leaders not only know how to ‘talk the talk’ of trust, they also
> know how to ‘walk the walk.’ If being a role model is ever necessary, it’s
> when it comes to cultivating a culture of trust. Discontinuity between word
> and example will quickly erode a principal’s ability to lead. (p.103)

With an established degree of mutual trust between them, principals, teachers,
students, and parents alike are seen as best positioned to work collaboratively toward
achieving established goals and actualizing the vision set for the school.

**Developing Community**

Principals in this study identified as the desire to establish a school community characterized
by common values that reflect mutual respect, care, a sense belonging and value as one of the
central objectives of inclusive principals. These elements are characteristic of caring
communities described by Noddings (1986, 1988, 1992, 2005) and Kunc (1992, 2000) and
discussed throughout the literature review in this thesis. Sergiovanni, (1994) also stresses the
value of community with common purpose suggesting that “community can help teachers and students be transformed from a collection of “I’s” to a collective “we,” thus providing them with a unique and enduring sense of identity, belonging, and place.” He goes on to argue that this “need for community is universal…[that] sense of belonging, of continuity, or being connected to others...” (p. xiii). Inclusive principals value this sense of community and want students and teachers to be proud of their school, acting as ambassadors for the school in the wider community. Principals believe that relationships based on mutual respect, encouragement and support, will facilitate this sense of belonging to, and pride in a school community. Accordingly they share a similar view as Sergiovanni (1994) in his suggestion that:

The quality of relationships that administrators, teachers, and students experience is key...relationships define the community – community of kinship, community of place, community of mind. Together, these three types of community form the cultural connections in a school that bond principals, students, and teachers together into a “we.” (p. xvii)

Sergiovanni’s community of kinship, place, and mind reflect what inclusive principals report they attempt to accomplish in their schools: to build a community where participants experience a sense of belonging and value identified as so critical for the fulfillment of basic human needs. Inclusive principals in this study consistently refer to this in their rich descriptions of the mandate of an inclusive school: to provide for all students a community experience in which they could have all of their holistic needs addressed to a degree which allows them to develop to their greatest potential and experience the fullness and richness of communal living with others.

**Developing a Vision**

In order to develop a community that reflects an inclusive philosophy, it is important for principals to develop a common understanding of what an inclusive school looks like. This may be addressed through visioning (Fullan, 1993, 1997; Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Sergiovanni, 2009) and related attempts to develop a shared understanding of what the principles of inclusion are, and how these are expressed throughout a school’s culture, climate, and praxis. Inclusive principals consider the development of a vision to be the outcome of a collective endeavor (Fullan, 1993, 1997; Neuman & Simmons, 2000), and reflective of the beliefs and values of the entire school community as a whole, not just those
of a principal. This reflects the reality of inclusive leadership described by inclusive minded principals interviewed for this study, which suggests that the inclusive principal is not a dictator, and his or her philosophy does not silence the voice nor trump the influence of all other members of the school community. Inclusive principals recognize the necessity of having a shared vision in order to increase buy-in and commitment from community members. They believe that all members of the school community have to have common understandings of what they are trying to develop for optimum change to occur. Accordingly, principals rely heavily on input from a variety of sources as they listen to, respond to, pull together ideas and build bridges between voices from a wide variety of stakeholders including Ministry, districts, teachers, parents, students, and the wider community.

Evans (2007) describes the principals’ role in building bridges to develop a shared vision as one in which:

...school leaders must first interpret the meanings of the issues and events for themselves (Ryan & Wignall, 1996; Spillane et al., 2002). To make sense of things, leaders “draw from” various individual, social, and instructional contexts to read meaning into the situations they must interpret. From this, leaders determine what to emphasize, downplay, or ignore in their words, actions, behaviours, and decision-making….the myriad of organizational and institutional contexts surrounding schools provide school leaders with ideological, social, and political cues that signify patterns, filter information and experiences, and guide actions and behaviours. (p. 162)

With information gathered from multiple sources, principals are better positioned to build bridges across the various perspectives of members of the school community. For Kirk this means “identify[ing] common threads between what we all believe and what we all think.” In so doing, inclusive principals attempt to set a common direction that reflects Ministry and district values and goals, as well as the values of the staff, students, parents, and even the wider community. Principals also acknowledge that this vision is not static, and as Stephen suggested, “...not like a photograph...it expands and grows depending on the circumstances and the situation.” In this sense, inclusive schools visions are understood to be ever changing, evolving as it were, in response to changing circumstances. This means that the school community is continuously working toward developing an evolving vision – as though it were a fluid as opposed to a static entity. To help facilitate this ongoing process, principals are constantly listening, asking, observing, and working with all community partners to adapt the school vision to reflect ongoing changes in the school environment and milieu.
Pressure and Support

Given that schools can realistically never be fully inclusive, ongoing change and improvement is always called for by the inclusive minded principal. Despite being positioned to mandate certain practices, a principal cannot force an inclusive philosophy or set of beliefs on teachers or students. Teachers may receive in-service on a specific policy such as the Equity and Inclusion Strategy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b), but in-servicing a staff does not mean that individual teachers will assimilate a policy into their own philosophies.

In schools where several teachers may not adopt an inclusive philosophy, the principal may be following inclusive practices but may soon find his or her efforts at reform thwarted or restricted by resistance (Fullan, 2001, 1997; Guhn, 2009; Ryan, 2006b) from some staff members who are not willing or capable of responding to students needs in an inclusive fashion. In such circumstances, the principals in this study reported that they model, support, encourage and, as a last resort, pressure others to develop a more inclusive approach. This takes time, effort, patience, and commitment. Ideally, through persistent efforts, appropriate modeling, creating dissonance (Ryan, 2006b) along with pressure and support as needed (Fullan, 2006, 2009), principals hope that teachers who are resistant to such change will eventually see the merits of an inclusive approach to schooling and come to embrace inclusion in both theory and practice.

Research indicates that resistance to change is a human tendency that is easily understood when one considers that change often requires new competencies, the development of which may itself create a sense of insecurity and even fear (Haynes et al., 1998; Noblit et al., 2001, in Guhn, 2009). Such resistance to change may be overcome when the outcomes of a proposed change are seen to lead to more desirable outcomes than previous practices, and when there is a steady positive pressure (i.e., from the principal) pushing for the change (Battistich et al., 2000; Fullan 2001; Noblit et al., 2001). This pressure for change is helpful and often necessary in propelling teachers to take the risks to change their own practices (Noblit et al., 2001). For inclusive principals in this study, modeling is the preferred strategy to bring about change in attitude or behaviour, but where modeling is not sufficient alone, inclusive principals offer various types of pressure and support in the hopes of creating empathy and understanding, or even dissonance.
Sometimes the pressure to change is a result of dissonance that is intentionally created by the school principal. Dissonance (Festinger, 1962, Ryan, 2006b) is understood to come about when staff or students are made aware that their behaviour is seemingly incongruent with their stated beliefs, in this case, with the common vision of what one’s purpose is as a teacher. The discomfort this awareness of incongruity creates is often enough to compel a teacher to bring about change in his or her own behaviour so that it aligns more closely with the principles of inclusion. One principal in this study took a teacher out to the home of a student so that they could see for themselves the type of living conditions this student lived in each day in his home. The intent was to create dissonance and empathy in the hopes that this would lead her toward being more respectful and compassionate toward this student when he is dealing with his issues and experiencing difficulty in meeting the expectations at school. When similar measures designed to inform or educate teachers were not effective, inclusive leaders rely on other forms of pressure designed to change behaviour.

Pressure is not always applied directly, however, and often is reportedly most effective as a *gradual pull*, rather than a forceful push. As noted by Donahoe (1997) and Fullan (1991, 2001), change is a process that takes time not only to implement but to become embedded in school culture as well. As such, principals require considerable patience and have to resist the temptation to mandate, force, or coerce change unless the situation absolutely called for it. As one principal Rob explains, patience is required because “You can’t push a rope...you can gently pull” and principals have to have the patience to work *with* people rather than simply managing or directing people. It is suggested that if you simply push, pressure, or force teachers, you take the risk that these tactics may in themselves actually create resistance among teachers. Alternatively, if you do not push, pressure or force, but rather pull, through the use inducements (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987) for example, you may increase teacher commitment and support for the initiative in question. There is a delicate balance to be maintained between these strategies of pressure, support, and pull forces. Inclusive principals recognize that in some instances there is the necessity to employ pressure and support to bring about change, but prefer to gently pull and induce teachers to join in and support an initiative, endeavor, or a new and more inclusive way of approaching students.
Whether it is a gentle pull or a push being employed, inclusive principals always seek to set the teacher up for success, just as they would do for any particular student. In order to accomplish this, any expectation for change had to be accompanied by various forms of support. These may involve professional development, extra time, resources, coaching or modeling. Inclusive principals consistently look for ways to support members of the community in their efforts to bring about desired change, rather than simply punishing and threatening them into compliance. This applies equally to staff as well as students and is necessary to convey the message that although their behaviour is unacceptable, they themselves are accepted as a valued and welcome member of the school community.

Principals believe it is important to provide support to teachers, students, as well as parents so that they do not feel they are isolated in their efforts to make changes required to achieve their goals. Whether the goal is developing skills to improve relationships or gaining a better understanding of the needs of adolescents, principals recognized that they had the capacity as well as the means to offer support in a variety of ways to allow others to grow professionally. As Rob succinctly put it, “the only reason we exist is to provide support for the classroom teacher....for teachers to teach and for students to learn.” One of the ways principals provide this support, as Beth suggested, is through coaching as a critical friend. Tschannen-Moran, 2007) states:

Coaches assist people to move forward toward their goals through conversation and their way of being with people. They know when to push and when to back off, based on the needs of the situation. They show genuine concern for both the task at hand and the welfare of those who have to accomplish that task. (p. 104)

For coaching to be effective, however, principals suggest that is critical that there be a significant degree of trust established between the principal and teacher (Fullan, 2001). Teachers have to come to believe and trust that feedback and guidance from the principal is based on what is best for students and what is best for the individual as a teacher, not simply what is best for the principal, the district, or Ministry-EQAO objectives. Sergiovanni (2007) has found that “For trust to be forthcoming, the led must have confidence in the leader’s competence and values. Further, peoples’ confidence is strengthened by the belief that the leader makes judgments on the basis of competence and values, rather than self interest” (p. 80).
Rob reported spending six years coaching a staff and assisting them in developing their skills in classroom management, an example that truly modeled for others that he valued and cared about teachers’ success and was willing to invest extensively in them as well as in students. Another principal, Raymond, along with his vice principal, spent two entire weeks offering support in the form of modeling in one of his teacher’s classrooms and coaching the teacher in ways in which he might improve his practice. In these instances, their efforts to bring about change were accompanied by levers and inducements, (make the required changes and take the positive Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) report, or show little or no change and take the poor TPA report) but this also came with adequate support to ensure that there is the opportunity for success.

*Setting Non-Negotiable Limits*

In extreme cases, support and inducements may prove to be inadequate in bringing about required change. It may then be necessary for principals to set clear and non-negotiable limits and outline consequences for not staying within these. Ryan (2006) suggests that inclusion itself is to be a non-negotiable option. Principals in this study further define this limit suggesting that certain behaviours will not be tolerated in an inclusive school. Principals set clear expectations for how teachers are to interact with students and parents, and that there is little if any tolerance for disrespect or targeting of students in an inclusive school. Expectations are made clear, teachers are cautioned as necessary, and if the disrespectful behaviour on the part of the teacher persists over time, other disciplinary measures are taken such as formal meetings and verbal or written reprimands, involvement of a superintendent or union, etc. In instances where teachers are blatantly disrespectful toward students, there is little room to negotiate and little time to wait for gradual change to come about as a result of modeling and gentle pulls.

Inclusive principals believe that disrespectful behaviour on the part of teachers toward students and parents is extremely detrimental to the fabric of respectful relationships that are the essence of an inclusive school, and are quick to identify and address such behaviour. In some instances, however, despite all of the support and pressure to change, even inclusive principals may have to resort to more restrictive and exclusionary measures. In one particular instance, a staff member was pressured to transfer to another school because
her resistance to adopting what were considered to be essential attitudinal and behavioural changes persisted. In this case, her ongoing behaviour was disrespectful and detrimental to students well being and showed little change, despite the principals’ ongoing best efforts to offer support and facilitate positive change. It was hoped that a new environment might give her an opportunity for a new beginning and a fresh perspective on her roles as an EA in a school setting.

Under such difficult circumstances, inclusive principals have to serve as advocates for the students and act according to the students’ best interests, and not those of the staff. However unpopular it may make them, a principal’s primary responsibility is first and foremost to provide a safe and respectful learning environment for students. If a teacher is jeopardizing this environment, then the principal’s efforts are directed toward supporting and pressuring to bring about one of two changes: a change in attitude and behaviour, or alternatively, a change in work venue. Although this latter choice may not always be a popular option to push for, other researchers have found that in similar circumstances team support was in fact enhanced by asking non-committed staff to leave and by hiring supportive replacement (Emmons et al., 1998; Haynes, 1998; Woodruff, Shannon, & Efimba, 1998).

If and when a teaching position does become available, inclusive principals make every effort to take advantage of the opportunity in hiring to ensure that they are hiring the “best” teacher for the position, as opposed to simply the next teacher on the seniority list. Accordingly, inclusive principals attempt to hire teachers who can deliver the curriculum in relevant and meaningful ways, share an inclusive philosophy, and who relate well to adolescents. One key to hiring effective teachers in an inclusive intermediate level school is to find the “right type of person” who would work well with this specific age group of students and respond well to adolescents. This “right type of person”, according to Taralyn, is a teacher she describes as possessing the three P’s; “they had personality, they had passion, and they had presence.”

Along a similar vein, if districts are committed to developing truly inclusive schools, then they should ensure that they are hiring principals who not only demonstrate the three P’s identified here, but also demonstrate the values that are reflective of an inclusive philosophy. Simply opening up a Black focus school, hiring African-American staff, and teaching an
African-American curriculum will, for example, not necessarily lead to an inclusive school experience for anyone who is not African-American. Alternatively, hiring inclusively-minded principals who are committed to the principles of inclusion and inclusive in their leadership style, will more likely lead to the cultural changes required to develop and inclusive school for all.

**Inclusive Leadership Strategies for Students**

Much of an inclusive principals’ time is spent focusing on creating a positive atmosphere and a successful learning environment for students experiencing behavioural difficulties in school. In order to create the conditions for optimal student learning, inclusive principals believe it is critically important to establish rapport and trust between themselves and students and relied on a number of strategies to facilitate this. In addition to establishing trust and rapport, principals recognize that it is important to set challenging yet realistic academic expectations and to provide programming and experiences that are engaging and relevant to students’ lives, interests and needs. Strategies principals initiate to provide these conditions include creating opportunities for dialogue and listening to students, being non-judgmental when their behaviour is unacceptable, attending to students’ basic needs, and offering differential instruction and programming for those students who are disengaged and not fully participating in the regular curriculum.

**Developing Rapport and Trust**

Principals have to consistently model care and commitment to students and as well, respond to each in a respectful manner if indeed they expect their teachers to do the same. This modeling is considered be especially important for earning student trust. The importance of a high degree of trust is not to be underestimated as without this trust, a student’s energies are often diverted toward self protection and away from the learning process. This may be particularly important for students’ with behavioural and emotional needs as “for some students learning to trust the people at school has been identified as a transformative experience, especially for those students whose lives outside of school have not taught them to trust” (Watson, 2003, in Tschannen-Moran, 2007, p. 100).
Numerous principals in this study report that they spend significant amounts of time participating in activities that are intended to help them become better acquainted with students and to develop trust and rapport. Many of these positive interactions with students were considered to be preventative of student misbehaviour in the future. These activities as a classroom principal include greetings, causal discussions, directed discussions, lunch hour poker club, and a wide variety of other structured or non-structured activities simply intended to develop a positive relationship. Other research has corroborated the effectiveness of being visible and available to students in the building as one’s mere “presence also enables principals to engage students in preventative interaction” (Principal files, 2006). These intentional, preventative measures are considered much more rewarding and productive than simply dealing with students when they would be sent down to the office for misbehaviour. Inclusive principals in this study noted, as did Robertson (1999), that “it is better that the principals go to the student on a regular basis than have lines of students waiting at the office before and after the school day” (p. 14).

Dialogue and Listening to Students

Inclusive principals participating in this study stress the importance of providing opportunities for teachers and parents to have meaningful input into decisions and goal setting for the school. Principals value their participation and see this as critical in increasing commitment to achieving a common vision and goals. This sense of involvement and full participation in the school community is not reserved for teachers, however. Inclusive principals recognize that parent involvement and teacher involvement are only a part of the partnership in truly inclusive schools. It is exclusionary if schools listen to adults but fail to listen to the very students who they are employed to serve. To their credit, some schools reportedly have members of student councils represented at School Advisory Council meetings and some progressive districts of education even have voting student representatives on their board of trustees. Although these are vehicles for student participation, educators are wise to guard against naively thinking that with these avenues in place all students have a voice. Such token processes may actually serve to exclude participation of others by blinding educators into thinking that individual students do indeed have a voice and that their representative on student council is aware of and actually
represents their concerns. In actuality, not all students nor all marginalized groups may be well represented by members of student parliament, through their School Advisory Council and so forth, and, therefore, may find little avenue through which to have their voices heard in schools.

Villa and Thousand (1992) advocate for the importance of collaboration through sharing of instructional and decision-making power with students in a climate of mutual respect. Inclusive principals recognize that students who are presenting behavioural challenges have valuable insights to share about how classrooms and schools may offer a more inclusive and supportive climate that might assist in meeting their needs and bringing about positive changes in behaviour. The inclusive principal ensures that disruptive students are included in the very decisions that directly or indirectly impact them, and in particular those aspects of schooling that attempt to control, regulate, govern, or consequence their behaviour. As noted above, principals work hard to establish this climate of mutual respect in the hopes that with this trust established, students, parents, and teachers alike will be more open in providing honest and candid input. Inclusive principals in this study report that they attempt to ensure that there are many ongoing formal and informal opportunities for behavioural students to express their voice by sharing ideas and concerns (with both individual and groups of students). These opportunities include, but are not limited to, after incident debriefings, individual and group meetings, student and parent surveys about topics such as school climate, bullying, student interests, etc. Regardless of the forum, the intent remains the same with each: to provide students with an opportunity to share their ideas and opinions in an arena in which they are listened to and their input is indeed valued.

Judging Behaviour Not the Individual

Inclusive principals interviewed understand that student misbehaviour is itself an expression of unmet needs, rather than simply a result of a conscious decision on the part of the student to act in a certain defiant or challenging fashion. Driekers and Cassel (1982) note, as did inclusive principals participating in this study, that misbehaviour is most effectively dealt with when the purpose behind the behaviour is taken into consideration. Rather than blaming and punishing the student (with suspensions for example), inclusive educators seek to
explore the reasons behind the behaviour and address these needs and in doing so, attempt to prevent cycles of misbehaviour from continuing.

Interventions that follow should, therefore, consider what needs the student is trying to address through engaging in misbehaviour, be it survival, freedom, belonging, fun, or power. Once needs are identified, staff members then work collaboratively to address these needs and where necessary, teach the student new pro-social ways to meet these in the future. In response to misbehaviour, inclusive principals attempt to accomplish three things: 1) clearly delineating between the students themselves and their misbehaviour; 2) debriefing with the student and others involved following incidents; and 3) offering a cadre of supportive follow-up interventions for students experiencing repeated misbehaviour. Delineating between the student and his or her behaviour allows the principal to send the message that although ‘your behaviour is unacceptable, you are still valued as a member of this school community’. Debriefing with students affords an opportunity for continued dialogue and learning from the incident or transgression. Lastly, following through with selected interventions provides the student with opportunities to develop skills or receive counseling regarding needs and concerns a particular student may have.

**Addressing Basic Needs**

According to the inclusive principals interviewed in this study, a philosophy of care and support has to be extended to all students, even those who appear to be disengaged from school, profess that they don’t like school, and are misbehaving and finding themselves in repeated confrontations or conflict with teachers. In response to such behaviour, instead of simply attempting to punish such students by excluding them and restricting their participation in one form or another, inclusive principals describe a wide variety of programs and strategies that they have developed and initiated to address student needs. These include breakfast, lunch, and snack programs to ensure students have their basic nutritional needs met, and social skills programs to assist in developing interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and anger management, problem solving. In addition to these, many principals arranged for Child Development Counsellors (CDC’s) or other personnel to provide counselling and support, and offered opportunities for alternative extracurricular activities to interest students who might not otherwise participate in school activities. These initiatives are undertaken in
an inclusive school because principals and teachers recognize these needs in many students, and as educators, they strongly believe that until these basic needs are met, students remain at a disadvantage and are less able to focus and capitalize on the learning opportunities presented to them within the school community.

**Differential Instruction and Programming**

Inclusive principals recognize that individual students learn differently and responded to this by implementing differential instruction and, where possible, opportunities for unique learning experiences designed to ‘hook’ a student’s interest and rekindle engagement in his or her schooling. In an inclusive school these individual differences and needs are not honoured and respected because of legal mandates; instead, differences are respected because it is the ethical thing to do (Beckner, 2004). Principals believe that it is the moral thing to do regardless of whether or not a student is identified as an exceptional student, whether or not that identification warrants specialized programming, accommodations and modifications, or whether or not that difference is visible or because of minority status.

Inclusive principals accept individuals for who they are and respect their right to be different and to learn differently. These learning differences are not just tolerated, but respected as principals attempt to allow students to capitalize on their unique strengths in a wide variety of ways, many of which are non-traditional. This often requires that principals undertake extraordinary measures to ensure that all students have opportunities to capitalize on their own talents in ways that allow them to experience successes in their endeavors and take pride in their accomplishments. Levine (2007) supports such alternative approaches to curriculum delivery as he notes that:

> It’s ironic that at the same time that neuroscience is telling us so much about differences in learning, we are imposing curriculum standards that offer our students fewer learning alternatives than ever before. If we aspire to meet the challenge of no child behind, we must provide diverse learners with diverging pathways to lead to their successes... [which permit] innovation and creativity in curricular choices.... I look forward to the day when our schools offer every student the opportunity to become a leading expert on a chosen topic-one that harmonizes with his or her kind of mind-and to share that expertise with the community.... Such a practice would give students a powerful experience of success... (pp. 293–294)
Inclusive principals interviewed for this study recognize the value in diverging pathways and go out of their way to provide these alternative opportunities for student success. Through such opportunities, principals attempt to ensure that these students are provided with an equitable opportunity to share their talents with others. As one principal suggested, opportunities such as these that were simply designed to “let ‘em shine” assisted in demonstrating to the students (and to having them come to believe) that despite their disruptive behaviour, they are still welcome and valued as contributing members of the school community.

Principals realized that an inclusive school values and celebrates more than mere academic success. In inclusive schools, staff recognize the value in each individual and look for individual strengths in order to build upon these and allow each student to experience success. In such schools, educators frequently attempt to keep students engaged by offering non-traditional opportunities for programming and participation that capitalize on individual students’ interests or strengths to facilitate success. They do this, despite the fact that such opportunities frequently require valuable use of resources, time to organize, structure, and supervise. Rob provided an example of this in describing a student who came to school with challenges and turmoil in her life that were no fault of her own. In their response to her, he and the staff attempted to capitalize on this girl’s strengths to engage her in some activity at school that led to success and feelings of accomplishment and pride. In allowing her to take time away from the regular curriculum and paint murals throughout the school, they were attempting to present a welcoming environment at school where she could not only find a safe haven, but an environment where her individual talents and contributions were recognized, valued, and celebrated; just as great grades and high scores on EQAO tests are celebrated for the more academically inclined students. Inclusive principals acknowledge that some students find individual recognition through extracurricular activities a school provides (such as sports and clubs) and others find this recognition through more individualized projects that a staff can facilitate such as in the example above. The central understanding remains the same, however; in an inclusive school staff works diligently to ensure that all students have an opportunity to express themselves in unique and meaningful ways that allow them to shine and contribute to the fabric of the school in a positive way.
Section Summary

Ryan’s (2003, 2006) seminal work on inclusion suggests that inclusion is best understood as both a process and a product. Research conducted through this present study on leadership in middle schools has identified another central component to aid in our understanding of inclusion. In addition to process and product, principals suggest that inclusion is also a philosophy, the values, ethics and beliefs reflecting a moral purpose that stems from the heart and guides principals in their actions. This philosophy influences both the process and the product of inclusive leadership and finds itself expressed through three main means: 1) a principal’s vision of the culture and climate they would like to see developed in their school; 2) the expectations principals have for themselves and others; and 3) the multiple ways in which principals demonstrate respect and engage with all members of the school community.

In regard to leadership as a process, Ryan’s Inclusive Leadership Framework provides a starting point for understanding a variety of ways and means by which principals facilitate the development of inclusive communities in their school. This present study adds to this growing body of knowledge by identifying the importance of four other processes: 1) developing trust; 2) coaching as a critical friend; 3) remaining non-judgmental; and 4) establishing non-negotiable limits. In conjunction with the central processes of Inclusive Leadership identified by Ryan (2006), these additional strategies can be utilized by principals to facilitate the development of more inclusive schools, particularly as they relate to environments for students with behavioural challenges.

A third finding from this study is that inclusive principals understand that students who are experiencing behavioural challenges are expressing unmet needs rather than simply consciously choosing to misbehave just to be difficult. Addressing students’ holistic need for belonging, value, security, and ensuring each is engaged with meaningful and relevant curriculum is considered critical to a student’s success. Inclusive principals attempt to address these needs because they believe they have a moral and ethical responsibility to do so; “because the need is there;” and because they recognize that without addressing these needs, students will be restricted in their ability to develop to their potential. Whether this means providing food, counselling, individualized attention, or a host of other supports, principals attempt to address these needs so that students can better focus on the learning opportunities that are available to them throughout the school.
While these findings add to the existing body of knowledge about inclusion and inclusive schooling, continued research into inclusive leadership as a philosophy, process, and product will provide principals and educators with greater understanding and more effective strategies in responding to the diverse and ever changing needs of students and schools.

**Implications for Theory**

This study has implications for and brings attention to the theoretical development of several aspects of inclusion, inclusive leadership, and inclusive schooling. Among these are implications for the staffing in schools, measures of inclusivity, and limitations to the practicality of inclusion and inclusive practice in schools.

If inclusive schooling for all is considered a serious objective, then the findings of this research suggest that it is important to hire principals (and presumably teachers) who adopt inclusive philosophies themselves. To assess this in candidates, reliable and valid measures and indicators of a person’s commitment to principles of inclusion, equity and social justice would be useful. To assist in the development of these assessment tools, a broader understanding of inclusion and how it may best be measured is needed. This can, in part, be achieved by expanding research into the understanding/sensemaking of teachers, parents and students around inclusion, and adding this to the knowledge base that is emerging around principals’ sensemaking of inclusion. With this broader understanding more clearly defined, indicators of inclusion may more accurately be defined and developed as screening tools or hiring aids for employment. Such tools would be useful to assist in the hiring of staff in schools and other agencies and institutions where inclusive philosophies would be compatible with the goals of the organization.

To assist in measuring the effectiveness of initiatives geared toward developing greater inclusivity in schools, school climate surveys that measure elements of inclusivity from a teacher, student, and parent perspective should be employed. These measures, to the degree that they are valid and reliable, can be made available and used as indices of inclusivity. By providing such measures, the public and those persons who work as educators can see that in addition to academic outcomes as measured by EQAO scores, measures of
inclusivity (such as those identified by principals in this study) are likewise valued and celebrated.

Despite their best intentions, the consensus (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) among principals in this study indicates that there are instances where they find it necessary to act in ways that may not be considered fully inclusive. Whether it is delivering suspensions, transferring staff members, enforcing a Code of Conduct, or implementing policy or safety related regulation that restricts practice, principals report struggling with the contradictions of the desire to be inclusive, and the external constraints imposed on them in their position as an ‘agent of the board’. As principal, they have a dual responsibility to uphold district expectations on the one hand, and to uphold their own principles of inclusion, values and beliefs that often direct them to act counter to established protocol. For principals, politics and legalities define their working realities and many find that these are on occasion at odds with personal and professional convictions. These realities define the limits of their inclusivity and at times restrict their ability to be as inclusive in their practice as they would like to be. How principals struggle and resolve these competing demands and the dissonance that may arise in such situations is worthy of further investigation.

In the light of this research and its findings inclusive leadership (understood as being comprised of both processes and a product) has as its foundation a philosophy which by its very nature must be grounded in principles of inclusion, equity, and social justice. Without this grounding and an ideology reflective of the tenets of inclusion, principals will be challenged to ‘walk the talk’ and model behaviours, conduct, and characteristics that are required to build confidence and earn the trust of others as an inclusive leader. Principals who do not have an orientation toward social justice, equity and inclusion may encounter difficulties relying on policy and guidelines to assist them in determining the best course of action in situations they encounter. Inclusive principals however, rely on their own moral compass, ethic of care, and set of values and beliefs to assist them in making decisions in response to the challenges they face on a day to day basis. As we learn more about these philosophical principles and tenets we will be better able to explore their influence on inclusive principals’ processes of leadership within schools, and on the degree to which specific practices lead to the facilitation of the development of inclusive schools.
The goal of developing fully inclusive schools will undoubtedly remain a never ending challenge despite the skill, best intentions, and dedicated efforts of even the most inclusive minded of staff, students, parents and community. Inclusion cannot be fully achieved until all students are treated as individuals with distinct needs, skills and abilities and all are valued equally for their uniqueness. As long as resources are allocated on the basis of labeling and identification, all students will not be treated equitably and inevitably some students who might not be identified will fail to have their needs addressed. Unfortunately, the students who are the most marginalized and those without strong advocates are often the ones most neglected. In schools, this group of students frequently consists of who are struggling in a variety of ways and calling out for help through the behaviours they express. Although fully inclusive schools may remain only a theoretical concept, the need to strive toward their development remains of the utmost importance to students in need. Ongoing research can be of assistance to policy makers and educators alike in helping narrow this gap between the theoretical conception of inclusion and the lived reality of students in school.

Conclusion

In recognition of the fact that “comparatively little has been written in the area of leadership and inclusion, let alone leadership and diversity” (Ryan, 2003, p. 8), it is anticipated that this research will add to our developing understanding of the various roles that principals play facilitating the development of inclusive schools. It is evident, according to the principals interviewed in this study, that an inclusive philosophy and an inclusive leadership style are the precursors to the development of such schools for students who are presenting behavioural challenges at schools. Without inclusive leadership and a philosophical orientation based on respect, value, and the celebration of individual differences, full and meaningful inclusion of all members of the school community, and especially those that do not adopt the normative behavioural codes, is unlikely.

Inclusive principals recognize that individual students have different social, emotional, psychological, physical, and academic learning needs and attempt to respond to these the best they can, given the finite resources they have to draw upon. This means that at
times, educators and administrators may implement a wide variety of interventions and non-
traditional program options in order to present opportunities for unique learning experiences
designed to ‘hook’ a student’s interest and rekindle engagement in their schooling. In an
inclusive school, these individual differences and needs are not honoured and respected
because of legal mandates, but instead differences are respected because it is the ethical or
moral thing to do. Inclusion is understood as acceptance of individuals for who they are and
respecting their right to be different, not just tolerated, but respected. This in turn requires
that extraordinary measures are often taken to ensure that all students experience and believe
that they are welcome and valued as contributing members of the school community and that
in their own unique ways, each student experiences success in their endeavors and takes
pride in their accomplishments.

Intermediate level schools can make a difference in the lives of behavioural students
by working towards developing an inclusive culture that respects and values each individual
and recognizes within each student unique strengths and capacities (Kunc, 2000). This study
acknowledges the influence of such a school culture in the lived experiences of students with
behavioural problems, and in turn, the critical role that the school principal performs in
influencing this culture. Along with other related research, this study will provide timely
insights and information for the Ministry, districts, principals, as well as Special Education
Resource Teachers (SERT) and classroom teachers regarding practices that might best
address the needs of Grade 7 and Grade 8 students considered to be behaviourally at risk.
With a better awareness of the needs of these students, and a greater understanding of the
role that principals and teachers can play in enhancing school experiences for these students,
educators and policy makers will undoubtedly be better positioned to make informed
decisions regarding how to best develop potential and maximize opportunities for success for
this group of learners.

Evans (2007) suggests that:

school leaders need to develop clear and congruent personal and professional
ideologies that support diversity, equity, and inclusiveness. Although
embedded within multiple, overlapping contexts and identities, school leaders
can then confront old and engender new organizational ideologies that are
socially, academically, and politically inclusive of all groups. (p. 185)

The findings from this study indicate that inclusive principals do indeed have well developed
personal and professional philosophies and ideologies that they can clearly articulate and
share with others. They use these ideologies, their inclusive philosophies, as moral compasses assisting them in navigating through the challenges they encounter each day, as well to facilitate the ongoing development of ever more inclusive environments – in schools and in community. These ideologies guide inclusive leaders and assist them in transcending issues of race, religion, ethnicity, color, sexual orientation, gender, class, (dis)ability, and even behaviour by looking beyond what is immediately evident and seeing all persons as unique individuals, rather than as individuals defined by circumstance, appearance, or behaviour.

With a philosophy that focuses on celebrating strengths and uniqueness rather than on shortcomings and appearance, educators can be best positioned to attend to the holistic needs of students and give each student the opportunities and skills they need to develop to their fullest potential: academically, socially, emotionally, psychologically, and physically. To simply focus on academic and intellectual development is a disservice to students with unique behavioural and emotional needs, and in the long term, to society as a whole. By addressing holistic needs as well as academic, educators will be better positioning students for their futures by empowering them with confidence, interpersonal skills, and strategies that will enable them to meet the challenges that lie before them.

In order to develop fully inclusive schools, the Ministry and districts alike are well advised to review their educational agendas and ensure that they are meeting the immediate needs of the students as well as the broader needs of society, the labour force, and the global village our students will inhabit for their futures. Educators must closely re-examine their assumptions about schooling and ask questions about which groups of students we are catering to and why. They must ask the contentious and political questions of why they continue to inadequately address the myriad of needs of a significant number of our students. They must ask themselves what they are prepared to do, beyond delivering the present day Grade 7 and 8 standardized curriculum through a one-size fits all approach, if they truly believe they are charged with the mandate to facilitate the development of every person to their fullest potential.

As Kai-ming Cheng (in MacBeth & Moos, 2004) suggests:

the greatest challenge is perhaps not the change in our society, nor the educational reforms that arise as a consequence, but the assumptions in our
minds about what education should be, what school should be, how students should learn, and what teachers’ roles should be. It is time to rethink! (p.187)

In acknowledging this, educators are challenged to look more holistically at individual students and attend to their global needs and development rather than focusing so strictly on their standardized academic development and outcomes. Through the delivery of a more meaningful and relevant curriculum that attends to this holistic range of needs, educators can equip challenging students with the skills and means to reduce their marginalization and give them greater hope and sense of direction for their futures. This will allow them access to societal discourse that is transformative, instead of tacitly allowing them to withdraw from an educational milieu that they all too frequently see as foreign to themselves.

Educators must make use of the research that has gone before them and learn the lessons from yesterday. Recognizing that the time and energy spent in efforts to re-culture schools towards ever more inclusive environments is indeed worth the investment, today, educators must challenge themselves to be open to changing the very foundations of educational purpose and mandates. In so doing, when tomorrow arrives, educators can acknowledge and celebrate that they have made a difference in the life of a student, a parent, a school, a community, a society, and indeed, in the world itself.
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Appendix 1

Ontario Ministry of Education Definition for the Exceptionality of “Behaviour”

Behaviour. A learning disorder characterized by specific behaviour problems over such a period of time, and to such a marked degree, and of such a nature, as to adversely affect educational performance, and that may be accompanied by one or more of the following:

a) an inability to build or to maintain personal relationships;

b) excessive fears or anxieties;

c) a tendency to compulsive reactions;

d) an inability to learn that cannot be traced to intellectual, sensory, or other health factors, or any combination thereof.
Appendix 2
Principals’ Role in Facilitating Inclusive School Environments for Students Considered to be Experiencing Behavioural Problems in Intermediate Level Schools

BARRIERS

Deficit thinking / Pathologizing / Principal & Teacher knowledge
Resistance / Curriculum focus / Policy

PRINCIPALS’ UNDERSTANDING OF INCLUSION / INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

STRATEGIES PRINCIPALS’ USE
Advocacy, Modeling Supports, Dialogues Educating Participants Critical Consciousness Setting Expectation & Standards Policy Development/Implementation Mandates/Inducements/Levers

FACILITATION OF INCLUSION
Culture Climate Community Values Resources

BARRIERS
Appendix 3

Research Sub-Questions

1. How do principals understand issues of inclusion and students experiencing *behavioural problems*?

*Defining Inclusion*

- What does the term “inclusive school” mean to you? (leadership, pedagogy)
- Do you consider your school to be such an inclusive school? Why? Why not?
- What would an “inclusive” environment for identified behavioural student look like?

*Student discipline*

- How are students at your school disciplined? What is they typical course of action followed by students acting out in class?
- What preventative strategies are in place in the school?
- What are your alternatives to suspension?

*Identification/Labeling*

- How many students at your school (total population?) are formally identified as “behavioural”?
- What do you understand to be the needs of these students, or put another way, why is it that they are acting out behaviourally?

2. What strategies do principals employ to facilitate inclusive leadership and the inclusion of students considered by teachers and principals to be presenting *behavioural problems*?

*Inclusive Strategies*

- What does leadership in an inclusive school look like?
- How do you create a sense of community, belonging, and value in an inclusive school: for teachers, students, parents?
• What measures do you take to bring inclusion related issues to the forefront of discussion within the school?

• What ways do each the following groups have involvement in sharing ideas and making decisions regarding behaviour, management related issues at the school:
  ▪ Teachers/parents/students

• What measure do you take if you have a teacher that is not presenting a respectful stance toward students? What is your general course of action in these instances?

• What support and encouragement do you offer teachers in meeting the needs of this particular group of students?

Programming

• What formal/informal programs/initiatives are in place to identify, and address these students’ needs?

3. What barriers do principals perceive obstruct their efforts toward inclusive leadership and including these students experiencing *behavioural problems*?

**Barriers:**

• What stands in your way from having the inclusive school you would like?

• Are there barriers/resistance to an inclusive climate? From where? Why?

• Is there resistance/support for to having students identified in your school? Why?

**Policy and Program:**

• Do *district* policies facilitate or make it difficult to offer inclusive environments for students?

• What system level supports/changes would you need in order to meet these students’ needs?
4. What do principals perceive might better facilitate the inclusion of students considered to be experiencing “behavioural problems”?

**Strategies**

- What would you like to be doing at your school to address the needs of this group of learners: with teachers, students, parents, whole community
- What do you think the Ministry/district might be doing to better meet the needs of behavioural students?

**Resources**

- What resources are available…
  - School, time, personnel, program, scheduling, PD?
  - Ministry, district, community?
- What other resources would be of benefit in order to better meet the needs of this group?