Promoting Inclusion in Urban Contexts:
Elementary Principal Leadership

by

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The purpose of this study is to explore the strategies principals use to promote inclusion in their urban elementary schools. Data was collected from sixteen urban elementary school principals—who were identified as skilled at promoting inclusion—in Ontario, Canada. The thesis argues that inclusion is vital to ensuring social justice and combating the culture of positivism in the current educational context. As well, this thesis presents numerous strategies to promote inclusion with staff members, students, and parents. I also identify critical themes: the importance of principals teaching others, particularly teachers, about inclusion; how the principals in this study learned about inclusion; teachers as barriers to the promotion of inclusion; and the negative impact on principals who promoted inclusion. I conclude with the connection of inclusion with the concept of the public intellectual.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1: The Problem

Education is of great importance to people in their struggle to overcome deprivation, exploitation and oppression. In leading to a better understanding of human problems, and assisting the search for possible solutions, education can be a liberating force (Bratton et al., 2003, p. 6).

This study will examine how urban elementary school principals promote inclusion in their schools. My focus is on educational leadership and, more specifically, educational leadership for inclusion. I will be examining how sixteen urban elementary principals have promoted inclusion in their schools and communities.

My interest in inclusion and leadership is rooted in my seventeen years of experience in education—the past eleven in administration—working in seven urban elementary schools in some of the poorest areas in Toronto and Hamilton, Ontario. These schools also shared some other characteristics: 1) many students were new to Canada; 2) English was not always the language spoken at home; and 3) Parents were working more than one job to “make ends meet”.

When I began my career as an elementary school teacher in 1993, I had been a teaching assistant for sociology courses for several years. I also had an undergraduate degree specializing in sociology. Above all, I believed that Canada was indeed a meritocracy: All students had an equal chance of success if they followed the rules of the system. But my years working in schools dramatically altered this belief in a Canadian meritocratic society. I saw that students were excluded for many reasons; none of these reasons had anything to with “merit.” Moreover, the educational system was not structured or organized, in my belief, to ensure equitable opportunities for all students.
As a teacher I learned very quickly that students and their parents were excluded—for a myriad of reasons—from school. It was in my transition from teacher to administrator, however, that I saw both the exclusionary school-wide practices and the possibilities for hope in changing these practices. But while I had hope for change, I did not know how to be part of the process of promoting inclusion in schools. Although I do not subscribe to singular notions of leadership, I do believe that changes, substantive ones, in schools usually involve the principal initiating and supporting their development.

And while I realize that schools are complex areas where often the status quo is typically reinforced and maintained, I remain optimistic about the possibility that change can and will occur. There is simply too much at stake if change does not happen; it is from this urgency for change that I began my research on how to promote inclusion in urban elementary schools.

I am using the Canadian geographical definition of “urban.” The definition of an urban area is an “area with a population of at least 1,000 and no fewer than 400 persons per square kilometer” (Statistics Canada, 2001). Throughout this thesis, I will use the term “urban area” and “city” interchangeably. Based on the census information in 2001, 94% of recent immigrants (those who have arrived in Canada less than ten years ago) settled in urban areas (McIssac, 2003, p. 59). This means that for the overwhelming majority of immigrants to Canada, their first experience living in Canada will be in an urban area.

Many students in our schools today are excluded from fully participating in their education. These students often are not part of the Anglo-French culture. I have chosen
to focus on urban elementary schools because the majority of new Canadians settle in the urban centres; the schools in these urban centres will provide a much more complex setting where inclusion is practiced and promoted. As well, I have chosen the elementary division because these are likely some of the first experiences that the whole family will have interacting with a government institution via education.

It is in these urban schools where inclusion is most needed. Inclusion is not a concept new to education. In the North American context, however, inclusion is much more aligned with special education students (Ware, 1995, p. 127). For my purpose, inclusion will be defined as “a philosophy that brings diverse students, families, educators, and community members together to create schools and other social institutions based on acceptance, belonging and community” (Bloom, Permutter, & Burnell in Salend, 2005, p. 6). Inclusion is now associated with full-scale reform that “incorporates all children and youths as active, fully participating members of the school community; that views diversity as the norm” (Ferguson, 1996, p. 17). My definition of inclusion includes not only persons with disabilities but all other marginalized groups.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how urban elementary school principals promote inclusion in their schools. More specific research questions include:

1) How do principals understand inclusion?

2) What practices/strategies do elementary urban principals employ to promote inclusion?

3) What barriers and facilitators do they face when attempting to promote inclusion?
4) What are the positive and negative consequences associated with promoting inclusion?

**The Problem**

Students and their parents who are non-white, female, gay or lesbian, poor, differently-abled, immigrants or speak English or French as a second language are often not included in their schools. As a result of this exclusion, they have to overcome many barriers to find success in the educational system (Ryan, 2003, 2006abc). Students who are not successful in the educational system, it can be argued, are at great disadvantage “making their way” in the world. Unfortunately, current initiatives often overlook issues of inclusion. In Ontario, for example, there is substantial pressure on elementary schools to ensure that their literacy and numeracy scores on the provincial Educational Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests improve each year; elementary principals then, must contend with the pressure on improving test scores. All educators are becoming more and more “preoccupied” with these large-scale tests (Volante, 2007, p. 2).

Principals are strictly responsible for the academic achievement of students even though issues of accountability involve all stakeholders (Mullen & Johnson, 2006). Moreover, these short-term remedies that focus directly on student achievement ignore other important components of inclusion such as student voice in schools (Hargreaves, 2007, p. 21).

The current reality in education with its emphasis strictly on students’ academic achievement and scores on standardized tests, unfortunately, dominates the current agendas of many administrators (Quinn, 2002, p.19). The leadership priority for
principals in Ontario is on instructional leadership; the principal, as the instructional leader, must ensure that his/her students make academic progress. Furman (2007) argues that this emphasis on accountability has roots in ‘Taylorism’ and scientific management (p. 80). It is incumbent on administrators to look beyond these agendas, however. Unfortunately, many individuals, including principals, have not yet accepted that there are socially constructed and systemic barriers to student success that revolve around race, class, gender, etc. Many contend that the differences of access and outcomes are solely due to individual shortcomings. This belief allows that if individuals work harder and follow the rules, they will be successful (Ryan & Rottmann, 2007). But for many marginalized students, they will not be successful in an educational system that is not constructed to include them.

There is a very powerful and pervasive Eurocentric influence in Canada. This influence excludes and marginalizes most immigrants and Canadians who do not belong to this white culture (Dei et al. 2000; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004). The population demographics are such that Canada, already a “country of immigrants,” will become even more ethnically and culturally diverse in future years (Porter, 2004, p. 1). There is much more ethnic and cultural diversity in Ontario’s urban environments and elementary schools, and 95% of diverse students go to public schools. It is imperative that we examine how to better serve our culturally and ethnically diverse students’ needs (Young, 2004, p. 15).

Students’ successes in school are greatly affected by whether they belong to the white Anglo-Saxon culture. Non-whites, females, gays and lesbians, the poor, the
elderly, the physically and mentally challenged, and students whose first language is not English, will find barriers, both implicit and explicit, to their success in Canadian schools (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004). Canadians might believe there is a “cultural democracy” but this belief ignores the dominance of the Anglo and French cultures (James, 2001, p. 177). The school curricula exclude students by valuing these white cultures and experiences while ignoring others (Ryan, 2006c, p. 8). Moreover, Canada’s education system excludes non-white youth experiences and histories (Dei et al., 2000, p. 17). Student success (or lack thereof) is the difference in drop-out rates and the achievement gap between certain groups (Ryan, 2006b, p. 13).

Non-white students also must contend more with issues of poverty. Immigrants are over-represented in areas of poverty, and immigrants with visibly different ethnic and racial descriptions suffer even more (Kazemipur & Halli, 2001, p. 217). These non-white students are excluded from many different occupations in society.

Individuals from privileged groups are often unaware of their privilege and how others are oppressed (Goodman, 2001, p. 24). Diangelo (2006) posits that whites “are taught to see their perspectives as objective and representative of reality” (p. 216). School administrators are no different; they make sense of their reality based on a number of factors, including their own history and background, circle of friends and associates, and work history (Evans, 2007, p. 162). This is problematic given that most elementary principals in Ontario are white. This study will provide other ways of making sense of the current reality in schools and provide insight into how to challenge and combat the status quo.
Educational leadership will have to change to meet the needs of our diverse student populations (Marshall, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Dantley, 2002).

**Significance of the Study**

I completed this study for urban elementary principals in Ontario to provide them with practical applications to making their schools more inclusive. The principals’ experiences outlined in this study, I believe, capture the current educational context in Ontario with this focus on a narrow definition of student achievement.

Examining ways in which principals practice and promote inclusion is important for a number of reasons. First, the research continues to demonstrate how many students, specifically those who are marginalized in society, are also excluded from the educational system. These exclusions have both a short and long-term negative impact on individuals, and simply changing the pedagogical practices in schools will not solve the problem. Second, the literature in this specific area does not show how urban elementary principals in Ontario promote inclusion in their schools: more practical solutions are needed. But this study will, hopefully, address solutions that are practical and applicable in the current Ontario educational context. Third, in my experience, much of the current professional development for elementary principals centres on instructional leadership with little or no mention of social justice or issues of equity. The current emphasis on the teaching-learning critical pathways must be tempered with an equally strong emphasis on issues of social justice, namely inclusion. It is too easy for principals to be lured into believing that narrow understandings of student achievement serve to
define the principalship. As a result, both newly appointed principals and those with more experience will benefit from the results of this study.

The study has indicated sixteen approaches to the promotion of inclusion in urban elementary schools. With the range of skill areas in the principals, there will be differences amongst the answers. This variety of approaches, in addition to the principals’ diverse rationales for promoting inclusion, will provide other ways of approaching the practice of inclusion. This study will hopefully begin the discussion of how to incorporate issues of social justice into our understanding of standardized test scores.

Organization of the Study

The overall organization of this study is designed to provide insight into how urban elementary principals promote inclusion in their schools. The introductory chapter outlines the purpose of the study and the current context of students’ exclusionary experiences in schools. Moreover, this chapter highlights the negative impact of exclusion on students and the foci for schools in the current Ontario educational context.

Chapter two outlines the two most prevalent conceptions of the purpose of education – neoliberalist and neoconservative – and how these do not support inclusion in schools. I contrast these two theories with my own conception of the purpose of education. Using this conception of education as a benchmark, I evaluated a number of different paradigms of educational leadership. Finally, I discuss James Ryan’s framework for inclusive leadership.
Chapter Three describes the methodology used in this study. The study employs qualitative methods since this strategy provides the principals in this study with a “voice” and opportunities to share their knowledge and experiences.

The fourth chapter examines two separate but connected areas: 1) the principals’ definitions of inclusion, and 2) who they believe are generally excluded from schools. The principals listed parents, and three categories of students who were excluded from school: non-white, special education, and those who come from low socioeconomic status (s.e.s.) families.

The fifth chapter examines what factors served to motivate the principals to promote inclusion. The answers were grouped into four distinct areas: personal or familial exclusion growing up; role model who practiced inclusion; experiences as a student; and experiences as an educator.

The sixth chapter details the approaches principals used to promote inclusion with staff members, students, and parents. Some of the important strategies mentioned include providing opportunities to others to lead, modeling inclusive practices, teaching about inclusion and using whole-school activities. This chapter illustrates themes related to inclusion with staff members, students, and parents.

The seventh chapter examines the impact of inclusive efforts on students, parents and themselves. Principals highlighted two specific positive areas: students’ and parents’ involvement in the school. There were, however, several negative impacts on principals with regard to their emotional and physical well-being.
The eighth chapter provides insight into the barriers principals face when they try to promote inclusion as well as how the facilitators of inclusion work in the school. The major barriers cited were staff resistance to change, staff members not understanding students’ lives, students’ socioeconomic status, and parents not feeling comfortable with the school. The principals also highlighted the lack of direction and support from the Ministry of Education and the local school districts. The two major facilitator groups were staff members and parents.

In the ninth chapter I discuss four major themes that were throughout the thesis. I provide analysis using previous research to further explain the findings from this study. In the tenth chapter I provide concluding remarks, implications for practice and further research.
Chapter 2: Review of the Related Literature

Without ongoing movements for social justice in our nation, progressive education becomes all the more important since it may be the only location where individuals can experience support for acquiring a critical consciousness, for any commitment to end domination (hooks, 2003, p. 45).

There is disagreement over the purpose of education between the neoconservative and neoliberal camps. Yet neither the neoconservative nor the neoliberal stances do much to support inclusion in schools. A more unifying, inclusive understanding of purpose of education is warranted; this will provide the “why” in the argument for inclusion in elementary schools. Paramount in this argument is the simple fact that most new Canadians settle in urban areas. Consequently, urban schools are likely the first contact new students and their families will have with an institution such as education.

Traditional leadership paradigms, however, tend to support the status quo, which in turn limits efforts to promote inclusive educational strategies; these paradigms do not support or promote all students being included in the school nor do they strive for goals that deal specifically with social justice issues. What is needed is a leadership paradigm that aligns with the tenets of the inclusive purpose of education which involves all students having opportunities to participate in the school and having socially just purposes and goals. The democratic and social justice leadership theories contribute to the framework of Ryan’s inclusive leadership paradigm.

In this chapter I will first examine and critique the different conceptions of the purposes of education and settle on one. Second, I will present information on urban
schools to help set the context of where urban principals work. Third, I describe a
variety of different educational leadership theories and apply an inclusive purpose of
education to each one.

**Purpose of Education**

Before I can begin examining the meaning of educational leadership for
inclusion, I need first to examine the purposes of public education. The purpose of
education provides administrators with the “why” of what they do. Educational
leadership, or “how” this purpose is put into practice, is a product of specific knowledge,
insights, and approaches toward leadership. There are specific difficulties when the
“why” and “how” are not in sync. That is, sometimes administrators’ conceptions of
educational leadership have no connection with their purposes of education. And, I
would argue, too little thought is given to the purposes of education, without a clear end
or goal in mind. Contradictions arise when a principal’s concept of leadership does not
align with his/her purpose of education.

But not all individuals are unclear about the purpose of education. Two specific
groups that are part of the new “hegemonic bloc” are quite clear about their views of

**Neoliberal purpose of education.** The neoliberal agenda requires that
government allow business to dictate how schools function; students go to school to be
trained for future employment (Apple, 2004; Apple, 2006; Davies & Bansel, 2007). The
capitalistic market is believed to be “fair” and “just” so the “best” students will succeed.
Many authors claim that the current education system is simply a servant to the
neoliberal agenda put forth by the capitalistic system (Apple, 2004). These authors claim that one of the main purposes of schools in the neoliberal agenda is to manufacture workers for the business world of capitalism. These businesses exert so much influence on educational policy (through pressure on politicians) that schools now are seen through many of the same lenses as businesses. In other words, neoliberals place great importance on limiting any barriers to the growth and expansion of the capitalistic structure in society. In this sense then, students are seen or viewed as “means to an end” with that end being a strong economic structure within society. In this view, schools exist to produce future employees. Students learn to become obedient employees for companies. The students who do well within the educational system will find appropriate employment; the market “fairly” determines the future choices for all students.

In many ways, private industry is seen as good and anything public is seen as bad. The pressures from the business world on education means that policy makers “micromanage” educators (Singh, Kenway, & Apple, 2005, p. 15). The belief is that schools will be more effective, efficient, and accountable if guided by business principles.

Students must be prepared to compete in the world economic market. Monies used by schools should be directed strictly to preparing students for this economic world (Apple, 2006, p. 32). Neoliberals envision a world with a “weak state” so that there is little to no interference with the continued growth and dominance of capitalism. Public employees (including teachers, administrators, civil servants, etc) are seen as a hindrance
unless their actions and agendas align with capitalism (Apple, 2006, p. 39). The neoliberal agenda simply ignores the diverse needs and talents of students while simultaneously restricting the education system to a singular purpose: training students for future employment.

**Neoconservative purpose of education.** The neoconservatives wish for a return to the traditions and values of the past with a standardized curriculum and testing (Apple, 2006). The purpose of education, then, would be to return to the basics of traditional schooling; this purpose, however, is antiquated in a Canadian populace that is so culturally and ethnically diverse. A research study examining the curricula of various provinces found that Ontario’s curriculum supported assimilation (through the silencing of nonconforming viewpoints) rather than “democratic engagement” (Bickmore, 2006, p. 382). This revisiting of traditional knowledge and values does not support the diverse student populace in Canadian schools. Neither the neoliberal nor the neoconservative purpose of education includes or treats all Canadian children equally, nor do their respective purposes place any significance on issues of equity or challenging the status quo.

This neoconservative purpose of schooling is limited in many ways and overlooks the historical reasons behind the creation of public schools. Barber (1997) asserts that the word “public” in public education represents diversity and plurality (p. 29). He, too, worries that the American system is dominated by hegemonic forces that have evolved because of the country’s specific history. In other words, even though society is characterized by diversity and plurality, the educational system still represents the
interests of the dominant culture. The emphasis on standards and standardized testing has provided the populace with enough reasons to believe that the education system is in distress. Nevertheless, people are not aware of the many drawbacks and shortcomings of standardizing curriculum and testing and they do not understand the way in which results are shaped or designed to represent a “crisis” (Foster, 2004, pp. 177-178).

I understand the purpose of education to involve seeing students as ends-in-themselves and not as means to an end. The end I favour pertains to the personal, social, moral, and intellectual development of the individual. The primary purpose of education entails that education should prepare students to understand and shape the world (Smith et al., 1998, in Portelli & Solomon, 2001). In other words, the students should gain a better understanding of how the world is and how to modify or change it. This allows for students from diverse backgrounds with accompanying experiences to be democratically included in the school (pp. 19). This view goes beyond some commonly held beliefs that the purpose of schools is focused primarily on reading, writing and subject-specific curriculum. Students need to be partners in creating the curriculum instead of recipients or the sole authors (Portelli & Vibert, 2002).

While there is no doubt that reading and writing are vital components of education, so too are students’ abilities to critically understand the world (Banks, 2004, p. 296). Bertrand Russell discussed a “humanistic conception of education” in which education would provide the soil, encouragement and freedom for the student to grow; the student would not be destined for a particular calling or vocation until the “seed” began to grow (in Chomsky, 2003, p. 164).
This view of education extends much further than simply producing workers for the capitalistic system: students are not reduced to passive pawns in a game where the end result (meaning their life choices) has already been determined. Students are not just able to analyze the world critically, but have the will and confidence to change it. The students are not passive recipients, but active, thinking, designing individuals who believe that they can shape their world. In this sense, all students have opportunities to understand the biases and prejudices (at both individual and systemic levels) that oppress some and support others. Borrowing from Russell, this view also includes all students having opportunities in schools to develop their talents, whatever these talents may be.

**An inclusive purpose of education.** There are four components of an inclusive conception of education: 1) Students are seen as “ends-in-themselves”; 2) the ends make reference to the students’ personal, social, moral and intellectual development; 3) students are prepared to critically understand and shape their world; and 4) students from diverse backgrounds are democratically included in the school. This conception does not accept that schools simply produce “workers” to fit into the capitalistic system; each student is viewed as an individual with strengths and areas of growth. Moreover, students must develop a critical understanding of the world and develop methods to shape it; they learn about the socially constructed processes that marginalize and oppress certain individuals and groups.

This concept of the purpose of education can be applied to the current research on urban schools where the majority of new Canadians first interact with an institution.
Urban Schools

There is a wealth of information documenting the American urban educational experience. Urban schools contend with issues related to poverty, racial tensions, and families and students who are marginalized socially and economically (Russo & Cooper, 1999; Fossey, 2003; Daniel, 2007). Many of the cities have suffered economically from middle-class families moving to the suburbs. Some have termed this movement “white flight” (Anyon, 1997; Fossey, 2003; Anyon, 2005; Theobald, 2005; Loger, 2006; Fruchter, 2007; Neckerman, 2007). Anyon (2005) argues that the lack of good-paying jobs in the cities has resulted in widespread poverty that impacts the adults and children who live there (p. 17). Moreover, this migration has resulted in the racial segregation of many urban American schools (Allen-Haynes et al., 2003). As a result of these shifting demographics, urban students, on average, score lower on achievement tests than non-urban students (Bizar & Baar, 2001; Talbert-Johnson, 2004).

Urban areas in Canada share many of the defining characteristics of urban areas in the United States. The overwhelming majority of new Canadians settle in urban areas and there has been a substantial increase in the cultural and ethnic diversity of the population as a result (McGahan, 1995). One significant difference between urban areas in Canada, however, is that poverty is much more dispersed amongst the population instead of being confined to urban areas, as it is in the United States. That is not to say that urban areas in Canada do not have areas of pronounced poverty. More people now reside in urban areas, but there has also been a sharp increase in the numbers of people
living in poverty in these areas (Kazemipur & Halli, 2000; Lee, 2000). Needless to say, administrators will face exclusion-related challenges in these contexts.

Rural areas in Canada, according to Timmons (2006), have made more progress at moving towards inclusive education for special education students than urban areas. Part of the reasoning behind the difference is that rural areas simply do not have the number of special education students or the services that sometimes separate the students (p. 471).

Administrators can battle exclusion in their schools by employing the right kind of leadership.

**Educational Leadership**

Traditional leadership approaches have placed much importance on the “hero-leader” who uses positional power or character traits to influence staff members and the school community. Democratic leadership theories move away from the “hero-leader” and toward collective decision making and sharing of power within the school. Challenges can arise when consensus amongst the people does not result in equitable or socially just outcomes. Social justice leadership theories borrow from democratic paradigms in that they encourage collective decision making and power sharing, except with a specific socially just goal in mind. Inclusive leadership theory, as posited by James Ryan, is part of the social justice leadership paradigm. Inclusive leadership theory supports the purpose of education with its focus on: 1) student seen as “ends in him/herself”; 2) the student’s social, moral, emotional, and academic development is considered; 3) the student develops a critical eye about how the world operates; and 4)
students from diverse backgrounds and cultures are meaningfully included in school activities.

Traditional educational leadership. In the last few decades, leadership in education has been dominated by positivist, management type discourses (Dantley, 2003). These discourses emphasize efficiency, control, and standardization, and support the reproduction of the white culture (Dantley, 2002). Moreover, traditional leadership theories glorified the power-leader who used his/her positional power and character traits to demand and encourage staff to follow. These theories, however, relied more on management skills and traits than on leadership (Marshall, 2004, p. 4). Many of these traditional approaches to educational leadership are characterized as “functionalist” in that the administrator’s role is to lead and ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the organization (Watkins, 1989, p. 9).

One of these traditional approaches is characterized as “transformational” and has its roots in Burn’s (1978) conception of leadership (in Allix, 2000, p. 7). Transformational leadership has four basic tenets: 1) Leader is charismatic and respected for his/her talents and expertise; 2) Leader is able to motivate others; 3) Leader fosters “new” ways of thinking; and 4) Leader mentors or coaches all subordinate individuals (Bass, 1988, pp. 5-6). Transformational leadership, however, ignores the structures and practices that sustain inequity and injustice (Gunter, 2006). That is, there is little or no critical theory applied in transformational leadership; there is the assumption that the system is “fair and equitable.” As well, too much emphasis is placed on the individual leader without regard for input or democratic involvement with others. Moreover, there
is not ample opportunity for the students, parents, and staff members to shape reality of learning and teaching in their schools. The ends identified here are more connected with efficiency and effectiveness than with developing the whole student.

Distributive leadership, on the surface, seems to address this concern about including others and their particular perspectives and expertise. Spillane (2006) writes that distributed leadership “is best thought of a framework for thinking about and analyzing leadership” (p. 10). Distributed leadership is focused more on leadership practice than on roles and individuals (Spillane, 2005, p. 144). The emphasis is on the interactions amongst individuals, versus accomplishing specific actions. Input and leadership sharing is valuable, but the status quo is not challenged with these two strategies alone: the organization is not scrutinized to ensure that it is equitable for all of the students. Moreover, leadership that is “stretched” over numerous people does not mean that all voices, especially those typically marginalized, will be heard. There can still be hierarchy when leadership is distributed because this distribution often occurs within a very hierarchical organization (Woods, 2004, p. 6). There is little or no mention of developing the whole student. As well, distributed leadership suffers from “subtle instrumentalism” in that individuals are still viewed as means to ends (Woods, 2005, p. 29). Distributed leadership lacks mention and/or emphasis on critical theory or its applications. There is no mention that the educational system is unfair, unjust or inequitable.
There are other leadership paradigms that attempt to make the educational systems more equitable and inclusionary for all students and involve students, staff, and parents. Some are more successful than others in this quest.

**Democratic leadership.** There are substantive differences between distributed and democratic leadership. Both theories emphasize the importance of interactions amongst people in organization to make decisions, but democratic leadership is aligned with a moral or ethical purpose. Woods (2004) proposes that “Democratic leadership entails rights to meaningful participation and respect for and expectations toward everyone as ethical beings” (p. 4). All individuals are encouraged to become part of the process of making decisions from the onset; participation is understood as a fundamental right of each individual. Schools are expected, as well, to prepare each individual to live and participate in a democratic society (Furman & Starratt, 2002; Woods, 2005; Moller, 2006).

But there are many different definitions and understandings of democracy. For my purposes, I will examine three different categories or types of democracy: liberal, participatory and community. First, liberal democracy involves elected officials making decisions for citizens; these citizens elect the officials but do not have the required skills and knowledge to solve problems on their own (Dixon, 1997, in Glickman, 1998, p. 48). Second, participatory democracy views individuals as not only voting to elect but also participating in the choices and decisions that are made by those officials. Individuals are seen as capable and intelligent to communicate and help shape decisions. Third,
community democracy is more focused on how people live and work together to make their lives better.

Glickman (1998) argues that only participatory and community democracy should guide educational leadership because individuals who benefit from the current system are more apt to value liberal democracy (pp. 48-49). Liberal democracy is also viewed as “minimalist democracy” because it is really only the elected officials who are involved. Furman and Starratt (2002, pp. 111-112) argue that it is this type of democracy that dominates any sense of democracy in schools today. This type of democracy is also characterized as “protectionist” and based on the self-interests of the socially privileged (Woods, 2005, p. 6). It follows, then, that not all types of democracies serve the needs of the marginalized and oppressed in society.

Participation and inclusion are vital to democratic educational leadership. Often-marginalized individuals or groups have less input into decisions and policymaking, even though “on paper” it appears that all voices are heard. One of the difficulties is that the dialogue amongst participants remains “conservative” or noncontroversial (Rusch, 1998, p. 215). Democratic leadership must involve all participants genuinely sharing ideas and beliefs. These participants must feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues of equity that often require a dissection of the status quo.

Democratic leaders, then, must have a clear understanding of how their version of “democracy” corresponds with their actions and interactions with others. One critical element then, is to ensure that the purpose of education is aligned with the meaning and practice of democracy and democratic leadership. If the democratic ideal involves
inclusion in decision making and groups are still excluded, then “democracy is not living up to its name” (Young, 2000, p. 13).

Democratic leadership should be concerned with “cultivating” an environment that “supports participation, sharing of ideas, and the virtues of honesty, openness, flexibility, and compassion” (Starratt, 2001, in Furman & Starratt, 2002, p. 113). Due to the many variables involved in the democratic process, however, it is not possible to suggest specific practices that will work in every situation. Democratic leadership can, however, serve as an “intentional” belief stance or position from which to build a democratic community (Starratt & Furman, 2002, p. 124).

Bottery (2001) adds that democratic leadership has two main components: one that is geared toward the development of each person’s potential and one that keeps focus on the current system or structure (in Woods, 2005, p. 44). The second point is vital here, as the context where democratic leadership takes place is always different. Understanding the interior and exterior forces that constrain or support the promotion of democracy is crucial.

Democratic leadership does not meet the demands of the ideal purposes of education, referred to above. In order for it to do so, democratic leadership must make the connection with critical theory; there is tension between the “flawed” social structures that reproduce the inequities and oppression and the basic tenets of democracy (Lees, 1995). Critical theorists examine the assumptions and beliefs that provide the basis for the oppression of people and suggest solutions to these problems (Martusewicz & Reynolds, 1994; Robinson, 1994; Always, 1995; Popkewitz, 1999; Wotherspoon,
Democratic leadership, without this critical awareness of how forces inside and outside of the institution impact the lives of individuals within the school, falls short of providing a comprehensive framework. Even with the addition of a critical “eye”, the complexities inherent in both the definitions and components of democracy make it difficult to develop a workable and practical tool for elementary school principals to examine, modify, and implement in their schools. As well, there is no mention of students developing socially, morally, or intellectually.

**Social justice leadership.** Social justice leadership is concerned with issues of fairness, inclusion, diversity, equity, and justice for all participants, specifically students, and focuses on how race, gender, disability, class, sexual orientation affects students (Bell, 1997; Goodman, 2001; Riester et al., 2002; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Shields, 2004; Marshall, 2004; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Lugg & Shoho, 2006; James-Wilson, 2006; Ryan 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Brown, 2006; Theoharis, G., 2007; Ryan & Katz, 2007). Social justice leadership builds on democratic leadership, adding critical theory that dissects the status quo and facilitates participants’ development of critical consciousness. Unlike democratic leadership, social justice leadership takes as its central purpose the notion education must involve the “whole student.”

Larson & Murtadha (2002) state that leadership for social justice entails that administrators believe that injustice is socially constructed and can be changed through education (pp. 144-145). They outline three strands of research on leadership for social justice: 1) critically examining current leadership theory and practices; 2) describing and examining different leadership experiences and practices; and 3) constructing new
theories, practices, to support social justice (pp. 137-139). They found that much of the leadership experiences in the literature represented those of white males. Consequently, the schools were created and maintained based on these experiences. Research must reexamine how leadership can support social justice goals for the poor and marginalized communities (p. 145). While this information helps us more fully comprehend the need for research, I am seeking a specific leadership paradigm that will have practical applications in an elementary school setting.

Rottmann (2007) places great importance on two factors for leading for social justice. First, there must a structural shift such that there is more localized (site-based) decision-making for the school involving parents, students, staff, and community. Second, the entire school community must confront oppressive forces such as racism, sexism, etc on an ongoing basis (p. 7). Without both of these approaches working together, there will be no systemic change to the Eurocentric hegemony of education. That is, the pursuit requires daily dedication in order in order for lasting change to occur.

**Inclusive leadership.** Inclusive leadership is part of the social justice leadership family (Landorf & Nevin, 2007; Riehl, 2000; Artiles, et. al, 2006; Sapon-Sevin, 2003; Gerrard, 1994). Power is shared, all individuals’ histories, experiences, and knowledge are valued while they work to question and challenge the status quo and its exclusionary and marginalizing practices. Barton (1997) states that “central to the demands of an inclusive society are issues of social justice, equity and democratic participation” (p. 233). Ryan (2006c) claims that social justice can be achieved in a school if all participants are genuinely included in the school (p. 5). Riehl (2000) agrees with the
connection between inclusiveness in school and social justice; she writes that building school cultures that are inclusive support a diverse community (in Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p. 18). In his examination of how listening and inclusion are related, Veck (2009) asks a critical question: how might educators and learners be included within an organization so that they are of and not merely in it? (p. 141). The important words here are “of” and “in.” I understand the word “in” to mean little more than occupying space. That is, students and staff members occupy physical space in the school but the school structure, practices, traditions are set. For my purposes however, occupying space is not enough. I am more focused on the “of” aspect of inclusion: students and staff members voicing their ideas and issues and also shaping their environment.

For many nondominant group individuals, inclusion in their school will be the first step in their journey for equity. Inclusive leadership involves diverse people united for the common good. Significantly, there is no noticeable difference between the leader and followers in terms of qualifications or social characteristics (Nemerowicz & Rosi, 1997, p. 15).

Shields (2004) posits a framework to help guide educators advocate for social justice. She suggests that “equity of access” to inclusive opportunities is one key component; the student must be able to connect their lived experiences with the curriculum. Social justice leaders must be transformative in the sense that they challenge and change people’s understandings of the world and also the practices in schools (p. 128). In this sense, then, educational leaders need to educate the school community
members. Educating members of the school community so that they develop their critical consciousness is one important component of inclusive leadership.

Including parents, students, and staff members in the school is vital to engaging parents (James-Wilson, 2006, p. 20). Parents learn about the practices and processes in the school and how they impact on the students. Moreover, parents also learn how to access resources and support services. Goldfarb & Grinberg (2002) suggest that the genuine participation of individuals who are usually marginalized is vital to social justice (p. 161). It is through this ongoing participation that individuals can begin to define and create their own destinies.

Crippen (2005) suggests that a “servant-leader” framework may result in an inclusive school. She bases her concept on Greenleaf’s notion of servant-leadership that will serve the needs of all people in order to create “strong, effective, caring communities in all segments of society” (p. 21). There is specific emphasis on the servant-leader and what he/she can do to support the creation of these communities. Some of the servant-leaders actions include: 1) a personal awareness of how his/her beliefs are connected by what they do and say; 2) a focus on convincing (rather that coercing) others what is “right”; and 3) an ability to visualize the journey ahead for others (pp. 20-21). While Crippen makes a worthy attempt to build inclusion within the school setting, her framework places too much emphasis on the “hero” leader while omitting any notion of critical awareness necessary to challenge the status quo.

Kugelmass (2003) researched inclusive leadership in three elementary schools in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Portugal. Her research examined
commonalities between the three different school cultures. Some of these common traits included: a belief in inclusion; an understanding that inclusion has both social and political ramifications; and the fact that the initial push for inclusion was the result of “external forces” (policy and parent groups) (p. 11). Kugelmass also found that there were structures of inclusion built into the schools; it is important that inclusion becomes a part of the way the school “does business”. This research relied less on the “hero-leader” but there were still some specific limitations to her findings. First, her sample of three schools, while useful for examining common themes, fails to highlight or document sufficiently the experiences of the respective principals. Secondly, while collaboration and teamwork were valued, the staff members and participants still necessarily shared the same notion of inclusion as the “positional leaders,” namely the principals.

**Conceptual Framework**

I am using Ryan’s (2006a, 2006b, 2006c) conception of inclusive leadership that involves the genuine inclusion of people in the day-to-day activities and processes in the institution. Inclusive leadership is a collective process that includes as many individuals and groups as possible. He writes, “Inclusive leadership is organized above all to work for inclusion, social justice, and democracy not just in school and local communities but also in wider national and global communities” (Ryan, 2006c, p. 2). It is a process that includes (1) a variety of strategies. These strategies inevitably make use of facilitators (2) and also encounter barriers. There will also be a number of consequences (3) that flow from these strategies.
Strategies

Barriers/ Facilitators

Consequences

Figure 1. Process of inclusive leadership by Ryan (2006c).

Strategies. There are a series of interconnected strategies that can be used by principals to promote inclusion in their schools and communities. These leadership strategies need to be aligned with inclusion. Some of these include:

i) Conceptualizing leadership. This is where the journey begins: the principal thinks about leadership, what it means, what it might look like, and the ends that might result from it. Inclusive leadership does not presume “the hero-leader” or entail that leadership resides within one individual or a few individuals within the hierarchy of the school (Ryan, 2006, p. 100). Moreover, leadership is seen as a collective practice, not an individual one. This means that the hierarchy in schools should not prevent any participant from becoming part of the leadership of the school. All participants, then, should have the opportunity to share their expertise and experiences. Ryan (2006c) cautions that, “no single individual or group of individuals is relied is featured or relied
on more than others (pp. 100-101). This is an important point so that a majority of individuals do not, through their inclusion, exclude others.

ii). **Advocating for inclusion.** While inclusion and inclusive leadership is a collective process in that it requires the input and energies of students, staff members, and parents, the principal must be willing to advocate for it. There will inevitably be opposition to inclusive initiatives.

iii). **Educating participants: developing a critical consciousness.** There are two connected and important concepts here: 1) Educating participants about how exclusion and inclusion occur within a school environment, and 2) helping these participants develop a “critical lens” for looking at how exclusion and inclusion have systemic and historical bases. Freire (2000) writes about the necessity of the oppressed to understand or see clearly (in critical terms) their situation; he is hopeful that once the oppressors and oppressed understand how the system works, both will be partners in “restoring” their own humanness. Ryan (2006c), too, suggests that this critical consciousness is vital to understanding how the system works. Ongoing learning, coupled with actions aligned to the appropriate ends of education, is necessary for all administrators.

Educating of participants begins with the school’s staff members. The difficulty lies in how to influence teachers to adopt enhanced teaching practices. Only when teachers believe it is the right thing to do will they be committed to adopting these new practices (Greenfield, 1995, p. 65). The principal, then, needs to provide others, especially the teachers, with powerful arguments that support inclusion and the accompanying leadership. This underlines how important it is; the principal must first
understand the issues associated with inclusion and how they apply to the school environment (Ryan, 2006c, p. 106).

There is a specific need for information to be shared amongst all participants concerning how exclusion and inclusion take place in the school. All participants then, need to be involved in learning about each other, sharing knowledge, experiences and expertise. In this sense, all participants become both “teachers” and “learners” (Ryan, 2006c, p. 109). One of the practices that administrators have found useful is modeling inclusive behaviour each day (Ryan, 2006c).

iv). Promoting dialogue. This focus on inclusion connects well with a purpose of education that looks to have all students develop a critical understanding of the world alongside the will or self-esteem to change or shape it and with the notion of leadership as collaborative process that is practice oriented, long-lasting, and malleable to the collective it serves. The inclusion of all voices in decision making and consulting practices will likely minimize the Eurocentric influence in the hidden and null curricula and reverse the “silencing” that takes place (Wotherspoon, 2004, p. 114). Non-dominant group members will be encouraged to share their experiences and insights into how the school can best meet the students’ needs. Furman & Starratt (2002) state that democratic participation requires people have the opportunity to debate, listen and share ideas (p. 118). Obviously, including all voices in decision making is an integral, if often overlooked, prerequisite.

Listening is a critical component of building inclusion and educators must listen to other stakeholders. Moreover, educators must be reflective about their ways of
viewing and understanding the world and accept that there is no single reality or worldview. Not listening to students prevents them from adding to or challenging the school environment (Veck, 2009, p. 142).

v). **Emphasizing student learning.** Student learning is paramount to inclusive leadership; student learning is directly connected to the other areas of inclusive leadership. McKenzie et al. (2008) argue that student achievement must be part of the social justice framework (p. 114). The content of student learning is just as important as the pedagogy. This is where student learning is connected with educating participants and promoting dialogue. Students must be engaged in ongoing learning if there is any chance of them developing critical consciousness. That being said, critical consciousness also requires students to learn the relevant information to support the growth of critical consciousness. The reality is that nowadays principals and teachers are working in an era of “high stakes and accountability”: schools in Ontario can be deemed or identified as “successful” or “effective” simply through a cursory examination of that school’s EQAO scores. The principal, then, cannot ignore the reality of the system he/she is working in and with.

vi). **Adopting inclusive policymaking.** This area is crucial if school members are to examine the broader picture of the school in that specific policies could be put in place that will serve stakeholders both now and in the future. Part of the section involves building into the school a number of long-term “pillars” or structures of inclusion that do not rely on the individual qualities of the principal and will thus endure subsequent principal successions. Ryan (2006c) notes that too often changes, reforms, initiatives are
lost, side-tracked, or simply stopped when a new principal arrives to the school. Inclusive policies can help support the continuation of inclusive goals and practices in the school.

**vii). Whole school approaches.** Inclusion must become the way the school “does business” in its day-to-day operations. This means the culture of the school must “encourage and nourish inclusion” (Ryan, 2006c, p. 133). Part of this inclusive culture requires that members share common understandings of inclusion (p. 135).

**Barriers/facilitators.** Barriers are the obstacles that limit or prevent inclusion from happening in school contexts. While the research in this specific area is not plentiful, some barriers have been identified. One is racism. This involves both the personal and systemic racist beliefs and practices. Another barrier is principal perceptions and attitudes towards racism. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, the overwhelming majority of principals in Ontario are members of the white culture; members of this dominant culture are not always aware of the privilege or the oppression of others. A lack of knowledge of diverse communities is also a barrier to inclusion. In many cases, school principals are not cognizant of the oppression and exclusions of marginalized individuals and groups. Said otherwise, the principals simply do not know about the exclusionary experiences of others (Ryan, 2003, pp. 160-162).

The hierarchical structure of the educational system can also get in the way of inclusion. The school principal is responsible for everything that happens in the school. Ryan (2006c) adds that because of this complete responsibility principals are leery about sharing the responsibility for decisions or power (pp. 11-12). As well, principals are
often constrained by “top-down” policies and procedures that do not require or encourage any divergent thinking or action (Ryan, 2006c, p. 12). Theoharis (2007) discovered that principals faced many obstacles as they tried to promote social justice in their schools. Some of these obstacles included staff members’ resistance and desire to maintain the status quo, the bureaucratic system’s failure to support equity and social justice, lack of resources and support from parents, and insufficient leadership training.

There are also facilitators that can ease the way for inclusion in the school. Timmons (2006) argues for inclusion to become the norm; it takes a, “concerted effort from multiple stakeholders” (p. 469). First, teacher leadership in schools (in both formal and informal senses) can support the inclusion of all stakeholders. Teachers’ voices in the processes and practices of the school and their use of socially just pedagogical practices are important in building an inclusive environment (Lingard & Mills, 2007). Second, student leadership and involvement in schools can ensure their needs and experiences are included (Ryan, 2006c; Carrington & Robinson, 2006). Third, parents and community members’ participation and input can support the incorporation of more diverse voices and experiences in the school. Teachers are important partners in building these relationships with parents through their daily interaction with students (Danielson, 2007).

**Consequences.** Little research has been carried out on the consequences for principals who promote inclusion in their schools and communities. Theoharis (2007) found that was a personal toll for principals who promoted social justice: weakened physical health and an ongoing sense of discouragement (p. 242). It is hoped that this
research involving elementary principals will highlight the consequences of promoting inclusion.

There are also positive consequences for principals, their schools, and communities. Ryan (2006c) discusses the impact of critical leadership on a particular elementary school that served to educate all stakeholders about power and exclusion. As a result, teachers adapted their curriculum and pedagogy to meet the diverse needs of their students. Moreover, the school community members began to understand how exclusion and power work against certain groups and used this information to make their own positive changes in the school (pp. 62-63). This school’s principal witnessed the positive changes to the practices and processes that were more inclusive of all stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

Throughout the study I use critical theory to examine the current condition of education, reform, and leadership; I chose critical theory because of its strengths at dissecting and questioning the validity and effects of the status quo on all people. Tierney (1991) explains that the critical theorists “assume that the world is marked by enormous suffering and oppression” (p. 162). Critical theorists examine the assumptions and beliefs that provide the basis for the oppression of people and suggest solutions to these problems (Kempner, 1989; Tierney, 1991; Martusewicz & Reynolds, 1994; Robinson, 1994; Always, 1995; Carr, 1995; Marshall, 1995; Popkewitz, 1999; Wotherspoon, 2004; Ryan, 2006c). Critical theory is especially effective at removing the disguises of “effectiveness” and “efficiency” to reveal an educational system that
includes some groups while excluding others. Moreover, critical theory attempts to enhance individuals’ consciousness by dissecting and examining the system (Hoy, 1994, p. 173). Dei et al. (2000) argue that a critical, reflexive educational practice is needed to highlight how education is helping maintain “certain cultural, social, political, and economic monopolies” (p. 173).

As well, critical theory is useful for exposing the various layers of socially constructed prejudices and systemic biases within organizations. Critical theory can serve to identify whose interests are being served in society. This is especially important to inclusion: whose voices, experiences, histories, and dreams are included and reflected in society and its educational system? Darder (1991) outlines that the dominant culture is supported by the greater society and the institutions within it. She adds

It is significant to note that subordinate cultures are maintained in oppressive conditions not only through the dominant culture’s function to legitimate the interests and values of the dominant groups, but also through an ideology that functions to marginalize and invalidate cultural values, heritage, language, knowledge, and lived experiences – all of which constitute essential elements for the subordinate cultures (p. 30)

The dominant ideology dismisses critical components of other marginalized cultures. This dismissal ensures that members of the dominant culture maintain their power and prestige in society. Darder (1991) also argues the conservative educational discourse serves to maintain the status quo and traditional power structures (p. 4). And, as a result of traditional exclusionary systemic practices and structures, non-dominant culture individuals often view the dominant culture’s worldview as ‘superior’. Darder explains further,
With the people’s consensus and uniformity of belief in the existing nature of democracy, and the unquestioning superiority of the dominant culture’s worldview, many of the currently existing dominant power structures might long ago have become an endangered species in the United States. (p.4)

Dominant culture ideology and beliefs are seen as superior and ones that should be maintained and supported. Members of the numerous non-dominant cultures are inculcated with the belief that their lives, histories, experiences are simply inferior; moreover, these members accept that there is a single worldview that is superior to their own. This deliberate action to gain power and control in society aligns neatly with the concept of hegemony. Giroux (1981) defines hegemony as “the successful attempt of a dominant class to utilize its control over the resources of state and civil society, particularly through the use of the mass media and the educational system, to establish its view of the world as all-inclusive and universal” (p. 23). The mass media and educational systems work effectively to ensure that from a young age, individuals are taught, repeatedly, there is only one way to view the world. Berry (2007) further explains,

…this is how hegemony works; a gradual process of rejecting social justice and inclusion for the many, and the establishment of invisible works and structures created by the elite (collectives such as governments, policy makers, media, special interest groups, church and religious institutions, big business, and corporations) to maintain their power and authority…. critical pedagogy has to reach further and deeper into society, institutions and Eurocentric, Western constructs to have any impact, to fulfill promises of social justice, equity, and inclusion, both in theory and in practice.” (p. 85)

Critical educators then must further dissect how this hegemony operates and determine ways in which this stranglehold of Western culture can be broken. The issue is not with
the content of Western culture but that it is the only culture deemed viable or valuable in society and that other views and beliefs are excluded. The vital issue here is that the societal institutions are interconnected to support and maintain one culture. Moreover, this one culture, Western culture, exists and persists to the exclusion of other cultures in society.

McLaren (1994) suggests that members of the dominant culture fear that critical pedagogy educators will change their tradition of privilege (p. 138). Unfortunately, this pattern of privilege and domination extends to schools and classrooms. McLaren (1994) posits

[critical educators] have both revealed and unsettled the ways in which the inequities of power and privilege that exist in classrooms – with respect to the acquisition and distribution of knowledge and the institutional practices which support them – are an extension of the conditions which prevail in the larger society (p. 138).

Schools support and maintain this position of privilege for the dominant culture or group. The question we, as educators, must ask is: are certain groups of students more important than others? Moreover, what happens to the students who do not belong to this dominant culture or group? Giroux (1999) argues that schools are not prepared to support a diverse group of students; he writes,
almost exclusively from a European model of culture and civilization and connects learning to the mastery of autonomous and specialized bodies of knowledge (p. 99).

This singular focus and emphasis on white Western European culture disadvantages and excludes students whose background and culture are different. Carnoy (1974) argues that the traditional theory of schooling rests on the belief that “…Western education brings people out of their ignorance and underdevelopment into a condition of enlightenment and civilization” (p. 4). Again, there is this assumption that there is one superior culture or worldview that deserves to dominate both society and its institutions. Not surprisingly, the school curricula reinforce and inculcate the worldview of white middle-class Western Europeans (Giroux, 1999, p. 100). Critical theorists have also confronted positivism and its impact on education and the maintenance of the status quo. I envision positivism as the paradigm and “bodyguard” that serves to legitimate and protect the current situation of privilege for those in power. Bates (1980) outlines that positivism can be understood as a,

[M]odel of science, which is based upon the idea of independent reality which is subject to measurement and description, and explicable in terms of theory which can be verified by independent and impartial testing, resulting in propositions and explanations that are free from cultural or historical bias (p. 4).

Positivism has its roots in Aristotelian philosophy, which argues that reality is “external to the knowledge seeker” (Peca, 2001, p.10). That is, there is an objective reality that can be determined through empirical research that measures and describes commonalities
and develops theories. This objective reality has nothing to do with the individual’s values, histories, worldviews, etc. In the early 1800’s Auguste Comte believed that

[T]he natural and social worlds could be understood and improved by using reason and systematic observation; that is, the use of scientific reasoning could enhance social progress and the human condition by emulating the successes of science and scientists from Galileo onwards. (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009, p. 515)

By using the scientific method, individuals can discover the natural laws that govern both the natural and social worlds (Peca, 2000, p. 15). And through learning about these natural laws, individuals can control and predict human phenomena (Peca 2000, p. 15).

Giroux (1981) asserts that the “culture of positivism”—which supports the interests of those in power—is more than just a set of ideas. He argues that, “it is also a material force, a set of material practices that are embedded in the routines and experiences of our daily lives” (p. 44). This means that the culture of positivism has invaded and impacted how we understand and view the world.

The culture of positivism has also had an impact on education. Granger (2003) describes how positivism has invaded and dominated the realm of education. He explains,

It [positivism] maintains that science alone can be trusted to provide us with knowledge of the world, and that what is truly real is solely a function of the known or knowable. Whatever questions cannot be answered by scientific (or rational versus creative) means must be left permanently unanswered. Moreover, this positivistic knowledge ultimately consists in certain discrete facts or atomistic truths, things that can be readily observed, measured, and quantified. In educational terms, that translates into precisely the kinds of reforms we are seeing today. We are led to believe that we can have certainty where education is concerned—happily, it can be ascertained by the concise tables found in our local newspapers—if teachers and schools would only teach, test, and make themselves
accountable for a prescribed body of “official” knowledge. (Granger, 2003, p. 147)

The “official knowledge” that teachers must teach, according to positivists, reflects the objective knowledge and facts that are found in the dominant culture. ‘The “official knowledge” that teachers must teach is informed by positivism, reflecting the value on objective knowledge and facts found in dominant culture.’ Positivism and the continuation of privilege for the Western elite are directly connected and interdependent: positivism asserts that education would be more effective if only teachers would use the official knowledge—created by those in power and representing their interests, histories, worldviews, etc.—which, in turn, maintains the status quo.

But not all learning in our schools occurs from a textbook; students are subjected to both the hidden and null curriculums. The hidden curriculum can take many different identities. Much emphasis on school improvement and on student learning focuses strictly on the formal instruction and learning that takes place, while these “other” curriculums are taken for granted. Other informal or tacit modes of learning are often neglected or minimized by authors, educators and policy-makers. The hidden curriculum also occupies the informal or tacit modes of learning in a school. Ahwee et al. (2004), state,

The hidden curriculum may take numerous and, by definition, subtle forms. It often reflects the dominant ideologies of the empowered cultural group…Students may learn a great deal that is not overtly set forth as a part of official school philosophy or instructional content. Such learning is comprised of the rules, ways of interacting, beliefs, and knowledge that is pervasive, though
not explicitly stated, and is attributable to implicit curricula presented in schools. (p. 26)

This curriculum is usually informal and tacit and can take the form of ways of interacting with each other, rules for behaviour and how the relationships between students and staff are established, and the beliefs of the school. Schimmel (2003) indicates that the informal or hidden curriculum is likely as strong as the formal curriculum (p. 16).

The null curriculum focuses more on what the schools do not teach or neglect to teach. Some points of view are discussed and some are not, some information used and some discarded. Ahwee et al (2004) posit that, “In our exclusions, we make clear cultural and political statements about what is of significance to us in our society. Traditional mores and values are thereby sustained and stabilized via the null curriculum” (p. 33). One of the case studies discusses the experiences of a female student who went through secondary school in the early 1990s but during history class, no mention was made of the experiences of African-Americans, gays or lesbians, or other marginalized groups. This oversight is hardly unique. The question then follows as to whose interests are served by keeping the null curriculum part of the school. It is difficult to empower or dissect the hidden curriculum or other layers of bias and prejudice if there is no acknowledgement or representation of the marginalized groups.

Uhrmacher (1997) writes about the “curriculum shadow”; he explains that for
everything taught (what is valued), there is something that is not taught (what is
disdained) (p. 318).

Educational leadership theories have also been heavily influenced by positivism
(Dantley, 2002, p. 35). Young (1989) indicates that educational administration textbooks
emphasize “bureaucratic and technicist” modes of thinking and behaving; these modes
are consistent with the positivistic paradigm (p. 130). Principals and future principals
learn that there are a set of specific behaviours and tasks that will result in outcomes such
as improved student performance [defined very narrowly] on a specific standardized test.
As well, components are deemed more important if they can be measured and verified
quantitatively. This is not surprising that the educational administration textbooks
continue to involve these notions of positivism. Young (1989) suggests

approaches to administration adopt a perspective in which systems theory places
the interest in system steering and control above all else. This is not surprising
when you consider that the clients for such views of administration are typically
principals or administrators, who have been shown consistently to be obsessed
with problems of control. Nor is it surprising to find that the predominant form
of knowledge in such approaches is control-oriented knowledge, usually in the
behaviourist form. (p. 130-131)

Maintaining control, in most cases, involves a continuation of past practice. The
principal, as the curriculum leader, is responsible to ensure that the information is
delivered to students. The positivist position asserts that if a certain set of pedagogical
practices and behaviours are implemented then the students will fare better on certain
tests. This fact alone is more than debatable but it completely ignores the biased and
Euro-centric content of the curriculum. Past practice entails that the patterns of privilege and domination will continue. Dantley (2002) posits that positivism is within this current culture of accountability and monitoring. He argues further that,

> [I]n an effort to inculcate a cult of efficiency, rationalism, and a fact-value neutrality, educational leadership has subsumed the verities of cultural differences in a grander narrative of control, standardization, and empiricism. Therefore, the schools and their leadership that have been historically grounded in this discourse of efficiency have done a good job of silencing and therefore establishing in binary opposition those voices of others who for whatever reason do not fit the privileged paradigmatic structure. (2002, p. 334)

This positivistic control on education rationalizes the structure of privilege through standardized tests and quantitative research that privileges those in power.

Educational theorists continue to challenge positivism on a variety of fronts. First, they argue, there is no single objective reality. Positivism ignores the biases and experiences of individuals. The assumption is that individuals will be able to discern these objective truths based on research and facts. Moreover, critical theory argues that, in addition to there being no single reality, society is shaped by many different forces, not just the singular will of the political and social elites (Bailey, 2007, p. 55). Society’s reliance on objectivity reifies the prestige and status of the ruling elite who already believe that their worldview is superior. Giroux (1981) argues further,

> [W]hat is espoused is that the very notion of objectivity is based on the use of normative criteria established by communities of scholars and intellectual workers in any given field. The point is that intellectual inquiry and research free from values and norms is impossible to achieve. To separate values from facts, social inquiry from ethical considerations is pointless. (p. 44)
Deriving objective truths under the assumption that the research and researchers are bias-free is nonsense. There is subjective bias in each decision and interpretation made.

Second, there are no explanations for why oppression takes place. Positivism is not able to describe how oppression occurs in our language and daily lives (Giroux, 1981, p. 45). This search for objectivity completely ignores the fallacies and inequities of the status quo. Moreover, there is no discussion or vision as to the interplay of social, political, historical, and economic factors within society that advantage certain groups while excluding others. This is in direct contrast to critical theory, which acknowledges that outside social structures impact the educational system (Lynn et al. 2006, p. 91).

Giroux (1981) adds,

Instead of defining itself as a historically produced perspective, the culture of positivism asserts its superiority through its alleged suprahistorical and supercultural posture. Theory and method are held to be historically neutral. By maintaining a heavy silence about its own guiding interest in technical control, it falls prey to what Husserl once called the fallacy of objectivism. Unable to reflect on its own presuppositions or to provide a model for critical reflection in general, it ends up uncritically supporting the status quo and rejecting history as a medium for political action. (p. 45)

That is, the theory and method are assumed not to be a reflection of, or owing to any one historical period; the positivist theory supposedly originated naturally. Hence, the search for objectivity would not allow the positivist position to acknowledge the subjective influences into its creation and maintenance. But positivism, like all paradigms, is socially constructed. Positivism’s lack of acknowledgement of its own socially
Critical theory relates to this study in many ways. First, the inclusive purpose of education involves students shaping and changing the world and not simply being shaped to conform to the status quo. Students’ ability to change and shape their world requires that they critically understand how the world operates. Second, inclusive leadership—as opposed to traditional theories which support and maintain the status quo—seeks to challenge the status quo and exclusionary practices; critical theory is a main component of inclusive leadership because it helps dissect the socially constructed practices and processes. Third, this thesis’s conceptual framework involves stakeholders developing critical consciousness. Lastly, I posit implications for practice that are based on knowledge and application of critical theory to the daily operation of schools.

Summary

This chapter explores purposes of education, urban education in Canada, outlined various approaches to leadership. It also delineated a conceptual and a theoretical framework. I began the chapter by outlining the most important purposes of education. They include: 1) Students are seen as “ends-in-themselves”; 2) the ends make reference to the students’ personal, social, moral and intellectual development; 3) students are prepared to critically understand and shape their world; and 4) students from diverse backgrounds are democratically included in the school. But there are substantial pressures on education from both the neoliberals and neoconservatives; their input and influence impact how people define the purpose of education. Sadly, neither the
neoliberals’ or neoconservatives’ purpose of education serves the needs of all students, especially those historically marginalized in society.

Urban areas in Canada are where the overwhelming majority of new Canadians settle; there has been an increase in the number of people living in poverty in these areas. Both these factors impact on urban schools and administrators will face exclusion-related challenges in these contexts.

There are numerous educational leadership theories –transformational, distributed, and democratic- which do not align with what should be the purposes of education nor do they support the inclusion of all students in schools. Social justice leadership, specifically inclusive leadership, on the other hand, does align with the conception of the purpose of education that I describe. I am using inclusive leadership as posited by James Ryan (2006c) as the conceptual framework for this study. This framework involves the genuine inclusion of people in the school. The process of inclusive leadership involves strategies to promote inclusion, facilitators for or barriers to the promotion of inclusion, and consequences that that flow from these strategies.

I am using critical theory as my theoretical framework because it is useful for dissecting and examining individuals’ oppression and marginalization. As well, it is consistent with a view of education that endorses students developing a critical understanding of the world. Moreover, critical theory is also compatible with inclusive leadership.

In the next chapter I outline the components of qualitative methodology used in this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will discuss the elements of qualitative methodology used in this study. First, I describe the research design as well as the rationale for using both in-person and telephone interviews. Second, I present the questions used to interview the principals. Third, I outline how the participants were selected. Fourth, I illustrate how the data was analyzed and organized.

Research Design

This is a qualitative study that explores how elementary principals promote inclusion in their schools. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993), qualitative research “describes and analyzes people’s individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions” (pp. 372-373). These descriptions and generalizations are represented primarily by words instead of numbers. This approach is ideal for this study, with its focus on the principals’ perceptions and the influence of their experiences on these perceptions. Qualitative research and a focus on “lived experience” are vital to concepts of social justice and the quest to eliminate oppression. Lincoln & Canella (2004) state that qualitative research can “[cast] a spotlight on oppression within our own borders, highlighting instances of social injustice, or critically and microscopically examining failed social policies that threaten the status quo” (p. 181). In this study, principals’ perceptions, knowledge, and experiences, will provide the groundwork for discussion and understanding.
Selection of Participants

This study relies on a purposeful stratified sample. A purposeful sample allows the researcher to select “information-rich cases to study in-depth” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 378). McMillan and Schumacher (1993) add that “these samples are chosen because they are likely knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating” (p. 378).

I selected participants after conversations with principals in five school boards directed me towards their colleagues who were experienced and skilled at promoting inclusion. Also, I contacted superintendents in two district school boards to submit names to me of principals who they felt would be suitable candidates. The participants who had experience and success at promoting inclusion in urban elementary schools were selected. I have worked with and talked with some of the participants in the study prior to the study; I was already keenly aware of their strengths at promoting inclusion. The initial participants I interviewed also had the opportunity to identify other principals who were experienced and skilled at promoting inclusion. This process is labeled “snowball sampling” because participants help identify other participants who have similar characteristics (Lichtman, 2006; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Warren, 2002). Each potential participant had an initial contact with the researcher to determine two main things: the interviewee’s experience at promoting inclusion in urban schools and the logistics of setting up the next meeting (in terms of time and length of discussion). I was able to interview sixteen urban elementary principals, representing five school boards in Ontario, four public district school boards and one Catholic district school board. I felt it
was important to ensure that the data represented experiences in more than one district school board. I did not endeavor to select principals based on varied years of experience, gender, ethnicity, cultural background or sexual orientation: my focus was strictly on identifying principals who were skilled at promoting inclusion and learning from them and their experiences. The definition of inclusion that I used to identify principals pertained to their ability to encourage and nurture stakeholders’ participation in the school. That is, the initial definition to identify principals surrounded their ability and skill at including others in the school. Again, some of these principals I had the opportunity to work in the same area of schools in Toronto and Hamilton and learned about their approach to the principalship, specifically how they encouraged and nurtured participation in their schools. Some of these same principals identified others who also shared this same passion for involving and including others in the school. Moreover, I asked one school superintendent to identify principals in her schools who were skilled at including others in the school.

In order to protect principals’ anonymity, I provided pseudonyms that were gender-specific. As well, I ensured that any identifying features –school names or words that define specific locations- were altered to further ensure that no principal is identified.

**Procedures**

In this study, 16 semi structured interviews were conducted by phone or in person. The principals were sent the questions at least a week prior to the interview. Phone interviews have both advantages and disadvantages. Phone interviews have the advantage over face-to-face interviews in that they can be done within a relatively short
Telephone interviews also provide flexibility for the respondent and have most of the strengths of the face-to-face interviews (Neuman, 1997, p. 251).

Telephone interviews have some limitations as well: they do not elicit non-verbal cues so the interviewer must rely strictly on what is being said by the principals (Berg, 2007). Also, phone interviews might not allow some principals to feel as comfortable as if they were in face-to-face interviews. Some principals, however, could be more comfortable talking on the phone instead of being interviewed in person.

I chose to conduct interviews because the conversation needed to be both flexible and adaptable. The interview can be used with many different types of people and issues. Interviews can also provide a lot of information to the interviewer (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 250). There are, however, some disadvantages to interviews. First, the respondent may not feel comfortable answering the specific questions; this would likely limit the quantity and quality of the information gathered. Second, the interviewer might ask “leading questions” that sway or bias the respondent in a certain manner (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 251). These disadvantages do not, however, detract from the strength of the research findings. The phone interviews went extremely well with principals; these people had the luxury of discussing their experiences in the comfort of their own residences. I also interviewed principals face-to-face, in their schools, at coffee shops, and at the university. In all cases, I made certain that the principals had opportunities to determine where, when, and how they were interviewed.

The interviews took place in the months of July and August in 2008. The interviews lasted, on average, just over one hour, although some lasted much longer. I
found that during all interviews there were several opportunities for principals to add insight or other experiences. Moreover, this allowed me to glean further insights by asking more probing questions. Merriam (1998) writes,

> This is where being the primary instrument of data collection has its advantages, especially if you are a highly sensitive instrument. You make adjustments in your interviewing as you go along. You sense that the respondent is on to something significant or that there is more to be learned (p. 80).

I used probing questions to generate more detailed answers and to clarify what principals were indicating. I discovered that the principals sometimes did not know if their answers had enough details and/or whether I properly understood their responses. Many times my prompts allowed the principals to “dig deeper” in that they connected their ideas and experiences with more concrete examples in the schools.

The interviewees seemed to enjoy having opportunities to share their knowledge and experiences in detail. I found that it was important for the interviewees to feel comfortable and allow them ample opportunity to describe and/or expand their responses to all questions. One specific question from the study, the motivators for inclusion, provided principals the opportunity to share their personal stories and experiences. This question elicited the most emotional responses. Three participants needed to take breaks because recounting the experiences was so draining. As a result, I found themes that I did not anticipate when I began the research.

The last question, recommendations for the Ministry and school districts, also elicited emotional responses—often anger and frustration—from principals. The principals in this study are passionate and committed to inclusion and have ideas as to how to better support inclusion in schools province-wide. This last question, then,
provided principals with the opportunity to say something about the changes they believed should occur in the current systems and structures. By this part of the interview I found that many principals were very excited to provide what they believed should be the next steps; I wonder if part of this excitement is tied to their frustration of having to balance Ministry/District School board requirements with promoting inclusion.

The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim into a word processing program. Tape-recording the interview preserved the exact words spoken, thereby maintaining the respondent’s message as precisely as possible (Seidman, 2006; Marvasti, 2004).

**Interview Questions**

1) How would you define inclusion?

2) Who has generally been excluded from elementary schools?

3) What are the motivators (life experiences, work experiences) for you to advocate for inclusion?

4) What strategies do you use to promote inclusion with:

5) How do you know inclusion is taking place in your school?

6) What barriers do you face when you promote inclusion with:

7) What are the consequences or effects of promoting inclusion with:
8) What recommendations would you make to the Board and the Ministry of Education regarding inclusion in schools?

**Data Analysis**

After the data was collected, I devoted significant time reading, rereading, and organizing. This organization is done through coding. McMillan & Schumacher (1993) state that “Coding is the process of dividing data into parts by a classification system” (p. 486). The method used in this study is called “constant comparison.” This involves reviewing the data collected and searching for commonalities among the responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993; Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 2001; Lichtman, 2006; Bloor & Wood, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Inductive analysis is a crucial component of qualitative research. The categories and patterns emerge from the data (after they have been collected) instead of being imposed prior to the collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 480). Inductive analysis is guided by a number of general principles. The analysis always begins after the initial data have been collected.

After each interview, I transcribed verbatim and read the words over several times. After five interviews I started to notice certain themes emerging from the transcripts such as the importance of knowing how to support staff members both personally and professionally. Some of these themes included: 1) teaching staff members about inclusion; 2) listening and gathering information from all stakeholders; 3) modeling inclusive practices at all times; 4) staff members as barriers or facilitators of inclusion; and 5) The negative cost to principals who promote inclusion.
I organized the data using Microsoft word. I created eight specific files that matched the interview questions. As I read through the transcripts on the computer I would highlight and select portions of the answers and paste them in a specific file. I used the eight questions to organize the data initially. That is, there were eight different major sections: each section was organized content-wise based on the specific question. There were occasions when I found supporting information to an earlier question in a different later question. I focused on searching each transcript for one question at a time instead of looking at one transcript for all eight areas. In this sense then I read and reread the transcripts numerous times because each interview question warranted a complete reread of the transcript. I chose this more labour-intensive method of analyzing the transcripts because it forced me to really know the content of the transcripts. After I separated the data into the eight files I began to examine each file independently for themes and/or commonalities of responses. I then further organized the data into specific themes within each files. I worked through one specific file/question at a time so that I was aware of the themes prior to beginning the next file/question; this practice helped me keep aware of the ongoing development of themes in the thesis and search for supporting information in other questions.

Summary

I used qualitative research methodology because of it provided principals with opportunities to share their experiences and knowledge about inclusion. The study involved sixteen principals of urban elementary schools and represented five different school districts. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted face-to-face
and by telephone. The eight open-ended interview questions provided principals with opportunities to describe and elaborate on their experiences. I selected principals who were deemed skilled at promoting inclusion in urban elementary schools. These principals were identified through snow-ball sampling or through my own work experiences working in two school boards as an elementary principal. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and I organized the information into themes.

In the following seven chapters I present the results from these interviews.
This chapter explores how principals understood inclusion and which groups and individuals they believed were excluded from school. Principals understood “inclusion” in a variety of ways and how it is manifested in school. They also discussed the individuals and/or groups who are typically excluded from school.

**Principals’ Understandings of Inclusion**

Principals provided a variety of different definitions of inclusion. These definitions are further organized into themes: i) people participated and voiced their opinions in the schools; and ii) the school welcomed people.

**People participated and voiced their opinions in the school.** Several principals discussed how students, staff and parents needed to have opportunities to voice their opinions or participate in the school. John mentioned that inclusion is manifested in the decision-making and participation in the school. He asserted that this idea of inclusion encompasses a notion of reciprocity. John explained,

> And I think as you work towards greater inclusion you move from – there is kind of an asymmetrical aspect of it, and then you get to symmetrical. And I think an ideal of inclusion, it’s symmetrical along stakeholders. I think in an inclusionary environment, the symmetry is that the communication is two-way. It’s reciprocated. It’s reciprocal. If you are talking to me and I am talking to you,
both of us have equal input; say whatever in the context in education. I don’t really think we have – always have symmetry.

The discussion then, is two-way and ongoing. John was concerned that communication between home and school entailed parents as the listeners. The school staff must be active listeners, he felt, and acknowledge that communication is two-way between school and home.

Kristin defined inclusion as who is being considered with regard to decisions, activities, conversations and social interactions. This means that inclusion in the school is not limited to one area of school life. Kristin believes that inclusion begins with the individual determining or thinking about what other individuals or groups should be involved.

Brent observed that his definition of inclusion is an ideal that we have yet to achieve. That is, we not yet achieved the ideal of inclusion and he commented, inclusion is an interesting term because it really indicates involving everyone in the dialogue, the organization, the decision-making. And so I think inclusion for me is – really I look at it from a democratic perspective and it should really be an effort to include as many people as possible in decision-making and the operation of the organization. And decisions about life and society, particularly people who are disenfranchised like the poor, minorities, women.

Brent made a specific effort to include as many people in the daily life of the school and in all the decisions. The focus for inclusion involved looking beyond the school context and toward the lives of people who are excluded in society, specifically the poor, non-
whites, and women. These conversations amongst staff members then could transfer to the school context and involve students and parents. Part of these discussions, then, would always involve keeping the concerns and needs of the marginalized people in the forefront.

Allan defined inclusion as all students having the opportunity to be involved in the school and be a “contributing member to the life of the school.” He added, “Life of the school” mean[s], holistically, right from what happens inside the classroom academically to what happens on the playground, to what happens in the hallways to breaking down the hierarchical understanding between, you know, principal, vice principal, teachers, children, parents. And understanding that everybody's a part of that culture that must demand that the sense that we're all together on this. We all belong here.

Allan’s definition addresses the breaking down or dismantling of the hierarchy that can marginalize individuals and groups. The principal works with parents, staff members and students as a team to promote inclusion. Inclusion at school involves examining social dynamics both inside and outside of the classroom, both the classroom and the playground. Allan’s contention is that that inclusion must occur every minute of the school day. Too often the playground is overlooked, even though it can be a place where exclusion is practiced and reinforced. In this sense, there can be two realities of school life for students: educators may promote inclusive practices within the classroom walls while exclusion flourishes where it is more difficult for educators or adults to supervise.
Debra’s definition centred on the concept of people’s participation and ensured that marginalized groups have opportunities. She explained that inclusion means that everybody has an opportunity to participate at a level that they can participate, so whatever their maximum potential is, and given choices. Right now, we have a lot of communities [and] a lot of children who are not given choices. Not because they are not smart, not because they don’t have interests and things, but solely because of funds or opportunities or exposure to things to show them there is this opportunity for their interest. So inclusion is providing… well, providing resources so children have real choices of communities. And families have real choices into things and giving them the opportunity to participate in things that maybe were never in the realm of thinking at one point in time because that just wasn’t a possibility.

Debra’s definition of inclusion counters the status quo by ensuring that disadvantaged groups and individuals have the resources and support to participate. Inclusion involves providing resources so that children can participate in a variety of activities. Students are also encouraged to have input in the school so that they can dream about their futures.

Tony stated that the “partners” (staff members, students, and parents) in the schools needed to have opportunities to share their ideas. These partners had input in not only the decisions being made but also on the type of activities the school offered. He mentioned that this input sometimes results in challenges. Tony commented that with discussions,
you try to come to consensus, but sometimes you can’t. But then you move on.
But it’s an opportunity for everybody to have a say, to feel that they’ve had a say,
so that if something happens, an activity goes on or a decision’s made, they may
not have agreed with it, but they had a say in it. And I think that’s the difference.
The important part here is that inclusion involves dialogue; even though consensus
cannot always be reached. The people are aware of the process, that their voices are
heard and acted on within terms of what the school can offer. Another critical part of this
definition is the acceptance that conflict and disagreement are part of the process of
discussing issues and building inclusion.

Anna discussed the importance of having more than just opportunities for people
to participate in the school. She explained,

I don’t want to provide opportunities, because opportunities can be taken or not
taken. So I’m thinking, for me, it’s providing all the stakeholders with
experiences that allow full participation in all aspects of school life. They need to
be – you can give anybody an opportunity, but whether they take it or not is the
difference. To me, it’s providing them with those experiences so that they do part
icipate in helping students, [be] able to participate academically, socially,
emotionally.

Her definition of inclusion was not geared simply to the academic setting in the school.
Anna also wanted to make certain that people had more than just the “opportunity” to
participate; she ensured that these opportunities were presented in a way that was
inherently inclusive. She believed people needed the actual experiences, not just the
offer for the experiences. In this sense then, there is directness in her actions: she ensures that the student is provided the opportunity and takes it. Moreover, as principal, she sees it as one of her responsibilities to identify the experiences that students need in the academic, social and emotional realms. Each student’s needs would be different as would his/her opportunities. Her definition requires the adults to know the student and his/her individual talents, needs, and situations in order to provide the requisite experiences.

Nina believed that inclusion entailed that parents, staff members, community members and students were included in all aspects of school life. A key component she also mentioned was that everyone needed to “feel” included. That is, people must perceive that they are included in the school. The primary component here is people’s perceptions as to whether they feel include or excluded. This definition involves not only the action of including people in the school but also on listening to and responding to their perceptions. Listening to people’s perceptions could prevent the application of ineffective school practices. That is, the principal might believe that school practices are inclusive when in fact they are not. This definition underscores the need for ongoing communication amongst stakeholders to ensure that inclusion is taking place.

Peter emphasized the individual’s feeling of inclusion in his definition. He added,

I think it [inclusion] encompasses a great deal of diversity. In the sense that you work to make sure that all elements of your school population are included,
whether they be special ed. or physical disability, race color, creed, what have you.

Peter highlighted the need to include special education and physically disabled students in the school. Again, the definition of inclusion entails involving all people, but also knowing how these people are feeling. From Peter’s definition, we can infer that successful inclusion in the school will have a positive impact on the individual’s sense of self worth. Moreover, as principal, he knew he needed to be aware of how people were feeling on an ongoing basis to gauge whether the inclusive actions were working.

Matt’s definition described the students being included in the school and also preparing them for society. He added,

Inclusion, to me, is helping all the children in a school fit into society. It’s not just inclusion into the school but out of the school, through the school into society—and that means everybody with all their individuality. I think inclusion is often narrowed down to some obvious categories, but it needs to be an attitude that goes beyond simply categories and dealing with every person as an individual.

Matt placed great emphasis on examining the connection between school and society and looking at each student’s talents and experiences. The key element in this definition is that the actions in the school support the student’s inclusion not only now in the school but also in the future in greater society.

The school welcomed people. Some principals indicated that inclusion involved welcoming students and constructing the school to meet the needs of students and their
parents. Students and parents feel that the school is constructed for them and where they will be accepted and respected. Moreover, this notion of “welcome” can also include people feeling that they belong in the school.

Nigel outlined that inclusion involved having “spaces” for children within the school. He elaborated that the school must be a place where people feel that there is a space for them, a role for them, [and] a comfort level for them within the particular system that we have. So children come to school and they feel that school is about them. That parents can come here and feel that there is a place for them within school. And not just in terms of as an individual but in terms of who they are, be it ethnically, be it culturally, be it… in terms of their socioeconomic level.

Students and parents should see the school reflecting their ethnic or cultural heritage and socio-economic level. Nigel emphasized that people need to have a “comfort level” with the school. They need to believe that they have a right to voice their opinion and the school is organized to “fit” them and not the other way around. The school staff members should, therefore, accept and adapt to the diverse needs of the students and their parents in order to make them feel welcome in the school. The key component here is that the school staff members at Nigel’s school altered their practices so as to ensure the students and parents felt welcomed in the school. The specific adaptations would be entirely dependent on the needs of their students and parents.

Dave stated that when there are equitable practices and an equitable vision, there is automatically a sense inclusion in the school. He noted the importance of building
relationships with parents so that they feel like the school “belongs to them and not just to us.” The school should always be, according to Dave, geared to support the needs of students and their parents. As a result, Dave’s definition outlines a shift in power relations between school staff and students and parents. In the past, school staff members dictated and shaped the culture of the school; structuring the school per Dave’s definition, the school culture is be shaped by the needs, experiences and histories of the students and parents.

Allan emphasized the importance of people feeling like they “belong” at school and that everyone work together. Above all, he noted that successful inclusion is essentially linked listening to, communicating and working with school community members. There is the notion that there is a common goal related to inclusion that people share, and then work collectively to achieve. This definition suggests that inclusion requires a collective effort, versus those of only staff members.

John indicated that inclusion involved everyone being and feeling accepted. He added that this acceptance of people must takes place

irregardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, being differently abled, […] having ethno-cultural, or socioeconomic differences. Inclusion is a deep feeling of welcome that permeates the environment and everything that happens within the environment.

John’s definition involves people being both welcomed and accepted by others within the school. The definition also identifies many of the marginalized groups in schools.
Peter indicated that inclusion meant “making sure everybody feels a sense of worth and belonging to the overall school culture and population.” Here, there is this notion of a collective or team that is within the school. This sense of worth and belonging extends to everyone in the school. Moreover, staff members, too, must feel this sense of worth and belonging.

While principals understood inclusion in sometimes different ways they understood that there are individuals or groups who are excluded from schools.

**Principals’ Perceptions of Who is Generally Excluded from Schools**

The principals also talked about which individuals or groups were generally excluded from school. The principals’ indicated that the following groups were excluded: special education students; students from lower socio-economic families; non-white students; and parents.

**Students.** The principals identified students as being the stakeholder group most often excluded from school. These included: 1) special education students; 2) students from lower socio-economic families, and 3) non-white students.

**Special education students.** A few principals indicated that special education students were excluded from school. These students were either “mainstreamed” in regular classrooms or were in self-contained classrooms. Students identified with special needs were included in the special education category. This is a very broad category because of the numerous designations that can identify a student as part of the special education umbrella.
Allan stated that special-needs students were excluded by staff members and by other students in the regular stream programs. He indicated that others did not understand the value or abilities of these special-needs students. Non-special-needs students, staff members and parents excluded special-needs students and their families.

Tony also discussed how special needs were excluded in the school. He added that it took a lot of effort to ensure that they had opportunities to be involved. This advocacy came from the principal and a few staff members; many people were not aware of the special-needs students’ talents and histories.

Anna stated that special education students tended to be excluded from schools. She explained,

> [W]hen I was a special ed consultant, I started the MID [Mild intellectual disability]/LD[learning disability] primary, junior team, that we would go in[to classrooms] and we were supposed to be observing students, but we were actually looking at the teaching practices. [T]hose students that didn’t quite fit the mold, they were sitting at the back of the room, [and] they weren’t called upon. They were the ones that were kind of excluded from the actual lesson. They had their head on their desk or they were looking around. So they weren’t engaged at all. And to me, those are the ones that need to be included the most.

According to Anna, these students were not included in the programming for the class. They were isolated in the back of the class and did not participate in the activities. The special education students, in the teacher’s eyes, did not “fit the mold”. The teacher’s perception of what he/she expected of the students was a determining factor.
Matt agreed special education students are often excluded from schools:

I find that special ed. is the thing that causes problems for the other kids and causes problems for parents, and children don’t want to be in special ed. And with my immigrant parents, they don’t want their children to be in special ed because of the stigma. So, it’s very difficult to deal with children who have special needs and help from everyone’s perspective.

Matt noted that there is a negative association with special education in his school. Parents and students in his school wanted no association with special education programming. The exclusion of special education students extended past the school response and involved the community as well. It seemed that that any association with special education was negative. In this sense then, there was school-wide exclusion of special education students.

Students from lower socio-economic families. Some principals stated that students from lower socio-economic families were excluded from schools. Kristin’s school could be characterized as having both lower and upper socioeconomic families. But she said that the poorer students were the ones who were often excluded. Kristin elaborated,

The lower-end kids, or the low-end kids, I find will be, um, compartmentalized by the other kids. They will not be coming to birthday parties, they will not be coming [to school], they won’t be as engaged as those kids. And then, …because I am a dual-track school that almost does it again, because you have the French immersion kids that often will be higher socioeconomic[ally].
In Kristin’s school, students from poorer families did not tend to associate with the more economically advantaged families outside of school, and these same relationships would be replayed at school. Her school was dual-track – French-immersion and English stream and this separated students. This separation was reinforced by the students’ stark differences in socioeconomic standing; French immersion students tended to come from families of a higher socioeconomic status than did those from the English stream. Kristin also indicated that there were divisions amongst her families that were new to Canada. She explained,

I have quite a high English as a Second Language component in the school that, depending on what it is the parents do, will determine whether their kids are considered as people we’re going to interact with or people we’re not so...um.... The family that may have immigrated here because they had relatives here who could get them into the country versus the family that immigrated because the father is a professor at the University of Waterloo or very senior in Toyota: that makes a huge difference, um, and I think that makes a difference to the kid.

In Kristin’s experience, the students currently at any given school determined whether the newly immigrating student met their standards for inclusion. There were different responses to these new Canadians depending on their socioeconomic status. In other words, the students new to Canada were judged by other students and their families based on their parents’ occupations. Students currently excluded from the school—for many different reasons—would exclude other students who were new to the school and did not meet their criteria. That is, students new to the school could be excluded if their
parents’ occupations were not deemed prestigious enough by other students. Kristin’s example suggests that there can be many different layers of exclusion that take place within a school. That is, students excluded for one or more reasons can exclude others as well. For example, students new to the country whose parents did not have middle and upper-class employment can be excluded by other students. In this sense then, there is an established “pecking order” among students.

Dave observed that educators tend to have negative perceptions of families living in poor communities. He stated that very few educators actually believed that poor parents wanted the same things as did middle-class parents. Dave elaborated that the belief many educators share,

if only they [poor parents] acted more like middle-class parents [that] their kids would be so much better off, is a huge problem. So [it is] in my opinion: … it reinforces all of the issues that their kids then have with the school system because then there’s that kind of gap between parents who feel like this is not for them. And the institution continues to be a place where they had bad experiences as students, [so] their kids are going to have bad experiences as students. And that gap is huge.

Staff members’ negative perceptions of lower-income parents contributed to exclusion at school. The staff members, predominantly middle-class, judged the students and their families in negative ways. Dave worried that these students would have the same negative experiences as their parents did.
Debra pointed out that poorer students’ few financial resources constrained them. She explained, “children with lower socio-economic status, children who grow up in neighborhoods where options just don’t exist, these are the people who are getting excluded.” These children did not have opportunities to take any extra-curricular activities such as dance or sports programs. Debra’s students were excluded from many activities because they did not have the money.

Craig indicated there was a silent and hidden economic exclusion to students from poorer economic situations. He said that,

I was at a school down at South Credit very poor, you know, inner city school in the suburbs and right across the street, there is a major rowing club and canoe club and none of our kids participated in it, and it was a very, very clear distinction that economically was not where you would be yet. You’ll think that would be an ideal opportunity to have the kids across the street and walk across in the afternoon and become expert at the sport. I think I found other examples in my personal life where even in rich areas that I’ve taught in and worked in and that other cultures, they weren’t excluded per say in any formal way but there was that silent, “you know we don’t talk with them.” They were never invited over. They were never asked to be part of things. So, it’s almost like the little kids in the sandbox, no one asked to play with them but they’re forced to go to school setting, they would; but every time those any kind of choice it was very clear that they were not welcome.
The students were aware of the economic distinctions between each other; the poorer students were excluded from some of the activities outside at school. The poorer students were never invited to participate at the rowing and canoe club, even though it was directly across from their school. The students likely felt that they did not belong because the rowing and canoe club was also a place their family members weren’t welcome.

*Non-white students.* Some of the principals indicated that non-white students were excluded from school. More specifically, principals identified black students as being excluded from school. Nigel argued that black students were excluded from schools and from the school system itself. He elaborated:

> [W]ith the black community, there’s a real feeling of disenfranchisement within our [school] system right now. I don’t think that is a…I don’t… well, and to a certain extent it’s true. To a certain extent, I believe that it’s also perception. But I also believe that to a certain extent-- and certainly in some places and some ways, it’s absolutely true. … [but] I think these things can sometimes become self-perpetuating, too. Regardless of what is done and what happens, it sometimes-- I can have a discussion about that if you want in a little while as we move through the questions. But I think certainly there’s a feeling amongst black kids, black parents, [and] black educators that this system is not designed for those kids at all.

Black students and their families were often excluded from school and they did not believe that schools acknowledged their experiences and histories. That is, they did not
believe that the school system was not constructed for them.

John stated that students from different backgrounds are excluded from school. He said that educators simply did not know about students coming from different countries. Educators were not aware of the cultures, lives, or experiences of many students new to Canada. John believed that educators also tended to have a traditional view of what is a family; students who were from different backgrounds and cultures did not always meet this same traditional definition of the family that includes a mother and father.

Allan stated that black students are excluded from school but not always through overt acts. He explained,

I think there's a lot of covert exclusion on the part of their peers and on the part of staff members who simply don't understand how to engage their cultural nuances, who simply don't get it in terms of what, to them, might seem offensive or different. But if they understood better, [it] would seem normal.

White students and staff members did not understand or know about black students’ histories or experiences. This lack of knowledge serves as a barrier to including black students more effectively in the system. Peter agreed that black students are excluded and he indicated that this exclusion is due directly to prejudice of people within the educational system.

Parents. Some of the principals observed that parents were excluded from schools. These parents were excluded because they were not involved or connected with
the school. Nigel mentioned that, in particular, the Chinese parents in the school did not feel part of the school community.

[O]ur Chinese community absolutely feels excluded. They do. I know that they do. We have made some steps. I’ve been here a year. We have made some steps. We have made some progress forward. We have a fairly sizeable Chinese community here. But they don’t feel that this [school] is for them. However, I’m not convinced that they feel that their children are fundamentally disadvantaged for that.

Nigel devoted significant energies to connect with Chinese parents in order to make them feel more included, but he acknowledged that he still had a lot of work to do. He sought to learn about what they needed from the school staff members to make them feel more welcome and accepted.

John said that certain groups of parents were excluded from the day-to-day operations of the school for a number of reasons. He explained,

It may be that, as a school culture, as a school environment, we are not communicating with them [the excluded parents] in a way that’s conducive to having the reciprocal communication. I think that sometimes we are guilty of making assumptions. So the fact that parents aren’t involved in the community doesn’t necessarily mean that there is apathy.

Parents might not have the reciprocal communications with the school. In other words, the communication may be one-way: school to parents. The other issue he highlighted was educator bias, or the assumption that certain groups of parents simply were not
interested in what was happening in the school. Some staff members believed that less frequent communication from home to school meant that parents did not care.

Kristin mentioned staff members’ awareness of communicating with all parents. Staff members communicated less frequently with certain parents or groups of parents. She elaborated that,

I think most of us, live without very, maybe not middle class, but a very socialized understanding of who we need to talk to and, so we’re not even aware that the mom that doesn’t have the education is over there and needs us to approach them to have that conversation and to laugh with and enjoy, and just be a part of that. The fact that that mom may not be coming up to me means that I need to go to her and have that chuckle over that silly thing that the child just did.

Staff members in Kristin’s school did not always communicate with all parents on an equal basis; this lack of communication had an impact on the degree to which some parents felt involved and included. Moreover, staff members communicated more often with certain groups of parents who of a similar class. Kristin also discussed that other parents sometimes excluded groups of parents in the school. Kristin added, “I have some Mennonite families and one very, almost-Old-Order Mennonite family, and on the playground it is interesting how the other parents will stay away from that mom.” Thus, as in this example of the “almost-Old-Order” Mennonite families the mechanisms of exclusion are, yet again, just a matter of avoiding communication.

Tony outlined that parents were often excluded from school, but that it was very challenging to provide opportunities for them to be involved. He elaborated,
We talk about including parents, but they really don’t have a lot of say, and there are a lot of reasons for that. I mean, it’s not like we purposefully exclude them. It’s that, a lot of times, parents aren’t around. There are the – even the school council, for example, sometimes they’re just not around. So how do you provide them an opportunity? And sometimes, I have found in the past that they feel intimidated in responding and providing input, because they don’t feel that they know enough about what’s going on.

Tony stated that there are other reasons why parents were excluded and their exclusion is not always a deliberate act by school staff members. Previous exclusions may have limited their knowledge of the school and the school system. As well, school council members’ work situations changed and this affected the amount of time they could participate. Seven of eight school council members were white, even though the majority of families in the school were not. Tony met on Saturdays with non-white parents to discuss issues related to the school. He said, “And they would actually say to me, ‘Well, we don’t feel like we’re part of it. We feel distant. Great teachers, but they don’t understand us.’” Here, the parents felt excluded partly because they did not feel that the teachers understood them. Tony needed to meet with them off of school grounds during non-school hours to find out their views and needs. These parents believed that the teachers were adept at teaching but not with learning about their children’s lives and histories.
Summary

The principals highlighted the need for all individuals’ participation in the daily activities within the school. They discussed the need for marginalized groups to have opportunities for involvement in school activities. It was important that inclusion occurred both inside and outside the classroom. The outside-classroom areas, such as the playground, were often overlooked by staff members; the playground was a place where exclusion could take place even if inclusion was happening in the classroom.

Another important component of how inclusion occurred at school was ensuring that all stakeholders had input into how the school operated. That is, everyone needed opportunities to voice their opinions about school-related matters. The communication amongst the stakeholders needed to be “two-way” and ongoing. These discussions did not always result in consensus, but all voices were considered. Participants also stated that it was crucial that the school environment be seen as welcoming to all people. All students needed to believe that the school was designed for them. Moreover, students needed to see the school as their “second home.”

Participants indentified three specific categories of students who were excluded from school: special education students, students from lower socio-economic status families, and non-white students. One of the common elements in all the students’ exclusion was a lack of understanding (on the part of staff members) of the students’ lives, histories, and talents. Staff members, most of whom were white and from middle-class backgrounds, were unable to connect with and understand these students’ lives. As
well, these students were also excluded by other members of the school population if they did not “fit” the school norm.

Parents were also excluded from schools for many of the same reasons as the students. As well, parents were not always welcomed or provided with opportunities to participate in the school in a manner that was intelligible to them.
Chapter 5: Experiences and Motivators for Inclusion

This chapter explores principals’ work or life experiences that motivated them to promote inclusion. The principals in this study identified experiences that motivated them to promote inclusion; the overwhelming majority of experiences occurred prior to them entering education. These experiences shaped the way in which they interpreted the world and later the way in which they practice leadership, specifically inclusive leadership. Influential experiences included: 1) personal or familial exclusion growing up (outside of school); 2) a role-model who practiced inclusion; 3) experiences as a student; and 4) experiences as an educator.

Personal or Familial Exclusion Growing Up

Some principals claimed that personal or familial childhood experiences motivated them to promote inclusion. These experiences gave them insight into how it felt to be excluded and the impact of exclusion on others. Nigel, for instance, was very aware that growing up as a part of a working class meant that his family was not able to provide the same opportunities as families who were more secure financially. His father discussed these societal inequalities so that Nigel gained a strong understanding of the lived repercussions of class structure. Nigel added,

I certainly was aware of the fact that life wasn’t fair and that the class structure was a pretty dominant piece in our lives. But you know, the fact that hardly anybody went to university from my school, that was a pretty clear picture.
Growing up in a working-class family, Nigel began to understand how some groups were advantaged by virtue of their socioeconomic status. His father died while he was still young and the family went on welfare. He added that the system was “just not designed for people [on welfare], like me, to do well.” This early instruction on class structure empowered Nigel, and provided him with a lens to understand the world. This education was, in many ways, his father’s legacy, as Nigel applied the teachings throughout his life and uses them today to advocate for students.

Dave grew up in New York and lived there until his parents divorced; his mother remarried a number of years later and moved to Montreal. His mother changed her name but initially he kept his birth father’s name. The situation, he said, was alienating.

Being from a divorced family in 1960 in suburban Montreal was not a common thing. And when we moved here, I had a different name than my mother and her husband. [...] All of those things were like unusual at that time and people definitely looked at it as if there was something wrong. And in grade 5, I finally went to the teacher and said could you just call me Smith from now on and forget about Standinfeldt? Just call me Smith. And she said sure. And that’s how it happened, actually. From then on, my school records were changed to Smith. He experienced exclusion by virtue of his parents being divorced—which was not common in the 1960s—and his classmate’s confusion about his last name was different than his mother’s. Dave felt that he “stood out” during these initial years in Montreal. This experience taught him how it felt to be excluded and feel different than the others.
Debra identified herself as a visible minority whose parents were Chinese immigrants. Her parents did everything they could to ensure that the family fit in—so much so that she did not learn much about her own culture. Debra explained, I never knew – I am Chinese. I never knew Chinese New Year existed my entire life growing up until I came to university down in Southern Ontario. Like what is this holiday everyone is recognizing? My parents never recognized it, not because it wasn’t important, because they tried so hard for us to fit into everything else that they did all of the cultures and the customs of – and traditions of that city. She witnessed her parents striving to be included in society to the exclusion of her own culture. From their perspective, there was no way to be both culturally unique and accepted in Canadian culture. For Debra, this taught her the importance of recognizing, understanding, and celebrating other cultures. This way, families do not feel the brunt of an either/or decision when it comes to preserving their cultural heritage in Canada.

Witnessing her sibling struggle academically at school, Debra gained another perspective on exclusion. She became frustrated with the cookie-cutter approach teachers took towards struggling students. [Y]ou know what? No matter how many times you are gonna teach it, as long as you teach it the same way, this child is not going to get it. They are not getting it. So we have to do something that’s different. She knew her sister struggled at school and that the same teaching methods used for other students were not helping her sister. Debra believed that a variety of teaching methods were needed to meet her sister’s academic needs. Debra was frustrated that her
sister’s learning needs were not included in the classroom. Her sister’s exclusion has motivated Debra to ensure that all students’ learning needs are met in the classroom.

Anna identified her experiences growing up as an only child with a father who was a blue-collar worker and a mother who was a secretary. She experienced verbal bullying from her father at home and from peers at school. Obviously, Anna did not have the same experiences growing up as did other children in her school. She stated that,

I didn’t have a lot of opportunities that other kids would have had. And I had to kind of look for the experiences, as opposed to having them handed to me. I look at the opportunities my children have and the things that I can provide for them, which lead to those kinds of leadership opportunities. I didn’t really have that, so I had to kind of go searching and looking for them.

She realized early on in her life that she would have to seek out opportunities for herself and that she would have to persevere. Anna stated that these experiences made her more empathetic towards people who were excluded and she was able to better relate to them now. As well, these early life experiences made her a fierce proponent of breaking down these patterns of exclusion that affected her students and their families.

Susan highlighted a number of experiences that led her to become a strong advocate for inclusion. She was an only child and her mother was very ill with ulcerative colitis throughout most of her childhood. Dealing with this illness, Susan felt very isolated from her peers. She added, “There were a lot of public ramifications of her illness. And so, I guess, there was a connection for me in terms of equality going way
back, probably to when she was very ill and all of those years.” Her family’s situation was compounded by her father’s financial difficulties. Susan explained,

My dad went – he had a bakery and they went bankrupt when I was in first grade. And we had to go into hiding. And so there was, I guess, that whole socioeconomic equity. There was the religious equity. I’m Jewish and my [father] he changed it [family name] to Jones* because his father was a baker and they moved around quite a bit. And he experienced a lot of religious prejudice.

Susan’s family went through self-imposed exclusion from others due to their financial difficulties. But there was also discrimination because they were Jewish. Through these experiences she better understood how to identify and understand other people’s exclusion. She added that these early life experiences reinforced her belief that everyone is important and should be honored and validated.

Craig described his experiences growing up and interacting with a mentally disabled boy named Charley*. He saw how cruel some of the people in the neighbourhood were to Charley. Craig added that he learned to include Charley with his cousin Allan. Craig discovered that people were excluded for many different reasons. A seminal experience was traveling in Mexico with his university friends in 1971. Craig remembered,

We saw a house fire, and we rescued some Mexican families, and I saw a family with five kids living in the two of the adobe huts. […] I thought, “Wow, this could have been me, born in this thing by selective opportunity.” I was born in a
fairly decent place; whereas these kids were born in you know they had uphill battle.

Craig reflected on his life after he saw how this family lived. He learned firsthand that others do not have the same opportunities in life as he did. Craig realized that it was simply chance that he was born into the family he was. This reflection motivated him to ensure that he provided all students with opportunities to succeed.

**Role-model: Familial or Other**

Several principals cited people who served as role models of inclusion. These role models provided the principals in this study with concrete experiences that were inclusionary in nature. Some of these people also fought against the exclusion of other people. The principals cited these role models as having a significant impact on their attitude toward and actions to support inclusion.

Nigel identified his father as his role model. He grew up in a working-class household and his father was a Marxist and a member of the communist party in England. Nigel said that, “they [Nigel and his siblings] had a politically engaged and politically active upbringing.” He stated that these discussions with his father helped him understand that life was not fair and that the class structure was a very active and powerful barrier for many people. He learned a lot about the way in which the world operated through his discussions with his father.

Karen also cited her father as a role model. When she was seven years old, she moved with her family to Connecticut. This was during the Kennedy-Nixon years and
the civil rights movement in the United States and her father was looking to purchase a house. Karen remembered that,

[W]hen he sat down to sign the contracts, he noticed at the bottom of the contract it asked him to sign to agree that he would never sell the house to a black, a Hispanic or a Jewish person. And he was shocked and we had come from Canada so this, you know, he was shocked. And he refused to do that. And, of course, there was a lot of pressure from my stepmother, for one, to buy it. And from the people in the company that had hired him to work there because it was just—it was pushed as, “Well, it’s just common practice. I mean, if you want to live in this nice neighbourhood here, it’s just, you know, just do it. It’s just what you do.”

Her father refused to sign the contract. Karen, though only seven at the time, remembered the fiery conversations in which her step-mother pressured her father to sign the contract but, in the end, he refused. She saw how certain groups were excluded and the pressure on her father to continue this exclusion. Karen said that, in later years, her father told her that the decision was clear cut: “I’m not going to be part of doing something like that.” She learned the importance of fighting against exclusion from her father.

John identified his family members as role models. He said that, “this belief [in inclusion] took some guidance and direction from my family or from educators that mentored me as I was working my way through, especially parents and grandparents.”
The learning process took place over a number of years. His family members were ongoing role-models for his advocacy of inclusion.

Kristin stated that her mother was her main role-model for inclusion. Her parents were both idealistic but her mother was the more powerful influence. She remembered her mother as

a strong, if not screaming, feminist[...] which was pretty unheard of. And my father, although appearing to be quite traditional, married my mother. And he had some traditional sides to him but he had no sense that, ah, women or females shouldn’t be engaged intellectually. And so that was just part of our household and I was raised, my mother certainly raised me to, um, fight the system.

While her mother provided her with the sense to fight the system, her father supported her by believing that females should be part of intellectual discussions and decision making. Kristin mentioned that she fights the system much like her mother but finds it very tiring and difficult.

Dave grew up in a family where progressive politics were discussed and debated each night at the dinner table. His grandparents left Europe in the early 1900s and still had contact with family in Poland and Austria. During World War II, the entire family was killed in concentration camps. Dave elaborated,

The Holocaust played a role in terms of how I grew up thinking: that such a thing should never be able to happen again. And that sort of leads you—it doesn’t lead everybody and certainly the Holocaust leads people to some really reactionary politics, too—but in our case, it led us to [radical politics]. My grandfather was,
when they came from Austria, he was a cigar box maker in New York and
became very involved in the union and was part of the Socialist Party. And my
mother has memories of him making speeches on soapboxes on corners and the
police coming and him grabbing her and grabbing the soapbox and running down
the street.

Dave’s family suffered atrocities during the war and his grandfather was very active in
socialist politics in New York. He learned from his grandparents and parents how to be
active and participate in progressive actions in order to fight for social justice. Dave also
learned the importance of advocating for one’s beliefs.

Peter, a Catholic principal working in a Catholic elementary school, said Jesus
was his role model. All students in his school shared this commitment to Catholic
education. This commonality, in Peter’s opinion, supported the inclusion of all students
in the school. He mentioned how the Bible described Jesus working with the ostracized
and marginalized people in society and worked to bring these people into society. Peter
added that,

He [Jesus] went up against […] the evil [of the] Roman Empire and fought
against those who were rich, and [tried to end] religious persecution. I mean
without going throughout the entire history books, He [Jesus] was the
quintessential model for inclusion.

Peter said that he used Jesus’ teachings to ensure that students, no matter who they are or
where they come from, were included in the school.
Matt reported that both his paternal and maternal grandmothers were role-models for him in terms of building inclusion. Both grandmothers were very supportive of missionary work and foster children overseas. He grew up in a small farming community and witnessed their commitment to helping others less fortunate. He identified their actions as major learning experiences for him.

**Experiences as a Student**

Some of the principals identified experiences as elementary, secondary or university students that influenced their commitment to inclusion. These experiences also helped shape their understanding of inclusion and exclusion.

Nigel remembered that the education he received in England was often given by disinterested teachers. Moreover, there were many beatings in the schools and there was no expectation that students from working-class backgrounds would finish high school and get a job. He added that,

I mean I had constant messages from teachers. Constant messages from teachers that were given which were basically, “You lot are a piece of crap. You lot are pieces of crap and you’re going nowhere and you’re nobodies,” and, I mean, really, that was what we were told. I mean, very, very clearly. I was once told by a teacher, you know, we had to— I was 12 and we— ‘cause you go to high school at 11 in England. So I’m 12, doing this needlework thing in domestic science and I must admit, I haven’t sewn—had sewn before. I’m trying to sew and the teacher said, “Well, that’s terrible.” And I said, “Well, I’ve never done this before and I’m not very good at this.” She said, “Well, what are you good at?
Are you good at anything? I can’t think of anything that you’re good at.” That was the—and that was a message, I thought, “Wow, what a bitch.” [Laughs] You know, that stood out pretty clearly to me.

He realized that because of his socioeconomic status, he was not expected to do well at school or continue beyond high school. The teachers in his school did not believe the students from his socioeconomic status could do well. But he persisted with his education and started university. Nigel remembered his initial lecture at university when the professor said,

“You’re all middle class in here.” And he said, “Oh, I know some of you are now looking at me thinking you’re not middle class, you’re working class. But your parents had middle-class values in order for you to be here.” I remember thinking, “Fuck off.” No, I mean, just that constant message, you know, “You got here so you’re like us. If you work on your accent and you, you know, play with things and you kind of, you know, refine your manners you can actually be just like the rest of us.”

Nigel found that these same exclusionary attitudes toward the working-class students continued at the university level. The professor believed that one of the reasons why working-class students made it to university was because their parents behaved like middle-class parents. Nigel experienced these biases due to his socio-economic status throughout his education.

Todd was a good student and athlete at school and came from a middle-class family. But as a gay male, who had not “come out” to others in high school in the 1970s,
he felt the pain of hearing jokes or disparaging remarks from others about homosexuality.

Todd explained,

I felt that, if there were sissy jokes, for instance, then I internalized those and felt okay, well, those are directed towards me. Or when I hung out with my best friends, who just happened to be the girls, there was that sort of insinuation, as well, and that sort of also — […] wove its way into things.

He had to keep his sexual orientation a secret for fear of further exclusion and condemnation. This experience reinforced his determination to include all people.

Debra remembered being called racist names by teachers and classmates. She never thought to complain because, as she contended, “that’s way it was because it was always happening.” She understood the pain of being excluded. Debra realized years later exactly what had happened to her and how pervasive the racism was in the school system.

Tony was born in Italy and came to Canada when he was eight years old. He went to a small Catholic elementary school with a predominantly Italian-Canadian student population. After graduating from elementary school, he chose to go to a new, innovative high school program on the other side of the city. Tony found the adjustment very challenging and he stated that,

Briarwood High School was 98% Jewish, and 1% Italian and 1% other. For the first time, I started feeling like I wasn’t part of it because I wasn’t Jewish. They celebrated all of the holidays, Rosh Hashanah, all of them. They were all gone, so there’d only be two or three of us in class. And I realized – and as I went
through the high school and got a little older and started, obviously, trying to date and you couldn’t date the Jewish girls a lot – some of them you couldn’t go to their home. And I really started feeling like – I started feeling like [I was] not part of what was going on.

Tony felt excluded from the school because he did not share the same religious beliefs or culture as did the majority of the other students. This experience reinforced the value of including all others in school. Tony connected with the feelings of those who were disenfranchised or excluded in the school because he felt excluded as a student in high school.

Peter also arrived in Canada at a young age. He was born in Malta and came to Canada when he was six. Even though he is now in his early forties, he remembered his grade one year coming to school, not speaking a word of English, and walking into class and having kids taunt. I remember [it] vividly. Also, the kids in my class were white Anglo-Saxon, spoke the language. [There] weren’t too many other kids in the same boat as me, so it because pretty evident that, because I was different in many levels, […] I wasn’t accepted. […] That caused a bit of grief for quite a bit of time.

He felt excluded when he started school because he could not speak English and his parents came from a different culture. Peter stated that this experience taught him the importance of ensuring that all children felt welcomed and accepted in his school.
Experiences as an Educator

Some of the principals identified positive and negative experiences as educators that shaped their approach and commitment to inclusion. These examples also served as evidence that significant motivating experiences can occur at any age. Experiences that motivate people to promote inclusion can happen at any stage of an educational career.

Nigel, as a teacher, learned a lot about inclusion from two principals he worked for. Both principals were African-Canadian and committed to social justice. Nigel elaborated,

One was a principal…[who] believed that the problem with our system is that, you know, we don’t have high academic expectations of black kids. So we better have them. And her way of—her idea of an anti-racist education was to make those kids come out the door academically successful. That was her picture of anti-racism. The other person who became equity coordinator for the board I was with at the time before merger—and he—his focus was on a sense of belonging for all kids. So feeling a part of the school community, that they were—value who you are but you’re also—we’re all also members of this community, too, and building that sense of inclusion in the community in that sense.

These experiences extended his knowledge of how to support inclusion in schools. The first principal wanted the high expectations to apply to all students and the second principal placed great emphasis on building a “community” within the school. Nigel said that both experiences helped him practice inclusion as an elementary principal.
Karen spent four years teaching in Cree villages in Northern Ontario and she witnessed how the community made decisions and shared information together. The band council and the teachers worked together to submit a letter to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to change the school calendar for this community. The newly proposed calendar permitted the families to go out together at the freeze-up and break-up of ice for the goose hunting season. Goose hunting was a traditional activity in the community. Karen remembered receiving the response back from the government that stated, “School begins September 1st, ends June 30th.” She understood how exclusionary the government’s response was to this community; the community’s needs, histories and culture were not being acknowledged. Even though the government excluded their voices from the decision-making process, the Cree band council meetings were very welcoming and inclusive. Karen explained that,

It was part of a band council discussion and band council meetings included everybody in the village. I mean, everybody went. And everybody who wanted to speak spoke. Yeah, so I learned a lot about inclusion by going to those band council meetings, too, come to think of it. Because, yes, anyone who wanted to speak had a voice, you know. They weren’t run by Robert’s Rules of Order. There was a lot of storytelling. I learned a lot about holistic thinking there. You know, […] sometimes when a question was asked, the response would be a story that, at first, you would think had absolutely nothing to do with what was asked. But by the time they were finished, it was, like, “Oh, my goodness, that just captured the whole thing.”
Karen witnessed how the community members’ ideas and insights were included in the decision-making process and that everyone understood they had the opportunity to participate. She experienced how inclusion could be practiced in a larger setting with many different people who did not share similar opinions or views.

In Kristin’s initial years as an elementary principal, she discovered that there were certain expectations for a female administrator. She explained,

As a female principal who moved very fast into administration, and as a female principal some would see as probably, at least “acceptable” in terms of physical attributes, um, […] there’s a package that they [other members of the school community] are expecting and then when there is the roll-out of this challenge of the system, and I expect an intellectual relationship that seems to create problems for people…so as long as I am somewhat submissive, and more than somewhat submissive some days, female attractive and I play that card, I will be included in many things, but if I challenge or if I use much of the intellectual component which I find interesting that’s seen as arrogant or that’s seen as inappropriate or that I don’t know my place and, I find that very frustrating.

Even though she was a school principal, her intellectual challenges to the educational system were not always welcomed or appreciated simply because she was female. The members of the senior administration, both male and female, reacted in similarly negative fashion. These experiences made her even more aware of the need to advocate for female administrators.
Brent also endured negative experiences when dealing with senior administration in his board. Brent did not agree with the direction of the board and he openly discussed this with senior management. He had been an elementary principal for twenty-six years and only then discovered how conservative and bureaucratic the education system was. Brent explained that his experience,

reinforced really strongly for me, and still does to this very day, how authoritarian and bureaucratic and top-down education is as an organization, as a profession. And how very controlling and authoritarian and power-based society is. Politics, governments, all kinds of issues in society daily. You really get that reinforced feeling of authoritarianism and control in a purportedly democratic society.

He was a strong advocate of inclusion and democratic decision-making but felt that the education system did not allow for dissenting or diverse opinions. Brent’s experiences with the exclusionary nature of senior administration reinforced his desire to develop an inclusive democratic community in his school.

Tony remembered how excluded he felt as a beginning teacher in the system. He described the school decision-making environment as top-down and authoritarian, a system in which only the principal had input. He and the other teachers on staff did not question this type of administration in the school. Tony stated that,

I always felt like, I don’t care if it [the undisputed hierarchy of schools] works or not. I don’t have a say in it. I mean, I was a university graduate and I can’t have a say in what’s going on? That just felt ridiculous. So I think my own experience of not having any opportunity to have an ownership or involvement in the
decision-making, even in those early days, made me realize that, no, people have to have a say. And if they don’t have a say in it, you’re never going to have an effective environment.

His and other teachers’ exclusion at school taught him the importance of including people in the discussions and decision-making.

Anna gained a lot of valuable experience working as a special education consultant with different schools, some of which were located in very high-needs areas. She witnessed how students identified through the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) process were not always supported in the schools. She explained, going into the different classrooms and observing, it was the teaching practices more than observing the kids. And you could see that – and it wasn’t intentional. I don’t think teachers intended to do that, but it’s easier. It’s easier for them to sit in the back of the room and just be at their desk or look – because you’re kind of, I’ve got a curriculum to teach, so I’ve got to go through. And I would sit at a meeting and teachers would ask, “Do you mean I have permission to do this?” Absolutely. Or else this person or these two little guys sitting in your class are never going to be able to participate.

Teachers did not know how to include the special education students in the learning opportunities. Rather than taking each student as an individual and tailoring the curriculum to his or her needs, the teachers found it easier to follow the “manual” of teaching practice blindly. The result, which Anna saw, was a pervasive exclusion of special education students.
Susan began her teaching career in an inner-city school in New York City. She began working with a grade one student named Carl who had repeated grade one the year before. Carl taught her a valuable lesson. She explained that,

We used the Bank Street Reading Series. I gave him the book that we were all using. And, lo and behold, he became a terrible behavior problem. And I think it was really a gift that he gave me, because I realized I wasn’t meeting his needs. And then I began the search, really, to look for what else I could do. And I went to lots of professional development, and I began, within the corridor of my school program, […] brain-based learning, multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, teaching to the level that the children were at, and so we took over a corridor of the school. […] The program became a model for the New York City Board of Education.

Susan stated that this was a model of inclusion because every child’s academic and learning needs were met. She believed students could be included more effectively if supportive programs were in place. But with a subsequent budget crisis, this model program was cut and she returned to teaching a class of thirty-five students.

Nina cited her experience working as vice-principal of an inner-city school as the critical point for her in learning about inclusion. She had never before worked in an inner-city school and was unsure if she was ready for this school’s challenges. After four months as a vice-principal, she was not even sure if she wanted to be an administrator any longer. Then she met Susan Nelson*, the local police officer who frequently visited
Nina and Susan made a decision together that they were going to find supports for the students. Nina explained her rationale,

[W]e have to bring kids out of the school, into the community, accessing at least the recreation center, and bring people from the community into the school to see what they can offer. So that was my motivation, [because] […] there was very wrong, and it had to change. Right outside the door was so much gang activity, [that] parents picked up the kids, took them home, and they weren’t allowed out. The recreation center didn’t have any kids in it because they couldn’t afford to take programs. Well, hello. Yeah, they can’t afford programs, so what are you going to do about that?

Nina realized that the children were not included in activities in the school or in the community. From her experience working the staff, students, and parents, she learned the importance and effectiveness of including people in the school and students in after-school programs. Nina witnessed the positive changes in students’ behaviour when they were included.

Matt learned about the inequities in schools from his years as a secondary school teacher. He remembered the first school he worked at had a needy kind of clientele from the wrong part of town, and I think maybe I learned a lot from that. It opened my eyes about what, specifically, was needed. And how our social inequities affected kids and families and their chances—because I had a very academic orientation in many ways myself [I needed these experiences].
Matt learned that schools had to provide more supports than simply academic instruction; he reflected on how his experience differed from those of his students. Moreover, his experiences of being a relatively middle-class instructor attempting to identify with lower-class students is very common in schools. Students and their families needed more support to overcome the societal inequities. Teachers, too, need support to recognize the extent to which their own background shapes their interactions with their students.

Summary

All the principals identified significant life experiences that motivated them to promote inclusion. Some of these experiences involved watching others fight against exclusionary processes in society. As well, the majority of experiences could be classified as negative and involving exclusion. Some of experiences involved exclusion because of religion, parent’s marital status, physical disability, and socio-economic level, and principals were motivated by these exclusionary processes and experiences to promote inclusion.

Many of these experiences happened outside of school and through their familial experiences. While some of the exclusionary experiences took place many years ago, the experiences remained powerful motivating forces today. Several principals also cited experiences when they were excluded as students. The principals felt excluded as students because of language barriers, being part of different cultural groups or socio-economic standing. Other principals discussed examples when they were teachers or principals. Many of the examples centred on their feeling excluded from the school or the school system.
Chapter 6: Strategies to Promote Inclusion

This chapter explores the specific strategies that principals employed to promote inclusion in their schools with staff members, students, and parents. Strategies with staff members are described first, while strategies with students and parents are presented second and third, respectively.

Promoting Inclusion with Staff Members

All of the principals consulted in this study agreed that an inclusive school community begins with a deliberately inclusive workplace for the school’s staff. To this end, the principals offered up strategies they found promoted an environment where staff members could participate fully in school decisions, and feel respected and valued for their contributions, regardless of their place in the traditional school hierarchy. These strategies included: 1). Thinking about leadership and communicating about it with staff members; 2) Expressing personal values on inclusion; 3) Modeling inclusive behaviour; 4). Using an open-door policy; 5). Listening to staff members and gathering information; 6). Supporting staff members’ personal and professional lives; 7). Hiring staff members who were passionate about inclusion; 8). Teaching staff members about inclusion; 9) promoting individual staff member leadership; 10). Encouraging group or committee staff member leadership; and 11) promoting whole-school activities.

Thinking about leadership and communicating about it with staff members.

A number of principals highlighted the importance of thinking about leadership and communicating these ideas with staff members. The principals devoted time to thinking about how they perceived leadership and what leadership might look like in the school.
PROMOTING INCLUSION IN URBAN CONTEXTS

But they also communicated these ideas to staff members. Karen remembered speaking with staff members during a staff meeting about some of the things she valued. At this staff meeting, she and her staff members determined what they wanted to focus on for the year. She recalled that,

there were the things that, you know, were mandated by the board. But we just had different ways of handling it, you know. I think for a lot of teachers it was kind of a relief for them to hear me say that test scores are not going to be the main focus of what we do. I mean, literacy’s important. Who’s going to argue with that? I mean, literacy opens up worlds for children, you know. But there were lots of ways of going at that.

Karen encouraged staff members to participate in the main part of decision making for the school year even though their school’s priorities were clearly outlined by the school board. As well, she also communicated that this focus must not rest strictly on students’ test scores. There were ways to move away from the school board focus to what school staff members believed students needed. Staff members learned their voices were important and there was more to student success than simply test score results (or, they felt relief that another teacher agreed that there was more to students’ education than their performance on exams!). Karen also demonstrated to staff members that she was willing to accept their input and direction even if it did not align directly with the board foci.

John stated that there were two levels of leadership that were vital. First, a structure for inclusion needed to be developed so that inclusion could become part of the
school culture. Second, he described his belief that staff leadership was an important second level and added that,

there is also looking at where individual staff or a team of staff are in terms of leadership development. I think one thing that we learn as principals through our advocating for inclusion is [that we have to] to provide opportunities for people to lead successfully. And we don’t always have a staff that are ready for that type of leadership.

Part of his conception of leadership then, involved providing leadership development for staff members. He needed to know his staff members’ areas of expertise and growth; the leadership development needed to be aligned with the staff members’ expertise. The other critical part of his conception of leadership was that inclusion must become part of the daily “happenings” at the school. The inclusive practices must extend beyond his tenure at that school.

Brent indicated his belief in a shared or a different leadership model and his disdain for the single leadership models. He elaborated that,

Most of our leadership models are singular, male, Messianic-type of leadership models. And they’re highly inappropriate and ineffective, I think, because they create a significant amount of collateral damage in the decisions that they make. The great leader makes great decisions in their own eyes, but in everyone else’s eyes often there’s collateral damage emotionally, professionally, and personally that happens, as in my case. Kind of all for one, one for all type of approach where we really work together to make decisions, we commit to them. And then
we follow them through, even if there’s some difficult things that we need to deal with. And so I’m always encouraging staff members to have a voice. I try to really encourage as many people as possible to have input into decisions, given time, and, I guess, the need for the decision to be made.

Brent outlined how that the leader who followed the “singular leadership” model tended to damage the relationships within the school. He sought input from others prior to making most decisions. Brent knew that leadership involved a collection of people; accordingly, he was passionate about encouraging people to partake in the decision-making. He demonstrated his commitment to this conception of leadership when he accepted decisions made by the group that he personally would not have chosen. Brent attempted to bring together people through dialogue and shared decision making.

Dave reminisced about the staffing committees from years past which included staff members and parents. Unlike similar committees today, these groups had the power to make decisions. Currently, staffing committees are consultative in nature and the principal retains the positional power to make the final decision. Dave argued that principals preferred this current process because they retained total control over the final decision, even if the staff and parents on the committee did not support it. Dave believed very strongly in involving people in all parts of the decision-making process. He described how he ensured this,

I would always do a draft of whatever that plan was and it was a continuation from the year before in many ways, but then the draft would go out to people. They would give feedback. We would meet and talk about it, and then the
staffing committee would really talk about it in great detail in terms of what were things that they thought were important to focus on, in terms of like staffing issues, so that what the program was reflected in the staffing.

The staff members had genuine opportunities to voice their opinions and create the final product. This practice of inclusion connected to what Dave believed about leadership and how people should be included in the school. According to Dave, if staff members believe “that their voice and their practice and all stuff is real and valued, people are happy to participate.” Staff members knew that these committees had the power to make decisions that could impact their working environment.

Anna wanted to differentiate between providing opportunities for stakeholders to participate and providing experiences for stakeholders. She explained the distinction in saying,

I don’t want to provide opportunities, because opportunities can be taken or not taken. So I’m thinking, for me, it’s providing all the stakeholders with experiences that allow full participation in all aspects of school life. They need to be – you can give anybody an opportunity, but whether they take it or not is the difference. To me, it’s providing them with those experiences so that they do participate in helping student, able to participate academically, socially, emotionally.

Anna stated that staff members, students, and parents needed to be provided with experiences to connect with the school. Her conception of leadership involved her looking for experiences for stakeholders within the school. Anna believed that the
principal should identify and provide appropriate opportunities for others to participate. She looked for these opportunities for her students that would support their emotional, social, and academic needs. Anna’s conception of leadership involved the principal clearly knowing the needs of all stakeholders, particularly those of the students.

Susan believed that the leadership team should be open to anyone who wanted to participate. In her mind, leadership does not reside in a singular person but within groups of people. Susan mentioned that the leadership team is,

inclusive for everyone who wants to come. So everyone’s invited. The community is invited. Not students because it involves – it’s not at a student level. The chairs come because they feel they have to. But certainly other people do come, as well. And it’s always open. So people can come when they so choose. I purposely don’t make it so that it’s exclusive of anyone.

There was flexibility for staff members, parents, and community members to participate when they wanted: parents, community or staff members could join at any time. She avoided retaining all the power to make decisions in the school; her conception of leadership involved ensuring that there many different individuals in the decision-making process. By having regular meetings —which anyone could attend—she attempted to make this inclusive practice part of the daily fabric of the school.

Peter used inclusive and shared leadership models to structure the school operations. He was very passionate about ensuring that there was a lot of participation in all aspects of the decision making in the school. Peter mentioned that, “committees basically run most of the items in the school”; these committees also had the power to
make decisions. He empowered staff members to take roles within the school and make changes to how the school operated. Staff members understood that Peter valued their input and that their input could change the way the school operated.

Craig used the triangle symbol from the YMCA to illustrate how students’ needs should be met. He continually made reference to this symbol throughout each school year and communicated this vision to staff members. Craig noted that the triangle, stands for the “whole student,” we call it. The prophecy academic, the left hand side is you look at it it’s a social most essentially it touched your heart. The right side is physical and social flexure radar. So to me that’s the old takeoff from the YMCA: The mind, the body and the soul. [...] That’s the image I try to drive at the people because I’m learning more and more in implementing anything or trying people to understand. You can do the superficial, you can setup the programs, but you really got to get to the core. So, to me the core is [that] we go back to with our staff members. We go back to starting with their philosophy of education and every year, I asked my staff, “What’s your philosophy education?” Let’s take turn to it because every teacher has one, I mean that’s part of your expectation that was your account with the master triangle and how does it match the things you do and not just the triangle but all that we go into our professional learning community teams.

Craig discussed this triangle symbolism with staff members so that there would be a shared understanding of the emphasis on supporting the whole student, not just the student’s academic performance. Craig provided opportunities for staff members to
connect their own beliefs on education with this leadership paradigm. He encouraged ongoing reflection for all staff members with how their actions and words connected to these core commitments.

**Expressing personal values on inclusion.** Several principals explained how they communicated their personal values on inclusion to staff members. This practice moved from the more general practice, mentioned previously, of discussing leadership to discussing their specific beliefs about inclusion to staff members. Karen acknowledged that staff members knew how she felt about because she “wore [her] feelings on her sleeves.” She cited the example of the disparity in the number of field trips between the richer extended French students and the poorer English-streamed. The extended French class students had many more field trips each year. Karen was new to the school and remembered the first staff meeting.

I was fairly dogmatic and unilateral about that. I said if field trips are going to be offered for a grade, they’ll be made available to the neighbourhood classes as well as extended French. And we’ll just have to find fundraising ways to accommodate that. And if everybody can’t go, then that trip won’t happen.

In this example, Karen did not open the discussion up to staff. She used her positional power to clearly state to staff members that inclusion was going to happen. In Karen’s view, there were instances when you had to be very clear and exact about how you felt. Even though she was new to the school, she demonstrated her personal values on inclusion when she encountered a traditional exclusionary practice. This example was
especially challenging because this practice of exclusion had been in place for several years prior to her arrival.

Brent had been principal at numerous schools throughout his career. He indicated how important it was for him to communicate what he believed in during the first staff meeting at each school. Staff members learned about what he valued; after he made the initial statement he began the democratic process. Staff members learned that he valued their participation in all aspects of the school life and decision making.

Allan described how he advocated for the special education students in his school. He remembered stating that the developmentally disabled students in the school needed to be included in the school assemblies. Allan told staff members,

We've got an assembly coming up. That D.D. [developmentally disabled] class is gonna be a part of this assembly. If they're not a part of it they're gonna sit in the front row and be right there. I don't care how much noise that autistic kid is making. What are you doing when you see kids in your class being excluded to make sure that they're not the last person picked in baseball? To make sure that they're not always on that, you know, history project group that's gonna get a low mark?

The staff members understood that he expected all students would be included in and around the school. But he was also specific about what he wanted in terms of including the developmentally disabled students in the assembly. This meant that inclusion went beyond talk at staff meetings and manifested in concrete, inclusive practice.
Debra remembered arriving at her new school and listening to her staff members complain about the parents and the students. Being new to the school, she learned quickly that many staff members these negative views of the students’ parents and guardians were an established outlook. She elaborated,

I’d say maybe half my staff believing that parents are just lazy, and the children are just lazy and not interested. And…we really got into talking to the parents. And one of the things I have mandated for every staff member is by the end of the second week of school, every parent has to be contacted. I don’t care by phone, in person. You go out and just meet them as they are dropping off the children. Every parent has to be contacted. And then every parent has to be contacted through the agendas or classroom newsletters.

Debra believed strongly that staff members must connect with and include their students’ parents. She knew that some staff held negative perceptions of students and their families and that these views needed to be confronted. She told staff members exactly what she wanted in terms of contact with parents. In this instance, she did not garner or seek consensus from a collection of staff members: she stated exactly what she wanted to happen.

**Modeling inclusive behaviour.** Many principals indicated that modeling inclusive behaviour was an important practice to promote inclusion in their schools. Modeling inclusive behaviour involved both verbal and non-verbal behaviour. As principals, they needed to make sure they “walked the talk” of inclusion. They knew that stakeholders would be watching them to see if their actions matched their words
Nigel discussed how he always ensured that he included the different staffing groups in the decisions. He mentioned that he included the special education educational assistants in the interviewing of teachers that they would be working with. All staff members understood how others were consulted and included. Nigel explained that,

You show your priorities through your actions. One of the things you do as a leader is you show that. I mean, you got to model it. Show who you are and what you believe in by what you do.

Educational assistants were surprised that they were included in the interview process for the teaching position at the school. Nigel understood that how he involved others demonstrated and modeled his own commitment to inclusion. Staff members, specifically teachers, saw that he included educational assistants in the hiring process and that he valued their input.

Todd and John also spoke about the importance of modeling. Todd indicated that he had to “walk the talk” when it came to inclusion with his staff members. He emphasized how important it was for staff to see him behaving in an inclusive manner. John, like Todd, modeled inclusionary behaviour so that staff members would understand his values. He, too, placed great emphasis on demonstrating inclusive behaviour.

Kristin described how she modeled inclusive behaviour to her vice-principal, her staff members, and to other parents by the way in which she interacted with people. She explained that on yard duty she

will talk to the parents that look like me, and I’ll enjoy, that but I am aware that I need to stretch out and make sure I am doing that with people that don’t look like
me. And, I think, I think if I were going to be there ten years, over time that might make a difference.

Kristin knew that not all staff members or parents interacted with each on school property before or after school. She made a conscious effort to talk with parents whom she does not usually talk with. Kristin remarked she hoped others would begin interacting with different people when out on yard duty. She recognized, however that as the principal, she needed to take that first step.

Brent mentioned that sometimes staff members did not practice inclusion with each other. That is, the teachers and educational assistants did not always include the secretaries, custodial staff and child-care workers in school staff activities or events. He explained,

I will continually encourage staff to make the social events conform to a format, or a time, that might allow more of those people to be involved. And so wherever I can, I’m always looking for ways to respect people, acknowledge people and treat them with respect, personally, when I deal with them, as well.

Brent worked on changing the structures of social events so that more people could be included. The teachers and the educational assistants did not always include other staff members so he altered the structure of these social events. He demonstrated his commitment to inclusion through his ongoing efforts at changing the structures within the school. That is not to say that the exclusion was a conscious or deliberate action on the part of staff members, but that sometimes the principal needed to make a unilateral decision to support the inclusion of others in the school.
Tony acknowledged that it was important to connect what he said with what he did. One of his mottos is that, “Every job is a self-portrait of the person who did it.” He was very clear about what his expectations were, but he knew that he had to support these words with aligning actions. That is, as I have pointed out before, Tony believed that principals must remember that all stakeholders, and particularly staff members, always watch to see if talk about inclusive action is followed up by actual action in an inclusive manner.

Susan stated that she believed that a number of components contributed to how she modeled his behaviour to others. She elaborated that,

Like, they [staff members] see, I think that my values come through on a regular basis in terms of all the decisions that happen in the school. And my support of them, in terms of them being successful and in my work with teachers who have less capacity and sending them for professional development and dialoging with them and supporting them so that they feel better about themselves as teachers.

Susan modeled inclusive behaviour not only through the decision-making process but also through the way in which she dialogued with staff members about their professional development. She worked with staff members to help them become successful and build their own capacity to support students. Staff members saw these values manifest in her over time.

Matt communicated very clearly with staff members the important principles that must be part of the everyday practices within the school. He added that, after you state these important principles,
you have to act them out on a daily basis. And you have to use them in everyday situations so that you establish a pattern of acting upon a certain value, so that people start to associate that with you, and then associate that with the school, and then associate that with the kids.

Matt took the approach of communicating verbally with staff members first, and then ensuring that his actions supported these words. He believed that staff members, parents, and students, started to expect a certain pattern of behaviour after they perceived consistent behaviour from the principal. Again, role modeling inclusion practices took time to affect others’ perceptions. Matt believed that, after time, the staff members would begin to model these same inclusive behaviours with the students.

Craig, like Matt, was very direct with his expectations of staff members pertaining to inclusion. He knew how critical it was for him to model this inclusionary behaviour. Craig explained that,

I’ve modeled those expectations the way I dress, the way I walk around the school. I talk about being visible all the time, so I make sure I’m visible. So, it’s hard to explain in ten words or something, [because] something you act on day to day. So I say I do it by my physical presence, I do it by the way I talk. I’ve been trained as a guidance counselor before [… I became a principal, so] I learned the power of active listening and I make sure I active listened to people. Probably the best skill I have ever learned from active listening is paraphrasing. So if I say I include you and respect you, then I use paraphrasing a lot in talking to kids,
parents, anyone because to me it demonstrated I’m trying to understand what you are saying.

Craig modeled inclusion by being visible and by ensuring that his interactions and dialogues with staff members, students, and parents, were also inclusive in nature. He also listened to others and then paraphrased back to them to demonstrate that he understood their message. Craig had also connected the role modeling with something he had do each and every day; as a result, people began to connect these inclusive values and behaviours with him.

**Using an open-door policy with staff members.** A few principals discussed the importance of having an “open-door” policy with staff; the most significant part of this policy involved the principal being available throughout the day to listen to and talk with staff members in a welcoming and inviting way. Nigel expressed the belief that people needed to feel comfortable discussing issues with him. He added,

- you have to give people a space and a format and you have to make it nonthreatening. And you have to make sure that people feel that they will be treated decently if they raise an issue, or they raise a concern, or they have a point of view to talk about, or whatever it may be. I think we have to create that.

Nigel highlighted the need to create that comfortable and welcoming atmosphere so that staff members would not avoid discussing issues, particularly if the issue was a challenging or critical one. That is, he was respectful toward the staff member even if the staff member raised a negative or critical issue. Nigel emphasized that staff members
must believe they are permitted to discuss issues or concerns otherwise they will remain silent.

Kristin mentioned that her door was, “virtually never closed” and that she made herself available to discuss issues with staff members at all times of the day. Staff members saw her door was open and they would come into the office to speak with her.

Anna discussed how comfortable her staff members were at coming in and discussing issues. She believed that she modeled inclusive behaviour in the way she sat down and discussed an issue with staff members. Again, her listening abilities were central Anna added that,

Most of it is through coming in, sitting down and talking. I would say that my staff is – some more than others – but very comfortable doing that. If they have an issue with another staff member or an issue with a parent, or whatever, we’ll shut the door and we’ll have a conversation. I may not be [able to solve things instantly] – and they know I don’t have the answers. They know that. I will never, ever say that I know – because I don’t. I don’t know everything.

Her staff members knew that she did not have all the answers and that she was willing to take the time to listen and problem-solve.

Similarly, Nina also had an “open door policy” and her office door was never closed. The staff members in her school felt comfortable coming in and discussing any concerns that they might have. She explained why staff members came into her office to talk:
I’m inviting, so I’m not a scary lady. When they come and they have a problem, I listen to it, and lots of times their ideas are better than mine. And so they know that I will make change based on their ideas if I believe that’s in their best interests.

The staff members knew that she was open to listening to their ideas and concerns because they had witnessed changes in the school as a result of their input. Nina acknowledged that many times things were changed because staff members’ ideas were better than hers: being a principal does not mean that she has access to absolute knowledge.

**Listening to staff members and gathering information.** Supplementing Nina’s observations, several principals further indicated the importance of listening to staff members and gathering information from these conversations. Principals emphasized that listening is a daily and ongoing activity and not simply a one-time event. Effective listening skills, according to Nigel, started with something very basic: a principal ceasing to speak. Immediately, staff members can feel more comfortable sharing information. He added that,

Stop talking and find out what they think. I mean, that’s really the fundamental piece of any of this stuff. […] If you want to know what’s going on, then you have to ask people and you have to listen. It’s not just that but you have to give people a space and a format and you have to make it non-threatening.

Nigel believed that having initial interviews helped him learn about the staff members’ lives and interests. Moreover, it gave him tremendous insight into the school’s strengths
and potential areas of growth. He understood that if he wanted to learn about the school he needed to stop talking and begin listening. Part of this process involved him ensuring that staff members felt welcome and safe to dialogue with him. He also mentioned that at a previous school he involved everyone in a school equity audit. This equity audit examined all areas of practice in the school. Part of this equity audit involved surveying staff members, parents, and students to determine how they felt about the practices that took place in the school. Nigel further explained that the purpose of the equity audit was, trying to gather data and get an understanding of what it is we’re doing with the various communities that we have within our school and the various groups that we have within our school. And trying to find ways to promote that feeling of belonging and that feeling of fairness.

While the process was time consuming, Nigel felt that the information provided staff members with a clear direction on how to become more inclusive. The equity audit provided the opportunity for other stakeholders to have their voices heard; likely many of these stakeholders had never before been asked their opinions about substantive issues in the school. In so doing, the equity audit validated the importance of everyone in the school.

Similarly, Todd also used a survey to gather information about his school. He surveyed staff members, students, and parents about all aspects of “school life.” Todd concluded that, there would be five percent that would just not feel included. I would suggest that as a school, we take a look at, roughly, there being 15% of students that we
have as being at risk. So I guess when you take a look at, you know, we’ve got 15% of at-risk students in the school and we’ve got likely 5% who may feel that there are issues.

The survey provided him and his staff with information on how all stakeholders perceived the school. The results helped identify the school needs and also kept the focus on students who were at-risk. But more importantly, the survey’s results identified a school focus for staff members.

John used a Stephen Covey strategy to “first seek to understand and then be understood” (Covey, 1990). He agreed with other principals that an inclusive environment required the principal to seek information and listen. John explained that,

I do believe you have to listen twice as much as we talk. Like what are the behaviors telling us? What are the interactions telling us? What is an apparent aloofness telling us about our school environment? I think that we have to observe twice as much as we listen, so what – like really, really watch what is going on there in a nonjudgmental fashion.

John believed that he needed to listen much more than talk. He cited an important point that the principal also needed to examine the interactions amongst people. John said that observing interactions was an effective means of gathering information about inclusion: he learned who was interacting with whom and the context in which these interactions took place.
Kristin also outlined that listening to staff members was vital to understanding how staff members perceived the world. Kristin explained that, when dialoguing with a staff member, it was important to

- listen to their story,
- understand their story,
- listen critically to their story,
- but remember that that story is being told by a person and that’s pretty important,
- very important, to understand that. They’re not making it up; that’s how they see it.

She highlighted the notion that by listening she learned about how that person “saw” or understood the world. In devoting time to listening to staff members, Kristin made it clear that she valued the staff members’ individual views and opinions.

Likewise, Anna made certain the staff members knew she was always available to them if they had a concern, question or problem. She explained that,

If they [staff members] have an issue with another staff member or an issue with a parent or whatever, we’ll shut the door and we’ll have a conversation. I may not be – and they know I don’t have the answers. They know that. I will never, ever say that I know – because I don’t. I don’t know everything. But I’ll listen and oftentimes will try to come up with a solution together, or I’ll ask more questions.

Anna argued that these conversations were vital in building those positive relationships with staff members. Staff members knew they could speak with her concerning professional or personal issues.
Susan indicated also that she made certain that she listened to staff members’ requests and opinions so that they knew their voices were heard and valued in the school.

Debra used weekly meetings with staff members—from all employee groups—to gather information. She learned about what staff members were feeling and saying. Debra said that these meetings helped her understand the “pulse” of the school.

**Supporting staff members’ personal and professional lives.** Several principals stated that an important strategy to build inclusion required the principal to know his/her staff members, and see them as having both personal and professional lives. By knowing staff members, the principal would be better able to support them and build inclusion with them. Kristin mentioned that she devoted time to getting to know her staff members. Her office door was always open and this meant she was always available for staff members to talk with her. She added that,

I try to spend time with them socially, which doesn’t include going out Saturday night but might include going out Friday after work occasionally when I think. By talking to them about matters to them which is often going to be related to, you know what to do about this child or that child. But not just brushing that aside, really seeking that and then sometimes that propels them forward as well. I, despite being fairly introverted person, I know my staff. I know them quite well and so people come in and tell me what is bothering them and what is going on in their lives.

The conversations involved the elements of both the school day and the staff members’ personal lives. Staff members felt comfortable talking with her and she learned how to
support their professional development. They knew that she cared about them and their lives inside and outside school.

Debra described her dedication to being available to staff members either through phone, in person, or email. She added that that staff members contacted her throughout the school year and if she could not answer the phone, she would contact them back at the earliest possible time. Debra explained that this effort placed on communicating with staff members,

really opens the door to “we can call [on] you for anything.” And quite often I get – well, as you know, as a principal you get a lot of calls outside of school issues. Family issues, personal issues, you hear it all. And that opens the door to communication for everything.

She learned about her staff members’ school and personal lives. Staff members knew that she would respond to their needs and concerns throughout the year, especially for personal issues. Debra’s learned about her staff members’ lives because she placed priority on being available at all times for her staff members.

Tony used chats with his staff members to learn more about them. From these conversations he tried to determine their strengths and weaknesses. Part of this process involved his providing opportunities for these staff members that align with their strengths. He indicated that by knowing staff members he was better able to support them. This was especially true for staff members who were labeled as the “detractors”, individuals who did not get involved in the extra-curricular support activities in the school. Tony added that,
you have to look at why is it that they are detracting. What is it? Their own life experiences and their own life situations might be such that they can’t take part. They want to, but they can’t. And if they want to and they can’t, then the frustration builds in and sometimes a defense mechanism is to try to tear it down, because [they] can’t be part of it. So you find a way to allow them to be part of it, or you simply recognize that “I understand your situation right now.” You’re a mother or a new father, or someone’s ill at home, or you’re having difficulty. It’s okay. Don’t worry about it, just do what you can.

Tony devoted time to chatting with staff members about their lives. Not all staff members contributed to the school and sometimes they even acted as “detractors.” Through his conversations, he learned that certain people’s personal lives made it extremely difficult for them to participate actively in the school. Not all the staff members labeled as “detractors” were able to commit to the school extra time, even though they obviously wanted to. Tony learned through these conversations that there are sometimes outside issues that prevent people from contributing.

Anna emphasized the importance of remembering the human element when working with staff members. She lamented that, with the emphasis on collective agreements, policies, and procedures, the human aspect of the job was often lost or blurred. Anna set aside time to meet with staff members to learn about their lives. She outlined her views:

To me—and I don’t want to sound like my job isn’t important, it absolutely is—but it is a job and it is a career. However, it’s not our whole life. And I think we
need to kind of keep that in mind. So [I have] lots and lots and lots of informal meetings with staff, just to get to know who they are and what they’re about.

Because I think that way, too, you get to know what they need help in, and when you’re moving staff along, you need to know who you can push without a problem and who you need to push, but also be able to provide a lot of support for.

By creating many opportunities to communicate with staff members, she was able to discern who was having difficulties or challenges in their personal lives. She placed great importance of supporting teachers with the knowledge that teaching is one part of each staff member’s life. She outlined that she communicated this importance by, asking questions about their family life, about who they are as a person, what’s important to them. I’ll pop into the classroom and you’ve heard something about—or in the staff room— say, how’s your mom? Is she doing okay? How was your trip? Just those kinds of things. Or I had one staff member who went to the doctor and I said, “Well, how did you make out?”

Because of these small, thoughtful comments, staff members knew that she valued both their personal and professional lives. Anna remembered earlier conversations concerning staff members’ personal lives and made sure she followed up to see how the staff members were doing. Being personally accessible to her staff members, and emphasizing her interest in their personal lives, created an environment where it was clear Anna cared about them not just as employees, but as people.
Employing a similar strategy, Susan met with each staff member individually for thirty minutes when she first became principal to learn more about the school and its history. The important part was that she learned about the school from their individual perspectives. Staff members also had the opportunity to ask her many questions during these meetings. These meetings then, provided an opportunity for all parties to know each other. Moreover, just as was the result with Anna, staff members learned that Susan valued their personal and professional lives.

Peter also met individually with staff members as well as made many class visits to continue the communication. He added that he had a lot of conversations that involved supporting the staff…whether it be with an angry parent or with a difficult kid [It was about] really showing them that you were on their side not just being their boss, but being a support for them. And, eventually, over time, when they see you as a resource, as opposed to someone just telling them what to do. That trust factor improves as well. So it took a lot of time and we are not quite perfect yet.

Peter emphasized the importance of supporting staff members and knowing how to support them. Peter ensured that the communication with staff members was ongoing. He understood that these relationships with staff members would take time to develop.

**Hiring staff members who were passionate about inclusion.** Some principals indicated that hiring staff members, specifically teachers, was an important practice to promote inclusion in a school. Teachers played a critical role in promoting inclusion in
the classroom and supporting school-wide initiatives. Hiring teachers who were passionate about inclusion and issues of equity would support the promotion of inclusion.

Dave used the hiring process to help find teachers who would work well in that particular school’s environment. He stated that,

Over the years, there were many times when we were able to hire people and a big source I always used was [the] student teachers who had worked in this school and who I was able to observe.

Dave also mentioned that he sought out teachers who wanted to be at the school. By observing them teaching and working with them when they were student teachers, he was able to determine whether they would be a good “fit” for the school. Dave determined whether the student teacher connected well to the students, staff members, parents, and community members. He added,

I think the most important players in a school in terms of anything are the teachers. The best way to have kids be in communities and school classroom communities that work for them, and that they feel a part of, and that they’re engaged with, is [to be very conscious of] who happens to be the teachers in the school…which is why I always felt that the most important thing I ever did in any school was who I hired.

Dave believed that teachers are the most important supports of inclusion in the school so the hiring process was crucial. The teachers had the opportunity to engage students in the school and support the school-wide initiatives.
Debra sought to hire teachers who complemented the skills currently represented in the school. She explained,

I mean, I hire people that have skills that I don’t have, which makes the world a better place for us at school because we have all of these different experiences. They may not have had these experiences themselves personally, but they can certainly give me that insight of where the children are coming from.

An example of this hiring policy is when Debra hired a staff member who had worked as a child and youth worker. This staff member provided invaluable guidance to the administrators when it came to dealing with students of lower socioeconomic status. She also placed importance on staff members’ interpersonal skills. Debra explained, “As long as you have the compassion, the understanding, the willingness to include—and inclusion is a big one—as long as they have that or the potential to learn that, everything else—curriculum, [for instance,] they can learn the curriculum.” She placed great value on the human components of the position, and less value on the knowledge of curriculum.

Debra believed that you can teach someone the curriculum but she sought candidates who would be proponents of inclusion and compassionate towards students and their families. This inversion meant the social integrity of the school environment was always first priority: not necessarily something all principals would do.

In a similar way, Susan expressed her values in a diverse school community in deliberately hiring staff members to make the staff more culturally representative of the school’s entire community. In particular, she realized that the staff also had to be more representative of the specific language needs of the community. A more culturally
representative staff, furthermore, could help parents and students feel included in the school.

Craig hired many student teachers over the years because they knew exactly what the needs of the school and community were. He explained,

We don’t just throw people in from afar. They come in as student teachers, in many cases. Let’s say we hired at least ten of them. […] They know the kids and also, they’ve got an understanding. The other thing we do as far as new teachers coming to school, we will hold programs for our new teachers.

These new teachers demonstrated an ability to work well with the students, staff members and parents in the school. Craig knew that they would be good additions to the school because they understood the community and student needs.

**Teaching staff members about inclusion.** This larger area of practice involves two sub-areas: discussing inclusion with staff, and providing opportunities for them to learn about inclusion. It is the teachers who have the most direct contact with students; teachers must understand inclusion and how it can be adapted and applied in classrooms.

**Discussing inclusion with a staff.** Several principals stated that they discussed the concept and practice of inclusion with their staff members. These discussions sometimes took place during formal meetings—such as staff meetings or on P.A. days—and sometimes during the many informal conversations that took place each day. Nigel used an equity audit to begin the discussion of inclusion with staff. He, his staff, and parents participated in an examination of the school practices related to both equity and inclusion. They gathered information using a survey that was given to all stakeholders.
He and his staff wanted their school improvement plan to focus on equity. Nigel explained that the equity audit was the first that the school had ever had. Because of this, and the comprehensive nature of the audit, the process took almost a year.

Sometimes principals use informal equity audits. In Karen’s case, she opened up discussion about a school tradition to highlight the greater, overarching, need for inclusion in the school’s environment. When she arrived at the school as principal, she learned that the extended French students, many of whom came from affluent families, had greater opportunities to go on field trips than the poorer English program students. Karen did not believe that these groups were being treated equitably. She explained that, when I brought that up at the first staff meeting, they said, “Well, it would be too much of a financial burden on those parents who can’t pay for them to go on school trips.” And so I was fairly dogmatic and unilateral about that: I said “if field trips are going to be offered for a grade, they’ll be made available to the neighbourhood classes as well as extended French. And we’ll just have to find fundraising ways to accommodate that and if everybody can’t go, then that trip won’t happen.”

The issue over field trips helped begin the discussion on how to include all students in an equitable manner. Karen encountered much resistance to her belief that all students should have opportunities to go on field trips; it took ongoing discussions with staff members to make the structural change in the school. She said this initial discussion on field trips led to larger discussion involving questions like,
“What kinds of things can we have happening throughout the year?” And my question was “how could we start the year off without this split? How do we make them all feel included as though they’re part of a community rather than an ‘us’ and ‘them.’”

Karen made certain these questions were part of the ongoing discussion she had with staff. By keeping the questions and discussion going, she maintained the emphasis on examining school practices related to inclusion. The staff members learned about inclusion and exclusion through examining their own school context and practices.

Kristin recounted a writing assembly when a number of students demonstrated their writing ability in front of staff and students. She remembered that almost all the students were white, female, and high achievers academically. At the next staff meeting she began the discussion about this.

I kinda opened the conversation, I didn’t say what I saw—I waited to see if anyone else had seen what I saw. Sure enough, one teacher said, “Well you know, they were all white and um, this is a pretty multicultural school….” And so we had a little bit of a conversation about that and then I said, “Well, you know that other thing that I noticed that was every one of the kids that read really could write, and that meant that there was quite a group of kids, despite our extremely high test scores, that weren’t up there because they’re maybe not quite as strong.”

Kristin started the discussion about how exclusionary the assembly was. After she introduced the topic and shared her opinion, other staff members joined the discussion and planned the next assembly based on the themes in the discussion. The next writing
assembly was far more representative of the student population. She added that this discussion helped staff members connect what they thought with how they acted. While she started the initial discussion, many other staff members carried the discussion during that and subsequent meetings.

Brent provided his staff members with educational articles during staff meetings and had discussions on these topics. While he employed a democratic approach to staff meetings, he still ensured that his staff members were constantly reading literature about issues of equity and social justice and were, therefore, more self-aware of their practice as teachers, even their engrained patterns of thought. He used the staff meetings to “extend” and “broaden” his staff members’ understandings of the various topics.

Likewise, Dave led a staff book club at school to help expand the concept of equity. He remarked that the book club was voluntary, but two-thirds of the staff would be a part of the book club. They got the book for free and dinner. But those books were always selected to be books that challenge people’s thinking around issues of equity. There would be a little committee of people who would sort of organize the group and make up a selection of a few books that we would then bring to the whole group so that any of them would have been fine.

The book club “get-togethers” provided staff members with excellent opportunities to discuss issues relevant to what they were doing in the school. These members connected what they were reading with what they experienced at school. As principal, he purchased the books and dinner, and supported the start-up. Soon a committee was making
decisions as to which equity-based books would be chosen. Committee members made decisions on the subsequent book titles and demonstrated a much more comprehensive understanding of issues of equity and social justice.

Principal of a school in a socially disadvantaged neighbourhood, Debra talked with staff members about the instability and terror that sometimes lurked in their students’ lives. Not all staff members, she said, really understood the reality of their students’ home lives. She explained further that,

They hear me saying it, but I don’t believe all of them truly understand. The ones who truly understand are the ones who walk our kids home after tutoring sessions. The ones who understand are the ones who really understand the kids and know that the children are falling asleep in class because they are up all night wondering what gunfire was— what gunfire happening out in the community.

Debra knew that more discussions were needed in order to better understand the students’ lives and experiences. She invited a woman from Somalia to a staff meeting to educate the staff members on some of the children’s experiences, and how these experiences could possibly explain certain behaviours in the school. Debra maintains that these ongoing discussions were crucial to staff members better understanding the students they were serving.

Tony also sensed the need to discuss inclusion with staff members; like Debra, he also emphasized learning about the students’ lives. He devoted time to sharing information about certain students’ lives so that teachers would understand some of the factors involved with those students’ behaviours. Moreover, he ensured that classroom
teachers were aware of some of the challenges that their students were facing socially, emotionally, or academically. He also used larger group discussions to promote inclusion in the school. Tony admitted that

staff meetings were basically presentations. So I would have the social worker come in and do a presentation, I would have the psychologist, I would have staff do presentations on special ed. service support service, do presentations on our kids and their needs and how best to service them. And then I had speakers come in. I had a couple of speakers from the black community who came in, and really one of them really provoked the staff.

This presenter managed to jolt the staff in outlining exactly how white educators unwittingly discriminate against black students. This speaker confronted staff members on their beliefs and assumptions about students. As a result, the staff members were forced to reflect on their own practice and their actions and behaviours toward all students. For weeks afterward, Tony said, staff members continued discussing the content of the presentation. Obviously, in this case, the lesson stuck! The type of professional development in his school varied depending on the subject matter; some learning was tied directly to the technical aspects of providing support to special education students while other learning experiences were meant to confront and challenge staff members’ beliefs and understandings.

Nina used staff meetings to discuss how her students are marginalized in society. Staff members talked about the needs of the students and the community all the time.
throughout the school year. Nina also used a school-community committee, on which many staff members sat, to share information and discuss inclusion.

**Providing staff members with opportunities to learn about inclusion.** Several principals indicated that they dedicated time to help staff members learn more about inclusion. These opportunities tended to be more comprehensive than simply discussing inclusion as a staff, involving formal structures such as dedicated training. The principals used various resources to support staff members’ understanding of inclusion.

Nigel used critical literacy and a critical focus model for his whole staff to examine pedagogical practice and resources. He stated that this was one of the major foci for the school for the whole year. Nigel added,

> You know, that there are kids who don’t see themselves reflected in what we do. And that this—that African Heritage Month, I don’t like the idea in some ways of African Heritage Month. I don’t like the idea of celebrations because I think they can certainly trivialize what we do and what we’re trying to do. But what I wanted to do was to go into—and to try to find ways to integrate this into the curriculum far more effectively than doing a few little shows. — […] I really wanted it to become, you know, whatever it is we’re doing. Let’s look at the contributions of black people. And then let’s build on that.

He provided staff members with a critical lens to examine the curriculum; staff members then looked at history and social studies texts to look for bias. This critical lens focus helped staff members look for omissions of exclusions from the curriculum and then
examine ways to address these exclusions. The result was that the curriculum quickly became more representative of the student body.

Todd mentioned a main focus at his school was on meeting the academic needs of the at-risk students through professional development on differentiated instruction. He combined this with in-servicing on equity and diversity issues. Staff members had to focus on how to better support the at-risk students through differentiating their instruction. On the subject of this professional development (P.D.) he stated that,

I try not to be the one delivering the P.D. I think that—I’m the one doing the staff meeting and so I find that—I’d much rather have, you know, a teacher colleague and/or say someone from a department to be able to come in and provide P.D. for the staff. Then that way they’re a teacher colleague; the teachers have a tendency to pay a little more attention to them. They’re getting the message from a colleague as opposed—it doesn’t come across as being top-down.

Involving many different educators in delivering the professional development, Todd ensured so that his staff members would be more receptive to the message. The staff members learned more effective ways at differentiating instruction to support more students’ academic needs, especially those students considered at-risk.

John began his work with staff members centred on the planning of a whole-school initiative. He remarked,

I think the most powerful way to get to a more inclusive school environment or leadership environment is to base it on an authentic school-wide initiative that we
work through as a community, all stakeholders. And then, when we are [all] going through the planning process, that allows us to start to use the vocabulary right. So in essence it’s no different than talking, than teaching a class. But then you begin to immerse yourself in the vocabulary. You develop the critical mass of people who have that philosophy, who get that it has to be collective and collaborative.

John stated that the ongoing application of inclusive concepts and vocabulary to the whole-school initiative was crucial to more staff members becoming involved. The collaborative planning sessions allowed staff members to share information, learn from each other and guide the development of the whole-school initiative. This group of staff members could then share their knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm to others in the school.

Anna and her staff members examined how the special education students in her school were being excluded academically in the classrooms. She led the school’s direction team (a collection of staff members who meet and design the school improvement plan in terms of student achievement) and provided extensive support to staff members on how to better meet the academic needs of special education students. Moreover, when students were brought to a school team meeting (a meeting to discuss the students’ concerns) she ensured that staff members were provided with guidance and support to meet the students’ needs. Anna added,

some of the MID [mild intellectual disability] students in there may have not had the experience and probably needed the visual on how to put it together, because
orally, they can’t quite follow the conversations. So those are the little things that I put together in those in-school meetings.

Staff members learned how to better meet the academic needs of these special education students. She emphasized to staff members that the support and knowledge had to be “…doable for you but also helps the student.” Staff members also knew that they were expected to apply these strategies in the classroom on an ongoing basis.

Susan mentioned that the entire staff was “tribes trained”. Tribes is a program that is used in schools to promote inclusion and community. Tribes training helped ensure that all people were included and heard. The school also used the document “We’re Erasing Prejudice for Good” in all classrooms. In order to facilitate the use of this document, she combined two important committees within the school: the equity and literacy committee. Susan explained further that,

I had the Equity Committee as a literacy committee. They didn’t have an Equity Committee before I came. So the Equity Committee and the Literacy Committee worked together. And our committees have a representative from each of the grade teams. So they can go back to the grade team [and communicate with all the teachers in the school]. They worked together and they did a professional development session on “We’re Erasing Prejudice for Good” and linking it to equity.

These two committees worked together to provide ongoing professional development for staff members. Piggybacking the Equity Committee on the Literacy Committee’s established structure and reputation within the school meant that all staff were
immediately included in the conversation about equity. As well, the combination of the two committees allowed those staff members to learn from each other in a much more collaborative manner than a top-down, principal-directed conversation about equity would have been.

Peter mentioned how his school used balanced literacy to ensure that students were included by having their academic needs met. Balanced literacy, in incorporating numerous pedagogical modalities, provided a stepping stone for a broader conversation about varying teaching strategies to appeal to as many learners as possible. He noticed that too often teachers tended to teach in one way only, even though not all students learn in the same way. There was ongoing professional development on differentiating instruction to help teachers meet students’ diverse learning needs and include more students in the teaching and learning process.

Debra remembered how she and other principals worked together to promote knowledge of inclusion through visits to different places of worship. She explained,

The principals invite[d] one staff member with them. We hire a bus, and we go to three different [religious organizations]. […] This last one I went to was a Pentecostal church, a Sikh temple, and a synagogue. And we sit there, and we listen to the religious leaders talk about what is important and how it connects to the education.

Principals and teachers learned together and shared their experiences with educators from other schools. The principal and one staff member would then return to school and share these experiences. Having a teacher attend the session helped ensure that the message
and experience would be viewed as simply another “top-down” discussion; the teacher
would share his or her learnings from the visit.

**Promoting individual staff member leadership.** Several principals encouraged
staff members to take leadership roles within the school. Encouraging participation in
leadership roles outside of classroom context served as a valuable model for including
others in the school. Nigel discussed the importance of providing space and support to
develop teacher-leaders in the school. He mentioned that he sought out teachers who
were looking for different leadership experiences. Nigel would then look for appropriate
experiences for these teachers. By combining appropriate experiences with the skills and
interests of teachers, Nigel ensured many more staff members were leading initiatives or
areas within the school.

Todd used staff members in crucial positions to provide professional development
in the school. Teachers led many of the professional development sessions in the school.
He added that teachers were often more receptive to the message they got from their
colleagues than if it were coming from an administrator.

Karen stated that even though, as principal, she was responsible for everything
that goes on in the school, “You [the principal] certainly don’t have to be the person on
the front lines for all sorts of things going on.” She described one teacher who was
instrumental in creating opportunities for students. Karen described the process:

There was one teacher in particular who was the catalyst for it. It was her idea
and so I just did everything I could to throw support behind it. I invited her and a
team of the students that she was working with to school council to present their
ideas to school council. So it was coming from the students, too. And I also made time at a staff meeting for them to do the same.

She supported the teacher and provided her with opportunities to share information with both staff and students. Karen did not exert control over the team’s ideas and looked for venues for them to present these ideas. Staff members, parents, and community members witnessed the teacher and the students’ leading an event at school.

John indicated that he looked at where individual staff members were in terms of leadership development. The principal, in John’s experience, needs to know where staff members are in terms of leadership development. In one example, John created an excellent leadership opportunity for his office administrator. The office administrator wanted to contribute to the school outside of her regular role in the school. With John’s support, the office administrator led a group of ESL students who acted as tutors for other students. He felt that this was an ideal way to combine the administration’s interests with the needs of the school. Nonetheless, John made it clear that the principal must determine whether the leadership experience is appropriate based on the particular staff member’s leadership development.

Kristin indicated that teachers organized and led many different activities in the school, including many sports teams. She explained,

We have a number of sports groups that [are] organized by teachers and really, what is run by me is “is it okay to do this?” but not how do I organize it. The teacher that does the ski club – she completely organizes a hundred kids, their parents, a group of teachers, the busses, and they go skiing six times [a year]. It
is not once! And it is all done by a teacher who asks, “Can I tell this child that
doesn’t have the money that we’ll pay for it?” [I say,] “Absolutely.”

Kristin made certain that she encouraged and supported these various programs. Many
times she simply gave the “okay” for these programs to take place. She allowed for
teachers to have control over many of the activities and provided them with support if they needed it.

Dave highlighted how he organized his staffing allocation to support the
placement of a teacher who led community outreach initiatives. Through the staffing allocation, Dave found time on the weekly schedule for one staff member to lead the development of home and school connections. He remarked,

He [the teacher] became like a community leader in terms of the school being always everywhere: helping organize community events, bringing—he was responsible for student teachers, like a lot of stuff. But he was also responsible for supporting the parent council. So, like, he would make sure that everybody who needed to be phoned was phoned the day of the council meeting to make sure they were there. He made sure about daycare and the food and whatever.

The teacher led several initiatives to build connections between home and school and this was a very visible and important leadership position within the school. But Dave made certain that the staff member was a good “fit” with the demands of the role. That is, the staff member had the necessary skills to be successful in the position.

Tony relied a lot on the leadership of a few teachers in the beginning of his tenure at his current school. He communicated with staff members about the various leadership
opportunities in the school. Tony saw how staff members’ skills and areas of interests connected with leadership experiences in the school. Staff members acted as facilitators with student groups within the school and created, for instance, a Christian leadership group that did a lot of fundraising for schools in Jamaica and Trinidad. Tony added, 

In the beginning there were a couple of key staff that were really on the same wave [or] path as I was. And they just jumped right in and wanted to do different things in that area. But there were also other staff who were very expert in other areas of school, like one particular person was a real whiz with computers. And so the opportunity to create a robotics program in the school was there. So there were people that had certain expertise and that, I think, […] appreciated the direction we were moving in. […] They] wanted to be part of it, and jumped in, and helped promote it. Some of them weren’t into leadership and just wanted to be part of what was going on and wanted to be able to use it on their portfolio.

He made certain that staff members were aware of the leadership possibilities; staff members with specific skills or interests had freedom to create and innovate. Tony remarked that certain staff members took leadership positions right away because they were enthused and excited about what was happening at the school.

Susan created an equity committee that included all the different stakeholders in the school. One of the teachers acted as chairperson of the equity committee in the school. She explained that the equity committee chairperson “coordinate[d] the equity initiatives and the committee work that happen in the school.” Susan attended all the
meetings but did not chair the committee. Staff members learned that Susan valued staff leadership because she encouraged the process from start to end.

Craig identified staff members that acted as “champions” of the different areas within the school. He used the word “champions” in his daily discourse with others to identify who were the leaders or chairs of that area in the school. Each area was led by a staff member who was considered a champion for that particular area. The champion and their staff members were provided with decision-making power and opportunities to change things. Craig tried to connect people’s interests and talents with the different areas of need in the school. Craig added,

Our champions literally run the school. So these are people that I call “champions,” like in front of staff and everyone. They know Michelle [indiscernible] is one of the major champions of our school as far as our setting up of professional learning communities. The other way I get people a voice is money talks. In our school, our budget is very transparent but our budget decisions [are not top-down]; people are given their money as teams to make their decision.

The key was that each school champion was a staff member who led the different areas in the school; the champion of each area had freedom to work collectively with other staff members in the same area and make decisions that impacted the whole school. While there were specific individual staff leadership opportunities with regard to the champions, most, if not all, staff members had opportunities to shape their work environment. Craig also ensured the communication amongst all the champions. He
stated that all the champions met together, in a “Circle of Champions,” to discuss school-wide issues and initiatives.

**Encouraging group or committee staff member leadership.** Many principals indicated that encouraging the development and decision-making power of committees was an important strategy to promote inclusion in the school. Group or committee leadership involves more staff members sharing leadership together and shaping the school culture. Nigel created an equity committee in his school that provided staff members with opportunities to learn and plan for inclusion. For example, the equity committee determined that they needed to weed the library to rid it of sexist, racist and inappropriate materials. They worked together after school hours removing materials from the library that did not align with equity vision of the school.

Todd has had an equity committee in place at his school for the past couple of years. He added,

> If something comes by the equity committee that indeed there’s a bit of a— something that needs addressing, then that can be the avenue that we go. If there’s something that the board has come out with, that indeed some information that needs to be disseminated to staff, then I can address it that way. Or something that — […] has happened in our school that has come by the office, either through a parent or through a student, or through a staff member,

The equity committee responded to board initiatives and planned for their subsequent application to the school; the committee members would then share the information with
staff members. As well, the committee addressed concerns brought forth by any member of the school community. In this sense, the committee provided an outlet for parent and student concerns to be heard and discussed.

Brent recounted how a special education committee in his school worked together to discuss and identify the diverse needs of the special education students. He placed great importance on how the committee members worked to support students. He added that the committee met regularly,

involving all of our special education staff in regular meetings usually every two weeks to three weeks throughout the school year. Where the special ed. staff, and that would include the [special education centre teacher], if there’s a centre teacher, core resource teachers, my English teachers, whatever. We would all sit down together. We would leave a space of time to meet every two or three weeks. And we would discuss the needs of the kids that I felt was really important. And allow voices at the table, even people that weren’t directly involved in a student’s case.

This committee met regularly and ensured that all people who attended had opportunities to speak. Brent mentioned that he received favourable feedback from staff members because they felt they contributed in this structured process of helping students. They shared their ideas and expertise to meet the special education students’ needs.

Dave remembered putting together the “organizing committee” for all staff members. He explained,
We met once a week at lunch and anybody who [wanted]—there were people who were automatically there because of their positions, but, I mean, nobody was forced to be there. It was a place where people could come together to talk about directions for the school, possible projects that we could work on, to really go into detail around issues that you would then bring to the staff meeting as a whole, to sort of work out the details. And it really was a place where first-year teachers could come and be a part of figuring out, really, what the school could look like, that would be different and how we could make things better in the school.

The organizing committee provided opportunities for staff members to discuss issues that pertained to the school. The weekly meetings also provided opportunities for educational assistants and teachers to meet and share ideas and develop solutions. There were no strict guidelines on who could attend these meetings and the results of these meetings were presented later to the whole staff. The emphasis on the less formal interactions, where everyone could discuss school-wide decisions, meant that new teachers were immediately integrated into an inclusive environment.

Allan mentioned that he rarely made unilateral decisions. He explained that when most decisions needed to be made “a committee was struck or it was raised at a staff meeting.” Allan said people were provided time to give input to the committee. The vital point here is that staff members, for the majority of decisions, had time to consider and discuss the issue prior to presenting their views to the committee. In this sense then, staff
members knew that even if they were not on the specific committee they could voice their ideas to committee members prior to the meeting.

Tony mentioned the importance of two committees at his school. One committee was called the “continual school improvement team” at his school. He chose some people to be involved based on their individual talents and then left it open for any other staff member to join. Tony chose one particular staff member who “had no bones at all about picking out what was wrong or what was going on.” This staff member was important to the committee because of the need for an honest understanding of what was happening in the school. Tony confessed,

I didn’t limit the number [of people]. Now, there are problems with that, because sometimes there’d be ten, 15 people sitting there. It’s a little difficult to get something done. So then you start looking at dividing up tasks. But just moderate[ly sized] groups, and then each group does a task. It’s easier to deal with.

Depending on the activity, the team met every two or three weeks. Tony did not always determine the agenda of the meetings or limit the number of people, even though a larger group presented more challenges to complete tasks. His role was more to moderate the discussion and ensure that each group had a task or discussion piece. Tony identified the second important committee as a “LSSAC” or Local School Staffing Advisory Committee. The LSSAC was a contractual team that was supposed to provide input and recommendations to the principal on all decisions that were made. Tony, however, provided them with more power than simply providing input. He elaborated,
Sometimes [...] the decision that they were making wasn’t the one I wanted. 

That’s the way it goes. You [have] got to be willing, once you lay that out there. 

[If] the decision isn’t the one you want, well, that’s too bad. And we went with it. We went with the decision. Now, I would also provide them all of the parameters around the decision, based on board policies and legislation and so on, so sometimes a decision I couldn’t do because you can’t do it because the Ministry says we can’t do this. And they were very good about that, understanding that, but most of the time, the decisions were made by them.

Tony understood that these committees needed to have more than just input into the decisions that were made in the school; they also needed the power to ensure the decisions were put in place. He provided the committee members with the board and Ministry of Education information. Tony accepted the times when the decisions that were made by the committee were not the ones he would have chosen. He accepted the committee’s decision even when these decisions differed from his own. In the end, the staff felt empowered in their own decisions, while having an excellent model for decision-making inclusion to assimilate in their own classrooms.

Peter indicated that committees led and organized most of the activities at the school. He mentioned that, usually, the principal simply created the policy and the staff members followed it. In one instance, the staff members and the students shaped and created the policy around bullying. He said,

It used to be called “anti-bullying” which sort of rings a tone of reactive response to bullying prevention, which is of course preventive. So we put that in the hands
of a committee. Instead of it being a top-down, hierarchical piece, we looked at the committee to decide how we were going to do things. I’ll give you an example: they decided to survey the students on their feelings around bullying. So that was a pretty neat little piece because it forced the staff to look at the opinions of the students. It empowered the staff to empower the students and created a culture of trust.

The committee members made certain they included students’ views and perceptions on bullying. While Peter was part of the committee, he did not determine the direction or specific steps taken; committee members collectively made the decisions. Peter stated that staff leaders created a better “buy-in” to the policy because they helped create it. Moreover, the staff members felt empowered because they created the steps and outlined and the follow-through; their ideas shaped their working environment.

Matt indicated that his school only had fifteen teachers and he tried to include all of them as a committee. As principal of a small junior elementary school that shares a building with an alternative middle school, there were specific challenges to building inclusion. He explained that he also included support staff members whenever possible. As well, there was a principal’s advisory committee which included non-teaching staff and a few teachers to discuss general issues in the school. This advisory committee met approximately once per month and helped identify school issues and develop solutions.

Craig used several different committees to make decisions in the school. Each staff member was on at least one committee in the school. The committees were chaired by a staff member who was identified as the “champion” of that particular area
that the committee considered. These committees had genuine decision-making power within the school, and staff members knew that they had legitimate opportunities to change the school as environment of both learning and working environment.

**Promoting whole-school activities.** Many different principals cited examples of whole-school activities that promoted inclusion in their schools. Many of these activities were led by staff members and included students, staff members, and parents. The whole-school activities generally took place throughout the year and provided specific focus for everyone.

Nigel discussed how his school focused on African heritage throughout the year, instead of only during February, the one month typically devoted to Black history. By using the whole school year to focus on African heritage, staff members and students had many opportunities to lead learning and connect with the community. He explained further that,

We made it more of a curriculum focus. Materials were provided for every teacher, [and we had] discussions and staff meetings about what we were going to do as a group. What kind of whole school things were we going to do? What kind of whole school events? We had a…really interest in assembly that was created by grade eight students and the librarian around influential and famous African-Canadians. We have daily announcements. We had a developing bulletin board. We had a “Heritage Night,” an African heritage night with all kinds of events that were part of that.

This whole-school activity was imbedded in the curriculum design and expanded from
there. There were materials for all staff members, plus opportunities for them to discuss their ideas. Students became involved as leaders as they discussed famous black Canadians, and events allowed the parents and community members to come to the school. This whole-school initiative included all stakeholders and had a curriculum focus throughout the year.

Todd stated that his school fundraised to support two or three charities each year. As the principal of a school located in a wealthy neighbourhood, he understood the importance of students learning that many people did not have the same material wealth that they did. Often the student council members chose the charities; they worked together with staff members to organize the events. He explained,

for instance, there might be a charity at a church down in the south part of our area that needs, say, Christmas baskets or Christmas boxes. Then — […] the classrooms likely will challenge each other to come up with as many boxes as they can. And there’s just a huge outpouring of generosity when the kids do that. So that’s tremendous work for the thing and it’s through—I think through that charity work, I think that the kids[…] recognize the importance of charity and recognize that there are others that are far less fortunate and far less able than our community is.

The majority of students and staff members worked together to fundraise for specific charities. Classrooms competed with each other; staff members hoped that these efforts would result in students becoming more aware of people less fortunate than themselves.

Karen discussed how teachers on her staff wanted to teach students to be more
sensitive to the needs and lives of others. The school student population was divided between two groups of students: the extended French students, many of whom came from wealthier families and the neighbourhood students, many of whom came from families that were struggling financially. Students who moved into the area and started to attend the school were not always welcomed by the other students, or their families, unless these new students, and their families, had similar financial resources and status. There was also a definite need then to unite the students and their families in the school. The solution that Karen thought up was a whole-school initiative to sponsor a village in Sierra Leone. Karen said that,

We just thought if we just took it out of the context first to help them see the issues, and feel some passion and compassion, and some sense of doing things for others out there, that maybe we could bring it closer. And get the students, the parents, community, businesses, and, yeah, within a year they raised enough to build a school. And the second year they built a well and we bought, you know, goats and pigs and whatnot for the village. So—and it became something that—and they learned a lot about this particular village in Sierra Leone, too. So it opened up their world a bit.

Karen explained that this whole-school activity brought the school community together. It also provided an excellent segue to examining homelessness in their community. Whereas there had previously been a stark divide between French and regular stream students, this project required both sets of students to work together on a common goal. Students became much more aware of the world around them. At the same time, they
recognized that the boundaries between them were even easier to overcome. This inclusive experience also led to the creation of another inclusive whole-school activity to start the school year so that the extended French students and area students could work together. She explained that,

We looked for activities to do in the school that would bring those classes together and integrate them. So, actually, for a couple of years, what we did in the first full week of school, because we didn’t even have the students in classes, in separate classes, we had them all mixed up. And no one was assigned to a home class teacher. They went, over the course of those first four days of school, they went-- they did workshops, special-- they were curriculum related but not sort of assessment-dependent types of things, you know. So each teacher chose an area of specialty and expertise like drama or, you know, mapping of the school area or orienteering, those sorts of things. And we integrated the classes so that there wasn’t extended French [versus] neighbourhood. They were all mixed up.

This whole-school activity worked well to move away from the “us” and “them” that was pervasive between the two groups of students. This initiative was particularly successful because it was used to begin the year. That is, students and staff members worked together to start the year, always a privileged moment in the social lives of the students. This initiative also ensured that teachers in the school interacted with both the extended French and regular English stream students. The students worked together on activities that were meant and designed to include both groups, which went a long way to breaking down the de facto social segregation between the two streams.
John discussed how his school community created together a mural for a project called the “Diversity mural project.” He explained further that the project, involving principal, staff, parental volunteers, [and] community partners. We have the immigrant culture and arts association involved in that project. Every student in the school—every junior student in the school participated in the whole project. And if you were to look at it, we are very proud of it. There is every background, culture, language, symbol, totem that was important to students at that point in time is in these murals.

This whole-school activity not only provided an opportunity for people to work together, but also allowed them to communicate about their culture and background. This activity allowed every student to contribute in a meaningful way. The mural not only united the stakeholders but also showcased the different cultures and histories in the school population. The mural emblemized the school’s commitment to inclusion.

Kristin cited two whole-school initiatives. First, they used a frequently-held writing assembly to bring her school together. Students demonstrated their writing ability in front of the whole school. These assemblies began showcasing many students of all academic levels. Parents and other family members were invited to share in the celebration for students who were involved in the assembly. Kristin personally wrote thank-you notes to all of the children. In response, she said that many parents phoned to say how wonderful this experience had been for their child. The staff members altered this writing initiative to ensure that more students were included. It was important that the initiative be flexible enough to allow for ongoing changes because there was ongoing
input from stakeholders. Staff members realized early on in the initiative that changes had to occur because they realized that many students were excluded.

The second initiative involved providing resources for poorer families in the school. In her school, there were twenty-three families who benefitted from the school’s charity initiative. Kristin asked people to donate to one of the school charity causes instead of buying gifts for teachers. All community members worked together to provide resources for those families in the school. She explained,

we ask gifts from people at Christmas or at the end of the year to go toward things that we know support the kids at the school. We have a program in Waterloo called “Send them off Smiling”. Silly as it sounds it, we have twenty-three families in our school that are [economically disadvantaged]. [So] the kids are provided with new backpacks, new shoes, new outfits, for, pencil crayons and all that, for the first day of school. And it’s a wonderful program. […] We ask that the staff gifts be charitable donations to “Send them off Smiling”.

This initiative kept the focus on supporting these financially struggling families throughout the year. There was a school-wide commitment to and awareness of this initiative. All stakeholders, in some way, were involved. The process functioned as learning piece about individuals who are struggling financially, and how to give specific (and valuable) support for families in the school.

Debra’s school was located in a very poor area. She used twice-yearly “fun fairs” to bring the community together. Debra knew that these fun fairs would not make money
but they would serve to provide an opportunity for the community to meet. She explained,

Our parents don’t have the funds. They [parents] won’t come because they know they can’t afford it for their kids. So the only thing that costs them is the food, and the food is done by the businesses. So the local businesses, like the local fish and chips store. They come. And I said, the only condition that you [have …] that you [keep the] prices [low] enough so our parents can afford it. So they [the businesses] are not going broke, but they are just making enough money to make a little bit of profit.

Debra understood that the purpose of the fun fair was not to make money but to unite people. The parents in the community knew that she designed the fun fair with that goal in mind. She organized the whole-school initiative based on the needs of her community. Debra sought support from local businesses so that parents and their children could participate.

Peter described how his school staff worked together and organized a snack and food program for the students. Through discussions with staff and students, he realized that many students were coming to school hungry each day. Peter described how he sought out volunteers for this initiative:

I solicited staff. I went after about twenty people to volunteer their time to supervise. It didn’t count as an extra duty, so […] they really took it on as an extra duty. Then I went after volunteer groups that were within our parish, and got about forty of them, and went after the parents and they volunteered as well.
He encouraged nineteen out of twenty staff members to participate in the school initiative. At first, staff members believed the initiative was “another duty” but soon saw a major benefit of having such a program: improved student behaviour throughout the day. This is an example of the efforts and persistent it sometimes takes to develop a whole-school initiative. While there was agreement that something needed to be done to support students, not all staff members initially believed in the solution. It took time for staff members to be convinced of the initiative’s value. Another bonus of the initiative that Peter also mentioned was that staff members learned more about the students they taught. He elaborated that the breakfast program has been eye-opening for everybody. They not only see how hungry they are but they’ve also seen the kind of food that the people in the socioeconomic conditions that we serve eat, which is not typically what the teachers would see eaten in their own homes.

Staff members learned more about their students’ lives. The initiative also connected staff members and students in a very positive activity outside of the classroom. A valuable learning piece was staff members learning more about their students’ lives and experience.

**Promoting Inclusion with Parents**

The principals identified different strategies to promote inclusion with their students' parents. These strategies included: 1) using parents as links to other parents; 2) working collaboratively with school council members; 3) using a variety of ways to
communicate with parents; 4) educating parents about inclusion; and 5) connecting parents with community organizations.

**Using parents as links to other parents.** Several principals claimed that certain parents in the school helped them include other parents. The principals relied on these parents to communicate with different parents about the school. Nigel worked in a very multicultural school in a large urban area. He described how he received help connecting with the school’s Chinese community,

> I have some conduits to the Chinese community, for instance. So I have some people I talk to who I believe are somewhat representative, who will bring things to me, [who] I’ve encouraged to do that. So [I have] a couple of parents that do that and that’s one piece to try to do that.

These parents provided Nigel with information on how to best serve the Chinese community. For example, he learned that many parents in the Chinese community wanted to come into the school at lunch and spend time with their sons and daughters. Based on this information, he gave permission to the Chinese parents to eat lunch with their children at school. While this practice of parents eating with their children did not happen as a regular occurrence prior the meeting, it soon became one afterward, and served as a starting point for listening to Chinese parents’ needs.

John described how he spent time with a parent of Turkish descent in his school. Over the course of a few months, he built up trust with this parent, and eventually this parent confided in him. This parent was seeking help concerning another parent in the community. John explained that his SWISH worker told him that,
“Mrs. So-and-so would like to talk to you now.” “Sure. Bring her in.” “Nope. She will not come to school.” “Okay. Well, where does she want to talk?” We ended up going into the portable to talk, and what the issue was, was she was gonna leave an abusive husband.

John built up the trust with the first parent who passed this information to another woman in the community. The first parent told her friend that the principal was someone who could be trusted. One of the key elements here is that the issue of trust took time to develop, a sort of “word of mouth” that this principal is someone who would listen and help. It was through this initial meeting with the Turkish parent that John was able to connect with the second parent who needed his help. In the end, he referred this woman to resources that would help her establish herself in Canada without her husband. This parent felt included in the school and found resources to support her life in Canada; John’s work at the school level that built trust supported this woman having more opportunities in Canada.

Dave worked in a school with many Vietnamese parents and he wanted them to come into the school more often. Dave used a translator in the school to communicate with parents and he learned more about their lives. This information could then be passed on to the staff members who learned about the Vietnamese parents’ lives. He stated that,

We would hire somebody who spoke Vietnamese to actually phone parents and explain to them and try to get them to come in. If you phoned […] a few would come. But generally speaking, we found out that […] generally speaking, the
reason that they don’t come is because they work three jobs and that they really can’t come.

Dave learned that the parents could not attend many of the school functions because they were working several jobs and simply could not come. The interpreter provided the Vietnamese parents with a “voice” and an outlet where they could communicate with the school staff members. The staff members learned valuable information about their students’ parents’ lives and how to more effectively include them in the school.

Tony worked in the school in which the majority of the population was non-white. He wanted to include them more in the school and he sought the help of one of his non-white parents. Tony elaborated that,

I had one of the non-white parents… I asked her if she would gather a number of non-white parents who might be willing to come in and chat anytime. So they decided Saturday. So we met over three or four Saturdays just to chat […] I wanted to get to know them and I wanted to understand what their concerns were, and I wanted to also try to get an idea of how to get them into school.

This parent served as a starting point for communication between Tony and a group of parents. The meetings took place off school property and during the weekend. The parents felt comfortable discussing their issues and concerns with her and, eventually, with him. By him attending these weekend meetings, he demonstrated to the parents that he valued their input and wanted them involved with the school. Tony also mentioned that he worked collaboratively with a grandparent of one of his students; he worked closely with her to connect with the parent community in the school. Together they
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devised ideas to help foster the relationship between the school and parents. Tony was open to trying new ideas and learning from the grandparent’s experiences to support the school.

Susan stated that she worked with several parents who acted as liaisons with the community. These parents spoke the community languages and they continued to support the communication between school and parents. It was critical that the communication about school issues and events was in more languages than simply English.

Matt said that there were parents in his community who helped enhance the communication between home and school. These parents communicated the positive aspects of school to the other parents. He elaborated:

There are other key parents whom I recognize as being sympathetic to the goals of the school, or understanding the goals of the school, and, hopefully, the good intentions of the school and the staff. And it’s a word-of-mouth advertising kind of campaign, so that there is a balance in the discussion that we know is happening out in the neighborhood, the proverbial parking lot discussions. You know it’s going on out there, and so you want to encourage and supply good information to the people who are pro-school.

The liaison parents helped Matt learn about what was happening in the parents’ and students’ lives. But these liaison parents also advocated for the school to parents and community members.
Working collaboratively with school council members. Many principals said that they worked with their school council members to promote inclusion with parents in the school. The school council is a mandated organization by the Ontario Ministry of Education. One of its purposes is to provide parents and guardians with input concerning the operation of the school. The school council involves parents, community members, staff members, students, and the school principal.

Todd stated that his two co-chairs of the school council had been outstanding. He said that they have, “…provided excellent leadership and direction for the parents.” Todd worked well with these two co-chairs on building inclusion with parents.

Karen worked with school council members to get more parents involved. She had noticed that the school council members did not represent the different social classes of the school. Karen described what she did next.

I talked to the school council chair about that in both of those schools when I first arrived. And then we talked to the, you know, sort of the incoming members, the members of school council that were already there and everyone did agree that it would be a good idea to make some phone calls and see if we could get more diverse representation.

She discussed with the school council members the need for a more representative school council membership. Karen worked together with the current school council members to get more members, especially from the groups that were not currently represented on council. Even with their combined efforts it was a challenge but Karen cited the skill of the council chair as key to the initiative’s success. Karen added,
The chair was excellent. I would say she was a very inclusive person herself. Even though she was very deliberate in making sure that she solicited voices from people around the table, you know, rather than just waiting for people to speak up. It’s tough. It’s tough for people who aren’t used to feeling as though they’re in positions of influence.

The school council chair shared Karen’s advocacy for inclusion and took specific steps to build inclusion within the school council membership. The school council chair sought to promote inclusion in the current council membership by ensuring that all members’ voices were heard. Even though the school councils tended to be dominated by individuals from the same social economic class, there were individuals who did not always feel comfortable sharing their point of view. This example demonstrates the need for inclusion even within a seemingly exclusive group. Despite the fact that school council members came from a similar socioeconomic group, there were still issues of exclusion. These issues had to be addressed by the school council chair. This example also signifies that exclusion can happen within representative and non-representative groups; the promotion of inclusion can never take a day off.

Kristin noted how the school council members organized parenting workshops during the school year. Through the feedback from her school’s council, Kristin learned that the school council members did not always know what the greater school community wanted or needed. Some of the school council members, for instance, wondered why there were parenting workshops taking place in the school. With feedback like this, Karen understood that the school council’s ideas were not representative many of the
different views and ideas in the parent community. She added that the parent workshops are

what attracts the multicultural group.... It is not [a] parent council, but when I went to the little parenting workshop that we had this year, that was the most diverse group of parents I’d seen other than maybe a school council, for sure. They’re not at school council and they are not at—I am currently putting a sixth classroom addition on—they’re not at a construction meeting. But they wanted to be at that parenting meeting.

Kristin knew then that she would have to help guide the selection of events aimed to connect with the community. In this example, the school council members needed help from Kristin to create opportunities that would attract a more diverse group of parents from the school—and to understand the importance of these inclusive gestures. The school council members had to be encouraged to try a new initiative or event to get more parents into the school.

In Dave’s school, he said that there were usually fifty people at each school council meeting. Three of the co-chairs worked on the agenda so that it represented the many different views in the school community. He worked with them in the first meeting to help organize some of the issues and ideas they wanted to look at during the year, as well the topics for the specific meetings. Dave helped facilitate the organization of the meetings by taking extra time to meet with the three of them privately.

Debra stated that the scheduling of the school council meetings was problematic in that not all parents could attend at any one time of the day. She explained:
So I have a council meeting Thursday evening [that is] followed by a Friday daytime council meeting, just to accommodate the different schedule for the parents. So that way we have [more] parents involved. She knew that the school council meeting times should not prevent parents from getting involved. Having the two meeting times demonstrated to parents that the school council was an important component of the school, and the school was attempting to support the parents’ needs. As a result, Debra was able to meet with two different groups of parents on the same issues. While this two-meeting approach required her to devote extra time to the meetings, there were more opportunities for parents to participate in the school if there was a flexible schedule.

Tony identified the importance of the school council chairs who were very interested in “moving the school forward and were very supportive” of his efforts to promote an inclusive environment. One of these chairs would come to school council meetings on Saturdays with non-white parents who felt isolated so she could learn more about the needs of others. Tony said that this school council chair was important because she “brought a different view” to the discussion table; she also provided non-white parents with opportunities to share their viewpoints and ideas concerning the school. One of the key elements here is that the school council chair saw the need to have more representation on the school council; the status quo was not adequate.

Using a variety of methods to communicate with parents. Many principals used a variety of methods to communicate with parents. Utilizing different ways to deliver information and to listen to parent concerns and ideas increased inclusion of the
parent community. Nigel worked in a multicultural school in which many different languages were spoken in the community. He explained that,

Some of the issues, of course, I mean, with parents, one of the pieces is the language piece to develop an inclusion with parents, there’s a language piece. That’s always a difficulty. Being a Toronto school, we have a great deal of diversity. But we, you know, I mean, we had, we have interpreters. We have letters going home in other languages.

Nigel placed a lot of emphasis on providing support to parents whose first language was not English. The school information went home in different languages so that many more parents would know what was happening in the school.

Karen highlighted two methods she used to communicate with parents. First, she made certain that the staff were able to schedule interviews during the school day. Karen explained,

In one particular school, there was quite a large faction of the local community that did a fair bit of shift work. And so, you know, interviews from four to seven is […] when they’re at work. And before school in the morning is difficult because they have to sleep sometimes. So, […] I mean, my expectation always was that you [the teacher] would find a time, a mutual time, when it could work.

She knew that parents’ work schedules could limit the amount of communication with the school so she instructed staff to be available for parents during the school day. If a parent wanted to schedule an interview during the school hours, then Karen would help facilitate that happening. Second, Karen used private conversations with parents to
ensure they felt included in the school. She cited one example of a parent who did not feel comfortable being in the school building yet needed to speak to her about his two daughters. Both of his daughters had special education concerns and he was very defensive about this situation. Karen remembered,

> the kind of conversation I could have with him leaning against his car, you know, across the street from the school, was vastly different [than in the school]. Like, that was his comfort zone, you know. — […] There were often lots of things I needed to speak with him about. And there’s a whole other story there about things having been put in motion to have these two girls shipped off to a classroom in another school and he didn’t want that to happen.

By meeting him across the street, she provided a more comfortable area for him to discuss his two daughters. He was not completely comfortable in the school so she visited him off school property. Karen also met parents at the local Tim Horton’s restaurants to discuss an issue or concern. She understood that discussions about school did not always have to take place on school property and that not all parents wanted to meet at school.

Kristin made certain in every newsletter and at every presentation for a trip or activity that she told people they could contact her about financial issues. She knew that there were families in her school who were struggling financially and would be contacting her, usually by telephone. When Karen responded to these phone calls, she was always sensitive in her language.
I say the same thing to everybody: “Is there an amount that you are able to pay?” And [I] let them identify what that amount is. [In] one is case it was zero, and in another case it was all but twenty-five dollars. And I don’t make the assumption that they don’t want to contribute something. I ask them directly, “Is there an amount that you feel you can handle?” And if they say “No,” then that is fine and I will handle the bill. If they say, “I can handle ten dollars,” then I say, “Okay, we will be handling the other 135.00 and just send in the ten dollars.”

She wanted to ensure that all children had the financial means to participate in trips or activities without compromising their parents’ pride. Karen ensured that she conveyed the message about the school support as many times throughout the year as possible. This is an important point; sometimes a message needs to be given several times in order for others to receive it. Karen also provided parents with an opportunity to share in the paying of the field trips or activities; each case was different, but parents were included in the final decision.

Similarly, Allan cited the importance of having those ongoing, daily discussions with parents. He remembered that, years ago, he was starting as principal of a school in January and wanting to bring in school uniforms. The initial response from parents was only 69% in favour. Allan began private conversations with parents. He explained that, I worked those parents then. I worked them, I talked to them, I talked about the value. I put up a bulletin board, a display cabinet myself, on the benefits of school uniforms. Parents who challenged the notion of school uniforms— you know what? I did not cuss them out. I said, "I want to learn from you. Come on,
and let's have a chat. Teach me what you know. Tell me what you think is wrong with school uniforms." And we talked, and we talked, and we talked. 

Allan, through many, many one-to-one conversations, was able to communicate with a large number of parents. The process of communication for school uniforms took place over months and it was time-intensive. He reported that the number of parents in favour by the end was 87%; this increase was largely due to his commitment to those individual discussions. These one-to-one discussions helped him understand the parents’ concerns and the parents to learn about his reasoning.

Like other teachers who were flexible to the parents’ work schedules, Debra made certain that the more formal parent gatherings, such as the school council, were scheduled both at night and during the day. Like this, she managed to accommodate the work schedules of the parents at the school. Debra also provided daycare to help families during these meeting times.

She added,

When I send my newsletters out, there is always one section in my newsletter written by four different parents. And all it says, in their own [respective] language[s], is to get this translated. So for Chinese it would say: to get this translated in Chinese— and it’s written in Chinese—call— and it’s a parent volunteer. And these parent volunteers are very active in our school as far as council [goes], as far as coming in and talking to us about issues or concerns or organizing big events. So we have four parents who do that.
These four parents helped connect the school and parents by translating newsletters but also by representing the different groups in the school. The newsletters are provided in four other languages than English and this is a visual and written reminder to parents in the community that communication between home and school is important. Furthermore, even if the school staff cannot speak to these parents in their mother tongues, these parents are included in the school community.

Tony met with parents over three or four Saturdays so he could listen to their questions and concerns. These parents felt isolated from the school and did not believe that school staff members understood their needs. Meeting with them on Saturdays, a day many principals do not usually work, he emphasized that he valued their input and concerns. As well, he asked these parents about ideas on how to encourage even more parents to attend the school council meeting.

Anna had great difficulty getting parents to attend school council meetings. She discovered, however, that when the school had a movie night the attendance at the school was excellent. Anna came up with an idea.

I’m thinking, you know how they have little commercials before the movie? I’m thinking, okay, if we have another movie night, we’ll talk about literacy or talk about home reading and why it’s important prior to, and then [the] show. It’s a captive audience! You know what? [I thought], I’m going to try that. I’m going to try putting something in and then showing the movie, because it was good. She knew that offering an event for families to partake in was a good opportunity to share with them some information about the school. Anna combined an event parents
wanted with a brief sharing of school information. The shows were a success, too, with more parents learning more about their children’s school lives.

Susan used the monthly school council meetings to communicate with parents but she also used monthly “meet and greets.” In these “meet and greets”, parents, the principal and vice-principal, along with other staff members, sat in a circle and discussed issues. Each person in the circle had an opportunity to talk about anything they wanted to. She remembered,

at the first meet and greet, I had only been here a few weeks, and one of the parents said – it was around the time that they were looking at same-sex marriages, and so one of the parents said out loud in front of everybody, “We really don’t believe in same-sex marriages or anything even slightly like same-sex.” So I laughed, and I said to her, “Oh, that’s good that we’re starting off with a very hard point.” And I said to her that— she had asked me for support for their position—and I said to her that there was no way that I was going to be able to support her position, because it was against human rights and it was against the board’s equity document.

These monthly gatherings provided parents with opportunities to meet with school staff members in a very inclusive setting. There were no assigned seats, and there was an informal and welcoming nature to the meetings. Each person present had ample opportunity to discuss any issue.

Peter needed to find out what were the parents’ and students’ concerns. He sent out letters, used the phone, and met with parents on the playground to gather information.
Peter knew that the personal communication with individual parents was the most effective way to get the feedback he needed. Because he did not rely on any single method of communication, he was able to get a wealth of information from. From this experience, Peter learned that employing a variety of methods is essential to communication with his students’ parents.

**Educating parents about inclusion.** Some of the principals indicated that educating parents about inclusion was an effective strategy. Parents, like staff members, needed to learn about inclusion in order to promote and value it. Karen knew that her school council members were not representative of the cultural and socioeconomic diversity in the school. She talked with them about getting more members from the various groups in the school. Karen explained,

> It wasn’t a matter of them [school council members] being deliberately exclusionary. It was, “Oh, I guess you’re right. I hadn’t really thought about it that way.” I mean, we’re not talking about evildoers who are trying to keep people outside the door. But sometimes you just have to have someone help you notice things because you just get used to things being as they are, you know.

By having that discussion with the school council members, she helped them understand that the status quo of school council membership was not representative of all the groups in the school. Keeping things the same was not an option. Karen was hopeful about the outcome after bringing awareness to people of the injustices and she said,

> I have an optimistic side — [...] I love that quote by Noam Chomsky. I’ll have to find it for you, where he said, “You know, most people if they just have
injustices brought to their attention, you know, they have a spirit of goodwill. It just needs to be brought to their awareness.”

The parents needed to learn about inclusion and exclusion and the effects on the school. Moreover, Karen believed that once parents were aware of the injustices they would be willing to help remedy them. This motivated her to point out inequities where she saw them, while ensuring that she suggested solutions.

Kristin worked to ensure her that her school council members were more aware of the cultural and economic diversity in her school. She lamented,

They [school council members] are not aware, and I don’t think about [the fact] that it is all one economic group [on council], that they are all white. I don’t think that really occurs to them. I don’t think they see it as a problem.

Nonetheless, Kristin continued to work on developing the awareness of her school council members concerning the varying interests and groups in the school. She also worked to ensure these diverse groups were genuinely represented on school council. The challenge in this situation was to get the established council to understand others’ exclusion, when they were white and from a similar, relatively advantaged, socioeconomic group.

Debra also worked on increasing her parents’ awareness of the plight of some of the students in the school. She elaborated that,

Even our parents, they don’t really get what life is for some of their friends [or] their children’s friends. They really don’t. So when I sit down, I have a heart-to-heart discussion with them. You know when I say, “I am sorry I didn’t get back
to you yesterday. I am getting back to you today because I was dealing with this child who has no food.” They go, “Well, what do you mean they have no food? Everyone has food.” I said, “No. Everyone doesn’t have food.” And so [this parent] gets this understanding of when children are stealing lunches, it’s not because they are bad kids. They have no other way of getting the food. So that’s an eye-opening experience for everybody.

Debra used personal conversations with parents to educate them about the lives of some of the students in the school. But she learned that many parents were not aware of the suffering of some of the children in the school.

**Connecting parents with community organizations.** Several principals said that they used community organizations to support inclusion in their elementary schools. Individuals from these organizations worked together with staff members or on their own in the school, to promote inclusion with parents. John mentioned that his community settlement worker, Gita, was vital in helping him connect the parents with the school. He explained,

I could take advantage of her skills and her prominence on the playground to begin to establish relationships, and that worked. Over time, the parents would work through Gita to get to me. And then it became almost— I just described something linear; it became something very, very circular, so lots of success there.

While Gita was not a board employee, she built relationships between the school staff and parents. Parents saw Gita as part of the school, and worked with her before
beginning to dialogue and interact more with John. Gita connected with parents and then worked to support their communication and interaction with the school staff members.

Dave described three examples of how he used community agencies to help include students, parents, and community members in the school. His school was located in one of the poorest areas of Toronto and was affected by Ontario Premier Mike Harris’ cuts. Dave explained,

Everybody in that community was affected, by losing about a fifth of their income, which was already unmanageable to begin with. So the school, at that time, working with community agencies, […] and] we worked with parents. They [staff members] worked with residents and organized an evening for them at the community centre where parents just were able to come and talk about what these cuts meant to them, and just to have a voice around what was happening.

These community meetings took place in the school, and provided the parents with an opportunity to directly meet and work with the various agencies. Dave mentioned that these meetings made staff members and parents aware that they had common interests, and that they could work together. Moreover, by bringing in the community agencies to one central location, Dave made it easier for parents to meet and learn about supports. Second, he invited Somali community workers to come to the school and speak with staff about the civil war in Somalia and the Somalian culture. Staff members learned more about the lives and experiences of their students and how to better support them in school. Third, he met with various community agencies to help his students attend after-school programs in the community. Dave started these initiatives in 2000, the year he
called the “year of the gun”. Parents were truly afraid for their children to be outside after school hours. Community agencies’ programs suffered from a significant lack of after-school student participation because students went straight home after school. Dave added,

We started this thing called “Safe Walk Home,” […] We applied for funding and got it, outside funding. The youth, high school youth, in the community were trained to be walkers, so they went to these training classes about what it meant to be a walker, how to do it. Then the kids, the little kids in the elementary schools, [their] parents would sign them up and it was like a real signing up thing. And, like, each walker would come to a school and pick up kids and then walk them to the after-school program, and then pick them up at the end of their after-school program, and walk them [home]. And, actually, somebody had to sign for them when they got home.

Local high school students walked students to the various after-school events. The solution involved working directly with the parents, community agencies and staff members and together they created a solution. Dave secured funding for this project that included all stakeholders in the solution and even included local high school students in leadership positions. Everyone gained from the solution.

Debra had a community worker who met weekly with parents in the school. Any and all questions and concerns could be raised with this worker. Debra understood that having a forum in which parents discussed issues was important. She explained,
It’s a drop in. And sometimes I am there. I said, “I need to be invited to this.” I will not come in on a regular basis because sometimes parents just need to meet. And if they want to complain about the school, they need to know the principal is not sitting there as they are complaining about the school. So I said, “By invitation, I will come in. I will drop in every once in a while, but by invitation.”

The meetings allowed parents opportunities to meet with an individual not employed by the school board. Debra knew the importance of parents having a “safe place” to discuss and share their concerns about the school. Moreover, she attended these meetings only if she invited. This way, she demonstrated her respect for the autonomy of the discussion group.

Susan mentioned that there were many opportunities and places within the school for parents to meet. She stated that,

We have a parenting centre for parents and young children. We also have on-site three portables that are used by the Somali Women and Children’s Network. And they service not only Somali women, but [...] women from all different nationalities. They teach them English. There are five different levels, and there’s been advocacy there, too, in terms of getting them another portable. And there were many steps that had to happen to get them another portable that they could use on the school property. And they have daycare for the children while they are learning English. They also teach them employability skills so they learn sewing and computer skills.
The community programs within the school provided parents with many different and valuable services to help them in the daily lives. One important part of these programs was the supports for all family members within the school during school hours. She advocated for them to get their own portable so that they would have their own space at the school. This made it convenient for the women to attend after they had dropped their children off at school or at the daycare service affiliated with the program. Moreover, Susan explained that parts of the school were used a community centre at night. She has sought partnerships with three different community organizations to provide the funding for the parenting programs that take place. Susan added,

the school is a hub of activity until around 9:30 at night. There are hundreds of people walking around all the time, and I often will work late. And they often will come see me in the evenings. Like, they’ll poke on the glass, or whatever, they know I’m here so they come to visit me. So the school is always open, and it’s always very, very active. There are lots of people in the building right now, and there’s summer camps for Parks and Rec. So the school is always a hub of community involvement and activity. And it’s a very busy place.

The community programs included the parents in the school and connected them with her. The parents saw the school as the “centre” of the community. Susan devoted time to ensuring that there were these community connections with parents in her school through funding and advocating for space. The school was connected with and represented the needs of the community; parents and students felt that the school belonged to them.
Nina knew that one important practice was to get the parents and the students more involved in the community centre located next door to the school. She worked collaboratively with a local police officer, Susan Charles*, who helped her seek support from local organizations. One of their goals was to engage the students after school in positive programs. But Nina also knew that many families could not afford to pay for these programs after school. Nina sought support to programs that would be affordable to families. She explained,

My husband and I, being former phys ed teachers, came down and trained police officers on how to run a recreational program. So they [these police officers] volunteered for the programs, we trained them. A group of teachers ran arts and crafts at [the community centre] after school one day a week for an hour, and then a mother did a dance class. So there were three nights of the week and that was our start to bring[ing] kids out into the community, and community members out to the kids.

Nina continued to seek more and more support from the community organizations because she could not continue on her own volunteering three nights a week with these after school programs while working as a full-time principal. She included the school superintendent, the superintendent of police, the alderman, and staff from the community centre. The staff at the community centre did not seem to understand why these programs were needed for the kids; that is, community centre staff members did not know how to provide programs to support students’ needs. She had to be very direct and
firm at the meetings with these individuals in order to improve the situation. Nina said that she finally had to tell them,

“I’m a full-time principal trying to run free programs after school. I have a full time [job]! The police officer who was helping me is dead, so it’s me. And I’m fighting the people at the rec centre to understand why we have to do this.” They all kinda looked at me and I said, “I’m willing to keep working on it, but I can’t work on it alone. So I need support from the police, from the city, and from the school board in order to continue.” The meeting kinda came and went, I continued planning through the summer, and then I came back in the fall and the whole staff at [the community] centre had changed over.

Nina’s planning and organizing partner, Susan Charles, lost her battle with cancer and changes were still needed at the community centre. The changes to the community centre were fundamental to the improved programs for the students. Nina stated that the new program coordinator was superb and worked well with her. Nina also involved other community supports to include her parents in the school. The public nurse was in her school during the day on Thursdays to work with mothers. Nina said,

My public health nurse is a savior to me in terms of working with moms. And she does [classes on] mothers’ cooking on a budget, [and] she does mothers’ sewing group. So they have now a beading group where they make jewelry. We can have fifteen moms in there, and so that’s how I connect with my parents, so not in a formal way with school council because they’re not comfortable with
formality. […] We do it [the school council meetings], but really I connect with my parents through these other programs.

She also connected with these parents as part of the school community hub committee which included parents, school, and community centre staff members. The committee met to discuss community issues and solutions. Nina stated that these programs were instrumental in connecting and including parents in the school.

**Promoting Inclusion with Students**

Principals highlighted four different strategies to include students in the school. Student leadership is a key component of promoting inclusion with students. Leadership opportunities and experiences allow students to shape how the school functions on a day-to-day basis. The first three strategies include: older students acting as leaders, student council, and other leadership experiences for students. The fourth strategy involved using specific programs that promoted inclusion with students.

**Using older students as leaders.** Some principals sought out opportunities for older students so that they could have leadership opportunities within the school. These leadership opportunities were not always part of the school’s formal structure and took place in a variety of ways in the school. Nigel stated that there were many difficulties trying to help the special education students in his school feel included. He explained,

We had kids with, in our special-ed classes, who were having terrible social problems at recess. So we found ways to [include them]. We had a thing called “the Super Heroes Club.” where we had social skills groups for those kids.
Nigel said that he had grade eight students take leadership roles to support these students. They worked together to slowly integrate the special education students back into the school yard. In this sense, it was a case of students helping students. The grade eight students, by being in leadership roles, were more cognizant of the special education students’ need for support.

John highlighted how student leaders worked together with the secretary to support ESL students. The school secretary acted as the staff lead on this initiative. These student leaders acted as ESL tutors, working directly with students who needed extra support. The tutors not only supported other students but learned about the ESL students’ school experiences.

Kristin chose her school’s leadership team from students in grades four, five, and six because her school did not have grade seven or eight. These students were involved in the school in a variety of ways. She explained,

the purpose is to have kids the chance to lead an assembly, to do the morning announcements, to see themselves taking charge of various things around the school. So they help out with the primary playday. When we do our jump program in the spring, they are out there helping with that.

These students had ongoing leadership roles in the school in a variety of activities. The students worked together as a leadership team while taking guidance from some staff members. As well, by having students in grade four on the team, there was a complement of experienced and new members each year.
Dave cited the use of a conflict resolution program that involved students in very important leadership positions. He explained,

We didn’t take, like, the kids that were the most conflict-resolution-ready to become the peacemakers. But [we] really tried to make it a mixed group so that there were some of those kids. But there were also kids for whom the training would provide a new way for them to begin thinking about things, and that other kids would all of a sudden see them as peacemakers, as opposed to what they normally saw them as.

It is significant that the students chosen were not always the ones who were the most skilled at resolving disputes. Leadership opportunities in his school did not belong only to students who met already met the role requirements for the position. That is, some students chosen for the peacemakers were not ready for the position but staff members believed the leadership program would provide them with excellent training. This program gave all students a chance to demonstrate that they could contribute something positive to the school community.

Nina discussed that grade six, seven, and eight students were involved in numerous leadership activities around the school. These students organized and led school dances, spirit days, and fundraising activities. By having the students involved in leadership activities throughout the school year, there was a greater likelihood of student leadership becoming part of the daily fabric of the school.

Matt was principal of a two different schools within one building. One school was an alternative middle school and other a multicultural junior school. When he first
arrived there were no leadership activities for students and very little interaction between the two schools. Matt elaborated,

When I first got there, there was nothing. Now there is a leadership program for the grade eight—because it’s a middle school—and they work once a week in a classroom in the junior school. [There’s a] kind of a buddy system with some of the other kids, and they have run play date again as the leadership program to have them run the play date for the younger kids.

The senior students of the middle school visited the other school’s junior students. This structure provided leadership experiences for students while at the same time connected the two schools together. Students in both schools started to interact with each other during the school day through classroom learning support or through helping with recreational activities.

**Using a student council in the school.** Several principals cited the importance of having the student council in their schools. Student councils provided students with leadership opportunities and a voice to discuss student needs. The student council, in many schools, was a more formal structure that involved democratic elections and specific roles for student leadership.

Todd used student representatives from each classroom to form the school government. The school government focused on raising money for charities and developing ideas for spirit days. Todd discussed how important it was for the students to understand how privileged their lives were. The students led and organized these
activities and gained an understanding the lives of people who were struggling financially.

Karen had two different student populations in her school: the extended French and the neighbourhood students. One of the issues that her school faced was that these two groups of students did not often interact with each. She made sure that the student council had representatives from all classes. Also, the student council members needed guidance from staff members to ensure that the activities they choose or created were ones that allowed the talents of both student populations to shine. Even though the student council members were evenly distributed between the groups, it was vital that the decisions and discussions were monitored by a staff member to ensure that one group did not dominate the discussion or the decisions.

John indicated that student council members were vital in providing the students with a voice in the school. He added that he provided the school council members with a goal to raise money for the “Kenyan Adopt a Village” initiative. Having a common goal to work toward is one method of bringing a student council membership together. But John stated that it was important to work directly with the student council members, so that they learned how to provide reasons for their opinions and ideas for discussion. Student council members needed training on how to conduct themselves during the meetings.

Dave had regular meetings with grade eight students. These meetings were either led by staff or student council members. The student council members
would bring up the issues that they wanted to talk about that were important to them, things they thought should change. [...] Sometimes, they would come up with whatever the idea was, and then they would come and meet with me. We would discuss what was going to happen, how it would be implemented. [I was always] very positive in terms of letting them understand how change can happen. And that it doesn’t always have to be [top-down], that [the] student voice is important in a school.

The students had ongoing opportunities to voice their opinions about the school. Students felt comfortable discussing issues and then presenting these ideas to her. The dialogue was two-way between students and staff members; these discussions provided students with input into how to improve the school and also how the change process operated.

Tony discussed the need to provide ongoing training for student council members so that they could be more effective. He explained,

You want kids involved, you want them to have a say, but oftentimes, they’re not sophisticated enough to have the proper say. “Oh yeah, we want dances.” Okay, you want dances. We started a student council. And first, we started it with younger kids. So we had grade five to grade eight kids involved in our student council. […] We provided those kids with leadership training, as well.

Tony indicated that the training for these students helped them improve the way they were doing things within the school. Students had the ideas, but needed to develop their skills at organizing and implementing initiatives. By having a variety of different grades
on the student council, he ensured that there would students who would be able to apply the leadership training in the years to come.

Peter included the student council members on certain committees in the school. He elaborated that,

We would often invite the student council representative to sit on some committees that were appropriate for them to do so. So we would often try to develop inclusion between the staff and students. There were three committees where we included parents and students on them to develop inclusion amongst all three.

Peter gave the example of a healthy food committee that involved parents, staff members, and student council members. The student council members were included in the decision making and discussion surrounding promoting healthy food eating. Having students participate on school-wide committees is an important way to ensure their voices are heard.

**Providing students other leadership experiences.** Some principals gave examples of student leadership that were less formal than student council. These experiences could be regular occurrences in the school or short-term initiatives or programs. Brent ensured that all of his most senior students were involved in leadership experiences and training. For example, he mentioned that grade seven students took leadership roles in the health and anti-bullying initiatives. Brent added,

I’ve never been in favor of student councils. Simply because they do become cliquish and elitist. And you get a few popular kids [who] get voted in all the
time, and they tend not to be as productive [in terms of] simply sharing leadership as broadly as possible amongst the school. And so what we do, for example, is [that] all of our grade eights participate in leadership opportunities throughout the school. […] All of our grade eight and seven students in the schools I’ve been in are assigned, as part of their community service for their confirmation preparation, to be readers on for the PA announcements and the “O Canada,” and all the different elements that go on in the school. So we try to give our kids as much profile as possible.

Brent did not believe that the usual student councils were not effective at representing the students since the councils tended to be elitist. One of his goals was to share the leadership experiences amongst his students so that no one student is singled out or favoured. Brent added that he wanted to ensure those students who usually did not have opportunities to lead had positions of leadership. He wanted to be more inclusive of the leadership training so that all students would have these experiences.

Susan stated that there were a variety of leadership experiences available to her students. She explained, “The students’ voices, I think, also are heard through the ‘We’re Erasing Prejudice for Good’ program.” The students were able to take leadership roles within this program, which entailed WHAT, and worked collaboratively with staff members for a whole-school initiative.

Nina mentioned that a number of senior students in the school worked directly with two or three staff members for the year. Together they designed and organized different activities for the school.
Craig said that the school’s “Global Awareness Club” provided leadership and learning experiences for his students. He explained,

The Global Awareness [Club] will tell you about the latest holiday in some culture… it’s more intense than a club; it’s close to the school student council. So that’s the perk, they get to do that. They do the work or create the posters. They know how to have some guest speakers in. They have special suppers. They’ll stay after school and do different kinds of food that are not their own culture and they’ll cook it all up and celebrate.

These students participated in organizing the celebrations and sharing of other cultures and histories within the school. The club was open to any student in the school and the leadership experiences were connected to developing an understanding of the world.

**Using specific school programs to include students.** Some principals identified programs within the school that worked to include students. These programs were sometimes used in specific classrooms and sometimes were school-wide. Nigel outlined how he wanted to integrate his developmental disability students into the school. He found that using reverse integration, bringing regular stream kids into the developmentally disabled children’s class, helped forge connections between the two groups. Nigel explained,

I mean, just finding ways for integration is another piece. One of the things that we’ve done is many of our kids are just simply not capable of integration. If you have […] an intermediate D.D. class, a developmental disability class, some of those kids are 14 and working at a pre-kindergarten level. So how do you
integrate them? Well, one of the things that we have done is [that] we’ve done some reverse integration. So we’ve brought kids from other classes into their classroom.

Using reverse integration was extremely effective because the developmentally disabled students and regular stream students had opportunities to interact. Rather than having these D.D. students feel like strangers within the mainstream students’ classroom, the mainstream students met them on their ground. Without this reverse integration the developmentally disabled students would be isolated from the other students in the school.

Todd mentioned that his school offered numerous intramural activities for students who did not make the school teams. As well, there was a large instrumental music program with opportunities for each and every student.

Debra explained that the school is using the Tribes program to promote inclusion. All staff members have been trained and it is used in all classrooms. As well, her school used school ambassadors to provide opportunities for students to welcome students and staff new to the school. Susan also cited how the Tribes program promoted inclusion for students in her school. She explained,

There are community circles happening in all of the classrooms on a very regular basis. Which is all based on students’ voices being heard, and then being able to speak up. And I do try […] as much as I can to participate in the community circles.
Students are able to discuss and share their ideas and experiences with other students and staff members on an ongoing basis.

Nina also noted the important role the Tribes program played in supporting inclusion in her school. Her whole staff and the community centre staff have been trained in Tribes. Nina stated that,

Tribes is all about respect, respecting your community, respecting your peers, [and] respecting yourself. […] We’re hoping through this big Tribes initiative, [if] we push it through the entire school and the Community Centre, and [if] we’re all talking, [with] mutual respect…that’s where we’re hoping to see the change.

The students and adults in the school and community centre used the same ideas, structure, and language to promote inclusion. In the case of both Susan and Nina, the structure was the Tribes program, which facilitated informal gatherings where students could feel empowered in their school community.

Summary

The principals identified the several strategies to promote inclusion with staff members, parents and students. Most of the strategies connected directly with the staff members while fewer ones were cited for parents and students.

**Strategies for staff members.** One of the most significant inclusionary strategies employed by the principals was thinking about leadership and communicating these views with staff members. The main component of these views was the movement away from the “hero-leader” leadership model. The principals encouraged staff
members’ participation in the daily operation of the school. Principals cited the use of committees and flexible leadership teams to have input and decision-making power.

The principals also cited the need to clearly explain their feelings concerning inclusion to staff members. In some of the examples, they shared their feelings when they first started at a school and needed to counter the traditional exclusionary practices in the school. In these cases, they explained to staff members how they felt about the specific practice and made it clear that this practice would not continue. The principals did not try to build or seek consensus on the decision to halt exclusionary practices within the school; they made the decision and used positional power to enforce it.

The principals highlighted the need to “walk the talk” by modeling inclusive behaviour. They had to model inclusive behaviour daily, because everyone in the school would be watching to see if their actions matched their words. Principals modeled inclusive behaviour by making changes to exclusionary structures or practices and leading the development of inclusionary ones. Modeling inclusive behaviour did not always produce the desired results in the short term; that is, the impact of practicing inclusive behaviour took time to surface in others’ behaviours.

The principals mentioned that having an “open door” policy was important to promoting inclusion. They made certain that staff members felt comfortable coming into their offices to speak with them. Principals cited the importance of being available to staff members as much as possible throughout the day.

Principals also indicated that listening to staff members and gathering information was an important practice to promote inclusion. The principals learned how the staff
members saw the world and found out about their ideas and concerns. Some principals used surveys, while others used initial interviews with individual staff members to glean information.

Listening and gathering information is connected directly with the next strategy, which emphasized that principals needed to know their staff members. That is, principals were aware of the professional and personal lives of the staff members—and aware of the importance of this knowledge. In response, staff members knew that principals cared about their personal lives, as well as their work professionally. Some principals met individually with staff members at the start of the school year, while others had frequent conversations that included components of both the teachers’ personal and professional lives. Principals learned about staff members’ strengths and weaknesses, and sometimes the reasons why a certain staff member was not participating in the school initiatives.

Hiring staff members who support inclusive strategies was also cited by principals as being a way to promote inclusion. They looked for staff members who connected well with the students and the community. Some principals had seen staff members teaching during their teaching practicum, and then hired them directly out of teacher’s college. Also, staff members were hired to complement the skill set already on staff, including to make the staff more culturally representative.

Talking with staff members about inclusion was also a valuable practice to promote inclusion. Sometimes these discussions took place during formal meetings, such as staff meetings or on professional activity days, while others arose less formally in
daily discussions. The principals did not always lead the discussions, as sometimes community members, social workers, or school psychologists could be involved. Some of the topics included gaining a more comprehensive understanding of students’ lives and experiences, and the traditional practices within the school.

It was also critical to provide staff members with opportunities to learn about how to apply inclusion in the school context. That is, the principals designed experiences that would highlight inclusion in school. One example outlined how staff members learned to differentiate instruction and how to use critical literacy within the classroom. Whole-school initiatives focusing on inclusion helped staff members gain valuable insights.

Staff leadership within the school helped include individual staff members. A key component of this area was that the principals allowed teachers to have the freedom and the space within the school to lead. Principals did not try to control the initiatives or how the staff members organized and led them. Principals also searched for leadership experiences within the school that would connect well with individual staff members’ talents and interests.

But staff leadership also took form in committees and groups within in the school. The principals encouraged the development of committees in the school; some of the committees planned initiatives or were responsible for specific areas of the school, such as the budget or supporting special education students. Consistent with individual staff leadership, the principals ensured that they provided the committees with the power to make decisions, even if these decisions did not always align with their own.
Principals also cited the effectiveness of whole-school activities in promoting inclusion amongst all stakeholders, including staff members. Staff members led the majority of these whole-school activities. The purpose of many of these whole-school activities was to develop awareness in students, staff members, and parents of those individuals and groups who are typically marginalized in society. Some of the activities were based on year-long learning—such as a focus on African heritage—while others were short-term, with an emphasis on fundraising for economically disadvantaged people.

**Strategies for parents.** Many principals stated the importance of using parents in the school as links to other parents in the school. These “linking parents”, by listening to parents in the school, helped principals communicate and connect with parents. Sometimes these parents represented specific cultural groups that had been marginalized. The principals gained information from these linking parents on how to support all students and families in the school community.

Principals also highlighted the importance of working collaboratively with school council members. The school councils sought, with guidance from principals, to include more parents in the school, particularly on school council. Principals stated that having a strong chairperson who valued inclusion was critical.

But not all school council members were aware of the dimensions of inclusion and exclusion, so principals sometimes had to educate them about inclusion. Teaching parents about inclusion meant that they could later value and promote it. Principals
highlighted how they worked with school council members to develop their knowledge of inclusion.

Principals used community organizations and agencies to promote inclusion with parents. Individuals from outside organizations worked with staff members or on their own within the school to provide services that included parents. Principals sought out these supports for parents; settlement workers or community workers had space within the school to support families.

**Strategies for students.** Principals indicated that they used students as leaders within the school to support school-wide practices as well as students who were struggling academically or socially. These older students led assemblies, initiatives, or helped other students: they had important leadership roles in the school. Some of these students received leadership training to prepare them for the specific roles.

There were also more formal opportunities for student leadership in the school, such as student councils. The student councils were democratically elected and provided students with a voice to discuss student needs. Students felt comfortable expressing their opinions to staff members, including the principal. Student council members represented different grades in the school and led charity initiatives for marginalized groups.

There were specific programs within the school that worked to include students. These programs were used in specific classrooms or in entire schools. Specifically, staff members were trained to use the “Tribes” program in all the classes, which many principals said provided great encouragement and empowerment for students to participate in schools.
Chapter Seven: The Impact of Inclusive Efforts

This chapter explores principals’ perceptions of the impact of inclusive efforts on students, parents, staff members and themselves. That is, what are the results of inclusive practices in the school with regard to students, parents, staff members and the principals themselves? The first three groups – students, parents, and staff members- are aligned with positive outcomes while principals identified most negative outcomes for themselves.

Students

Student involvement in the school. A number of principals said students’ being involved in the school was an indicator of inclusion. Nigel discussed how he saw students involved in various activities around the school. He cited one example of funding they received for a critical media studies initiative. Eight grade six students, who were generally not involved in the school, chose to join. This initiative gave these grade six students an opportunity to participate in a school activity that was directly aligned with their interests. The school also looked to provide activities that met a variety of different student interests; some of these activities were outside of the regular school athletic teams. He elaborated that,

When I look at the badminton team, [the] grade five [and] six, badminton team, [... I see] a lot of kids who don’t normally come on our sports teams. And they’re in there, representing the school at badminton, with a really great teacher. When we teach kids playground games, and they’re involved out there using
At his school, there were a variety of different activities to appeal to students’ diverse interests. He witnessed the group of grade six students participating in the school because they were interested in the program. As well, there were playground games taught to students and he witnessed these students using them. These special playground games, by their very design, included other students.

Karen mentioned that she saw more integration on the playground, which she saw manifest in the fact that more students were being included in playground activities.

Allan cited the example concerning his special education students at recess as an indicator of inclusion. The special-needs students typically were excluded from many of the activities on the playground; as a result, these students often did not enjoy being outside with the other students. But after implementing some initiatives designed to break down social exclusion, positive changes took place, and he remarked that soon he saw fewer special-needs students with frowns on their faces and playing by themselves.

Debra noted that there was a marked improvement in student discipline in the school because students were interacting better with each other. She added,

Very few suspensions are happening now, so that children are in school, as opposed to not being in school. When you walk through the halls, most children are engaged in whatever the activities the children are doing. When you are in the schoolyard, very few fights happen in the schoolyard. Most children are playing or working with each other.

Inclusion, in this sense, was something that was seen school-wide in the way students...
interacted with each other. The students were also engaged by what was happening in the classroom. In this sense then, students were more engaged throughout the whole school day. School attendance has improved and the students are interacting with each other in more positive ways.

Tony also discussed how the interactions amongst students improved over time. He explained,

In the first year, we noticed that, for example, we would have indoor recess when it rained and the portable kids would all come into the gym and sit there. And it was very clear, the groups: black, black, some white, Filipino. [The divisions between ethnicities was] very clear. By the fifth year, that was not the case. It was mixed groups all over the place so that was one thing: that kids were starting to get it.

Early on, there were clear divisions amongst students based on their ethnicity. After Tony implemented initiatives, the students began including each other and interacting with each other more than in previous years so these divisions based on ethnicity were no longer so evident. Tony also saw student initiative as another sign of inclusion taking place. He stated, “The student council would come now with proposals for activities that they want to do. Kids coming and feeling that they are comfortable enough that they can ask to start a club.” Tony recognized that the student council members were more vocal about ideas for activities in the school. Students knew they had a “say” in the school and started creating clubs and other activities. The other important point was that students felt comfortable coming in and discussing their ideas with him.
Peter spoke about the committee work that students at his school were involved in. He said, “We would often invite the student council representative to sit on some committees that were appropriate for them to do so. There were three committees that included parents and students on them.” The student council representative provided the students’ perspective in a forum with staff members and parents. He saw the students having input on the committees as a clear indicator that inclusion was taking place. As a result, students felt empowered in their school in a way that they had not previously.

Craig cited that numerous teams, clubs, and activities happening in the school as evidence of inclusion. His school was connected with the “Freedom Writers” program; his staff and students had opportunities to work directly with the teacher who the movie was made about. This writing program encouraged students to connect their thoughts and experiences with their written work. He added,

The music presentations we do, we have all kinds of different reflections of kids and their likes and dislikes. I see kids giving talks and presentations. You go into one of the great classrooms, so that it was one of the freedom writers and you got a girl that’s talking about racism hopefully with her class. I mean, that blows me away. These kids are understanding and seeing what’s bad about it, [and] how they’re going to change it in their class and their school.

Students were expressing their ideas and concerns within the classrooms; one key element here is that staff members were members of that audience. That is, the students were able to share their life experiences, not only with their peers, but also with the staff members within the classrooms. As well, students had influence over the different
activities that were offered in the school; the activities in the school reflected the students’ interests.

Supporting students. Some of the principals indicated that a positive consequence of promoting inclusion was seeing how students were supported in the school. Nigel, for instance, said that when inclusion worked the students were impacted positively. He explained that this meant

Our kids feel more comfortable. Our kids are more successful. I think it’s hard to be successful in a place where you feel that you’re not valued or not respected or not wanted and not part of what’s going on.

Nigel saw that the students benefited from feeling included in and belonging to the school. Students were more successful in school and they felt more connected with the school.

Todd saw an improvement in the school environment over the years he has been principal of the school. Particularly, he has seen more support in place to address the many different needs of special education students. Todd elaborated,

I’ve seen, in the five years that I’ve been there, a bigger acceptance. We have an awful lot of two and three designation students for spec[ial] ed. and when I first arrived there, they were not [thriving] -- tutors had difficulty with them, students had difficulty with them.

Some of these special education students had two or more designations [through the IPRC process] that made it extremely challenging for others to accept them. Over time, he has seen an increase in the level of acceptance towards these students.
Karen discussed how powerful it was to see students beginning to include other students who had tended to be on the periphery before. The students took deliberate steps to make sure other students were no longer excluded. This was especially important in that students took independent steps to include other students, without any pressure or encouragement from teachers.

John indicated that he saw the “quiet kids” participating and saw more students engaged in leadership. He explained,

Students feel safe and confident enough to engage in deep, critical conversations with adults. So the students learn to say, “You know what, I don’t agree with you,” but in a respectful manner. And I think that that’s a positive consequence. In terms of negative, I think that we have to have constant diligence, period, in terms of how students are interacting.

John noticed that students were involved more in discussions with staff members; in some of the instances the students disagreed with staff members. Students felt confident enough to voice their opinions with staff members even when these opinions differed.

Debra discussed how her staff members looked after each student as if he/she were their own. It used to be that if there was a problem with the student, he/she would be sent to the office for the principal. But then she began to see staff members advocating for all students. Debra explained that staff members now are starting initiatives and taking ownership for all students. She added that staff members now say, “Let me just take this. Because I started off those initiatives for you, let me follow up” —even though this child is not in their class—“Let me just follow up
with this. And we’ll fill you in on what’s happening.” So [it’s] a whole team approach; every child knows that no matter what staff they go to, that staff can provide support to them. And that staff can also communicate information back to whoever needs to hear it. So the children know it doesn’t matter. It’s not like one staff will turn a blind eye, where it used to be, and another staff will help you.

The students benefited because they experienced a sense of community in the school; any of the staff members would be interested and committed to helping them. The staff members worked as a team to support the students’ needs. The team approach on staff created a community of support for students.

Peter mentioned that there were fewer fights between students. He elaborated to say that he had seen,

far fewer issues around either ethnic or racial lines, [and greater] student harmony in the yard. Kids who typically wouldn’t get along very well now [are] getting along better [and demonstrate] a much better understanding, especially of those kids who are special ed. Typically, you’d see, in the past, an autistic kid just walking the yard by himself. Now [this kid] has people walking with him because we’ve promoted friendship and a support system for that.

Students were getting along better with each other and there were fewer difficulties between students of different cultural backgrounds. Students were also taking the initiative to support special education students who were previously isolated and excluded.
Parents

**Parent involvement in the school.** Many principals stated parent involvement in the school was evidence that inclusion was taking place. For Nigel, an important indicator was seeing parents coming to the school to raise issues and concerns with school staff. Parents felt comfortable enough to visit the school and discuss their feelings. As well, he noted the number of people showing up for events and activities as another piece; the numbers reflected that many parents felt included in the school.

Debra also mentioned parents feeling comfortable discussing issues with staff members as a sign of inclusion. She added,

> We have parents who come in and voice their concerns to staff members. And so we know that they are participating. Whether it’s good, bad, or indifferent, they are participating. When I send home newsletters with a tear-off section, we get most of them back. Even if they can’t come, they’ll check-off no, I can’t come; whereas before, we’d get nothing.

Parents felt comfortable to share their concerns with staff members. Moreover, parents did not have to be physically in the school to be involved; they signed the forms to communicate to the school they received the information. She also highlighted that parents are in the school more for school council meetings and literacy nights; she estimated that 200 parents (out of 250 students) came out for a school activity.

Anna stated that there were more parents attending events such as the monthly assemblies celebrating students after she made a concerted effort to get parents more involved in school activities. The assemblies united the parents and the school staff
members to focus on student success.

This chapter examines the positive and negative consequences principals experienced as a result of their attempts to promote inclusion in their schools. The positive consequences were centred on the changes and improvements principals saw in their schools. The negative consequences, on the other hand, tended to be centred directly on the respondent.

**Staff Members**

**Helping staff members.** Several principals discussed the impact promoting inclusion had on their staff members. Principals were happy to say they saw positive changes in staff members’ behaviours. Todd mentioned that he saw his staff members working more as a “team.” There was much more common assessment and sharing of best pedagogical practices amongst the teachers. But he also saw how the staff learned and supported each other with special education students. Todd elaborated that,

We’ve got a lot of autistic kids now — […] that of course don’t have assistance with them. And so as a result, we’ve […] we’ve gone through training to be able to learn about different strategies that we could put into place in the classroom to accommodate these kids.

Staff members worked collaboratively to ensure these special education students were supported and included in discussions and the school.

John said that she saw many more staff members taking leadership positions and responsibilities in the school. As well, staff members viewed students in much more positive ways and devoted more time to listening to them. Debra mentioned that her staff
members worked more as a team to support student needs. Staff members used to expect the administrators, or the student’s homeroom teacher, to solve a problem. Now staff members are working together with all students. Students could then rely on all staff members to help.

Anna indicated that she witnessed more staff members voicing their opinions to her and amongst themselves. These staff members provided her with both negative and positive feedback. She explained,

I’ve got a few devil’s advocates who will say things, and we banter back and forth. And to me, because if they don’t say [any]thing, then they say things to me, then they say things in the parking lot or they say thing over here. And I’ve often said, you know what, let me know. Tell me. Bring it on.

Anna said that at first staff members were not comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions but slowly they adjusted. She would rather them being comfortable speaking to her rather than simply discussing the issues in the parking lot or in her absence; Anna wanted staff members to speak their minds with her. Staff members also provided her with positive ideas on how to make the school a better place.

Susan noticed a very positive improvement in the way her staff members worked together. Staff members became more supportive of each other, but their learning has also been affected. She explained that,

I think that the depth of understanding in terms of equity […] has increased ten-fold, at least, since I’ve arrived. […] I mean, equity is always a life journey to
me, but I think that people — it’s much more at the forefront of people’s intellect [now]. And, hopefully, their emotional understanding of it, I hope.

Staff members focused more on issues of equity and how equity is applied daily in the school.

**Principals**

While there were several positive results of inclusive efforts, there were also negative outcomes that pertained directly to principals. That is, principals discussed how their emotional and physical well-being suffered.

**Discouragement.** Several principals discussed feeling discouraged while trying to promote inclusion in their schools. Nigel admitted he felt the current era has been the worst time ever for administrators. He explained,

> I mean, the discouraging thing is, […] the focus of the Ministry [of Education] at the moment. Well, there is one extremely big negative piece and that’s, I suppose, and that’s the way in which it takes up so much of our time. That—nobody feels job satisfaction when you feel you’re always scurrying and you — […] don’t have the time to follow through on things.

Nigel did not have the time to complete or focus on what he believed were the most important components of teaching and learning. He was discouraged that other tasks outlined by the Ministry occupied too much of the day; these tasks prevented him from devoting more time to promoting inclusion.

Karen outlined an experience with a classroom teacher that discouraged her. The teacher witnessed a student being treated inappropriately and excluded by other students.
Rather than dealing with the situation, this teacher decided to ignore the incident. Karen was on yard duty when the incident happened, so she was able to support that student, yet she wondered how many incidents occurred when she was not around and were not followed up by staff members. Karen also mentioned being forced to comply with the target setting set forth by the Board. She explained that,

I was in a school where that neighbourhood population, where the kids in grade one to three, the turnover in a three-year period was over 70 percent. So-- and I have a background in statistics so, I mean, even from a mathematical point of view, forget the social justice. […] But the social justice thing was the most important, too. Because, I mean, how do you look at a child in grade three and predict what score he’s going to get in grade three? Or one in [grade] one and predict what score he’ll get in grade three when you have no idea what kind of family turmoil and, you know [is going on]? I mean, I had a grade-eight student who witnessed-- I don’t know that you want to use this example, but I had a grade-eight student who — […] witnessed her mother’s boyfriend trying to hang her from the rafters in the basement of their house. So what does an EQAO score mean? It’s just so inhumane to turn everything into numbers like that.

Karen wrote a letter to her superintendent outlining the reasons why these numbers were not ethical. Her superintendent replied that she must comply with the order. Karen was discouraged that the Board emphasis on quantitative targets kept the focus away from issues of equity and inclusion.

John discussed his discouragement when staff members believed that students
need to fit program instead of the program fitting the child. That is, the educators needed to adapt the program to fit each child instead of the child adapting to the program. He added,

There is an emotional toll. If you are hearing someone squawk about integration, then there is emotional toll because, […] I fundamentally believe that an inclusionary school environment is necessary. So if someone is behaving in a way that kind of confronts, [or] goes against something that you have as a fundamental belief, there is a negative consequence there.

Staff members complained about the special education students being integrated in the classes; this complaining went directly against what John believed about inclusion.

Kristin said that in her school board there seemed to be an “over-prescription” of curriculum and getting the students’ reading levels up. There was little room for discussion that students had different experiences and talking about these experiences. She was frustrated with how her board implemented the Ministry of Education directives. Kristin added,

We have virtually no conversations in our school board ever. […] You go to a system meeting, and you are to sponge it in, and go back, and spit it out. We are not to have a conversation about how would that work in my school and should it work, and definitely not should it work – that would be a kiss of death to say “should this be done in my school?”

All schools needed to implement the Ministry strategies in a singular way, with little or no discussion. The emphasis from board—via the Ministry of Education—had little to
do with issues of inclusion and more on compliance with Ministry directives.

Anna described feeling like she was “spinning her wheels” with certain parents who did not want to be included. She stated that,

I think I’m hoping that, because I give them as much information as they need and probably too much information, [they’ll eventually come around]. Because I’m not one to hide anything, I figure, we’re all in this together and we’re all here for the kids. But […] I honestly think that there are people that don’t want to be included. They don’t want to be part of it. I think that’s [just how things are] — you do these things, you plan things, and as I said, you get three people.

Anna said that some parents simply did not want to come into the school; these parents believed it was the school’s job to “look after” the child.

Peter outlined that his experiences at school were sometimes like a roller-coaster ride. He said,

There were some days that I felt the staff was just falling apart, that they were divided, that they were not on the same page, that they refused to support each other, let alone me. Yeah, there were many days like that, and then there were other days where it was better…

Not being able to always see the staff acting in supportive ways was demoralizing for him. But it was also challenging because there was a lack of consistent behaviour from staff members.

Matt endured conflict with staff members who did not accept the movement towards a more inclusive environment. He added that,
You get pushed back, either with them, or between them and other people. I mean, [it’s] a part of the consequences, I think. Some of them have an awakening because they have a desire to help but needed some information, needed some education, and some encouragement.

Matt provided staff members with added support to help speed up their learning curve on inclusion. But even with this support, there was still conflict with certain staff members who did not want the change to occur.

**Fatigue/Exhaustion.** Several principals discussed feeling exhausted or “burnt out” from the demands of trying to promote inclusion in their schools. Nigel stated that he did not pursue inclusion as much as he should due to the cumulative effect of his efforts on his job as principal. He stated,

> You get burnt out because of the cumulative effect of the job… I have two schools and the total special ed is like three schools [in its demands]. I mean, — […] it’s absolutely not possible to do the job that I’m doing this year. It’s just not possible to do it effectively. You make the best of it that you can. You try to do the best that you can with what you have to work with, with what’s going on, and you go from there.

Nigel indicated that he tried to balance what he thought was important and what other organizations or institutions believed were important.

Brent has endured many negative consequences from his promotion of inclusion. He explained,
I’ve been threatened, I’ve been intimidated, I’ve been passed over for promotion repeatedly. I’ve been really ostracized in my own school system over the 35 years I’ve been with them. Ostracized not only by senior administrators, but by other principals and administrators who don’t believe in inclusion, or want to, I guess, lead in a comfortable, status quo manner. Because it’s easier. […] Leading change is much more difficult than living [in] a status quo. And many of my colleagues just simply want to leave the status quo. But authority’s a powerful thing, and the power of leadership, in terms of formal authority, is a powerful thing as well to suppress dissent. And […] I’ve paid a huge emotional price in terms of stress. And the emotional negatives […] have come from constant rejection and being intimidated by senior administrators when I speak out.

Brent’s health was compromised because of the ongoing stress. He advocated for inclusion but not only did the senior administration not support him, they ostracized and marginalized him.

Dave said that his role was incredibly intense and compared well with an emergency room doctor. He elaborated that,

I don’t think I could have that job for many more years than I did it. Like, it’s just too intense and I think to do it the way I think it should be done is really intense. To do it the way most people do it, it’s not so intense. They close their doors. They don’t talk to anybody and they follow the rules.

The position took its toll on him and he indicated that most people would not have found it so demanding because they would not have left their office or challenged the rules.
Debra stated that a big consequence for her had been the time it took to promote inclusion. This time has taken a toll on her family because she has spent so much time working on school-related matters. Nina also indicated that there has been an impact on her and her family. She explained,

They [her family members] admire for what I do, they’re very proud of me, and that allows me to keep doing it, sometimes at their cost. But I am a mother first, and I say that to everybody in this building. You must a mother first if you have a family, and this place is second. But I’ve got a good family that allows me to really give a lot here because they’re doing great.

Nina’s family has been affected by the time and work involved with her promoting inclusion at school.

Summary

Principals said that their attempts at inclusion were having an impact on students and staff members. They indicated that staff members were working more collaboratively with each other and the students. As well, principals mentioned that staff members became more aware of inclusion. Principals described how students were more accepting and inclusive of each other.

The most common response amongst principals identified students participating more in school activities. These activities ranged from more interactions on the playground to activities that included students who were typically excluded. Moreover, the principals witnessed more positive social interactions amongst the student populations. Students also became more involved in the decisions of the school through
sharing ideas on committees and voicing their opinions to staff members. A few principals stated that parents were becoming more involved in the school. They cited the evidence of a larger parent turnout at various activities to more communication with them from home.

But there were also negative consequences for principals. These negative consequences were centred directly on the principals themselves. Principals reported feeling discouraged about not having the time to promote inclusion; this lack of time was due directly to board and Ministry of Education directives and initiatives. Principals also reported feeling discouraged by the ongoing resistance by some staff members who did not want the change to a more inclusive climate to occur. Principals also discussed feelings of fatigue and exhaustion. They described the physical, mental, and emotional challenges to trying to promote inclusion given the myriad of other demands of the job.
Chapter Eight: Barriers and Facilitators

This chapter examines principals’ perceptions about the barriers they encountered in the promotion of the inclusion, as well as the facilitators of inclusion in their schools. Barriers limit or prevent principals promoting inclusion in schools. Facilitators, on the other hand, help and support principals nurturing and building inclusion. First, this chapter will describe the barriers against inclusion. Second, this chapter will describe how staff members and parents act as facilitators of inclusion.

Principals’ Perceptions of Barriers against the Promotion of Inclusion

Principals indicated that they face several barriers when trying to promote inclusion in their schools. These barriers include: 1). Staff members’ resistance to change; 2). Staff members’ lack of understanding of students’ lives; 3). Students’ socioeconomic status; 4). Parents who did not feel comfortable with the school; 5). Schools’ lack of autonomy to make decisions; 6). District school boards have foci other than promoting inclusion; and 7). Lack of support from the Ministry of Education.

Staff members’ resistance to change. Many principals cited staff members’ resistance to change as a significant barrier to the promotion of inclusion in the school. This resistance can take the form of disagreement, inertia, or subversion as the school moves towards more inclusive practices and ways of thinking. Nigel indicated that there were staff members who simply did not agree with him on issues of equity in the school. He explained that,

You face [the] barriers of people who don’t, fundamentally, agree. Who actually think that, you know, the reason that there’s all these black kids in special ed. is
either because they’re not as smart as white kids, which nobody ever really articulates….Or that the conditions within that community are such that they are to blame for the problems that exist. So that’s a fundamental piece.

Some of these staff members in Nigel’s school believed that black students belong in special education because they are not as smart as white students. As well, there was a feeling among some staff members that they are to blame for their socioeconomic situations. In other words, the system is “just” and the people – black students and people living in the community – deserve what they get and where they are. Nigel added that he argued his point with these staff members. He expressed to them what he expected in terms of their behaviours. Nonetheless, he lamented that,

You can’t control somebody’s mind, but you can control, to a certain extent, what they do. I don’t think that’s an equitable or fair practice. [And…whether people just play the game is another issue. It’s one of the difficulties we always have is whether people really fundamentally change what they believe and think or whether they just appear to.

He was hopeful that some staff members’ resistance over time would lessen, but he was not sure whether this was due to compliance or due to their enhanced understanding of the reasons for the change. Sometimes staff members’ compliance with the equity initiative is all that can achieved, especially over the short term. Nevertheless, Nigel asserted his point and maintained his emphasis on equity.

Karen also discovered that there were staff members who were “normalized into a certain way of doing things.” That is, staff members were used to behaving and thinking
in certain ways within the school. These actions and patterns of thought, she found, were not always conducive to promoting inclusion. A related problem, Karen added, was that no one had confronted these staff members in the past. Not only had the behaviours gone unchallenged—and were, therefore, thoroughly entrenched—staff members were not accustomed to self-reflection on issues of equity. An important point here is that these patterns of behaviour could have been weakened had they been confronted earlier.

Allan identified what he described as the biggest barrier of all: the “saboteur minority” on staff. He also described how staff members became comfortable with behaving in a certain way because things had not changed for several years. Allan added that he continually confronted the one or two staff members in the school who just seem to be contentious and oppositional, regardless of what the issue is. If it's black, they say white. If it's up, they say down. Unfortunately, whether it's a character thing, whether it's a personality trait, those saboteurs often tend to be loud, aggressive, and confident people—and they silence the majority. So in that sense alone, getting the majority voice to be heard or segments of the majority who have important things to say…

The saboteurs fought against the direction of the school and administrator actions. These saboteurs’ aggressive actions intimidated other staff members from speaking up. Allan had to work on getting the majority of staff members’ to voice their ideas and issues in order to battle those two saboteurs. It was important not only to confront the saboteurs, but also make certain staff members felt comfortable voicing their opinions.
Tony also said that staff members’ resistance to change was the biggest barrier he encountered. He explained that,

Why are we [staff members] having to do this differently? I think once the staff realizes that the change is beneficial to the kids and to the community, the resistance to change disappears. But resistance to change is a barrier that you have to overcome, and you have to understand why people are resistant to change. You have to—there is the responsibility [to do so]. You have to understand that people have responsibilities within the school, but they also have responsibilities outside the school, in their own personal lives.

Tony acknowledged that part of overcoming this barrier was to communicate to staff why change was necessary, and how it benefitted students. He devoted time to explaining the rationale behind the change as opposed to simply moving forward with the change. Tony also cited that staff members’ personal lives could be barriers; some staff members had personal commitments—such as caring for an ailing parent—that limited their participation in the school. Sometimes the reasons why staff members resist the change is simply due to what is happening in their personal lives.

Nina discussed her experiences as principal new to a school and how staff members resisted change. The outgoing principal had told her that the staff members “did not do professional development”; some of these staff members verbally attacked the previous principals. She described the magnitude of her problems,

The staff meetings were horrendous. People came over here and tried to attack me, and I disciplined them. Like, “No, you’re not going to treat me that way.”
Like, “It can’t happen.” So people transferred out, which was great. Two, at that first meeting, I went over to tell them how things would be structured at Smith Avenue, [the school] when they were coming there. It was a holding school. And [he’s] got a tape recorder. He thought it was just a riot because he was gonna catch me saying things that were in contravention of the collective agreement. So a teacher came up to me at the end and said, “Did you see he had that?” She thought it was funny. And I said, “Are you serious?” And I went directly to the superintendent and said he needs to be disciplined, and he was.

Nina confronted the many verbal challenges from staff members during her first couple of years at the school. The staff as a whole had become accustomed to battling against the previous principals. Nina confronted the staff member and set appropriate standards of behaviour amongst staff members. One example of this resistance was the staff members believing that the parents in the school community did not care about their kids. She described the exchange with one staff member, who said,

“So tell me when are the parents gonna start taking charge and doing their part for these kids? You just want more and more from us.” It was the last negative thing that was ever said. I said to him, “Well, that’s interesting and I’m surprised you’re working in a community like this with that thinking because we know there are three variables. There’s the school, there’s the parent, and the kid. The parent’s aren’t changing. The school’s gonna change, so that we can change the kid.”
Nina challenged the staff member’s assertion and emphasized that the school would have to change to support the students. Nina confronted resistance from staff members on more than one occasion because the situations warranted it. She was challenged publicly during staff meetings and each time she responded. Staff members did not want to adapt or change their behaviours or approaches to teaching and learning.

Peter mentioned working with an experienced teacher who was set in her ways. He highlighted the challenge to work with staff members who were resistant to change of any kind. Peter elaborated,

I think with a teacher who is set in their ways, sometimes personality just gets in the way. And you can’t change a person’s personality. I have a teacher who has been teaching for 20 years, who thinks her way is the right way, and that everything else everybody else does is just politics and it just gets in the way of what she wants to do. No matter what I do with that teacher, no matter how I address it, no matter how I approach it, no matter how many olive branches I put out to her, she simply will not move. So what happens is she becomes a negative force on staff, and undermines everything that we try to do. But we keep pushing on.

Peter used a variety of different methods to change the teacher but was still unsuccessful. This example served as a reminder that not all staff members will respond to initiatives or strategies to change of any kind. Moreover, the concern grows if these resistant staff members spread their negativity or resistance to others.
Matt stated that certain staff members were simply resistant to authority. He said that some staff members have conscious attitudes that they’re going to resist me and some of them get angry too, yeah. I don’t know that they have conscious attitudes of resisting changes for the sake of the children, or [if they’re resisting] inclusion and understanding [on principle]. There’s, of course, a natural opposition sometimes to something that the principal wants or the leadership wants…

Some of these staff members resisted the direction not because of rationale for change but because the direction was coming from the principal. Matt mentioned that there was natural opposition toward him simply because of the positional power he held as principal.

Staff members’ lack of understanding of students’ lives. Numerous principals stated that staff members did not understand the students’ lives or experiences; this lack of understanding was a barrier against the promotion of inclusion. Todd stated that staff members did not have a clear understanding of what criteria are used to identify a student as being at-risk. He made it a policy of giving staff ideas of how to connect with these at-risk students. Todd indicated that,

I give them suggestions as to the kinds of things that they could do for a child. For instance, phoning home. Or that they could phone at eight o’clock in the morning to get the kid out of bed so that they can get to school on time. That’s not considered to be their job. Their job is to teach them once they get here. So that’s sort of something. You know, if they happen to notice that — […] the
kid’s not bringing a lunch to school, phone home and sort of ask why. Just-- I guess maybe what I’m suggesting is, you know, take that extra action, and it’s quite often in terms of communication with the home and just see what they can come up with.

Staff members were encouraged to go beyond simply focusing on the teaching in the classroom. He guided them to connect with the student and the student’s family to find solutions and supports. Part of the ongoing resistance, however, was this reluctance of staff members to see these non-teaching actions as part of their responsibility. The other aspect was that staff members had to learn about their students’ lives outside of class before they can do their best for them in class.

Karen indicated that staff members sometimes think they are doing the right thing when they are, in fact, marginalizing their students’ lifestyles and needs. She provided the example of a teacher who believed so strongly that her students must be on time for each class that she enforced graduated consequences for each late infraction. The teacher came from a middle-class background and firmly believed that she was right to treat the children this way. The teacher could not understand or empathize with her students’ lives. One grade eight student was late for the fourth time, for instance, and the teacher would not allow him into her class. Karen explained that the reason that he’s late is that his mother leaves for shift work at seven in the morning, [but] they couldn’t get a babysitter till nine. So he’s responsible for the toddler, his little sister, from seven o’clock till nine o’clock. And, I mean, this is necessary for them to do—so that there can be food on the table, you know. And
he’s learning good: he’s very nurturing with his younger sister, takes very good care of her, walks her to the babysitter, then comes to school. And it means he’s late. But there’s no [sympathy for this from the school]. The teacher doesn’t know that because the level of empathy or willingness to consider that there might be reasons for these rules not be followed [is not there], you know. So it’s a dismissal of a lifestyle.

Karen spoke to the teacher about this student’s life but the teacher remained unsympathetic. She continued to emphasize to the teacher that there were factors she needed to consider.

Kristin indicated that staff members sometimes saw certain children as disruptions that should be sent to the office, instead of taking the extra steps in the classroom to help these children. Kristin advocated for her staff members to do more to support students and look for solutions, especially for at-risk students. Nonetheless, it was very clear to her that staff members did not always understand the students and their needs. She added,

I have one teacher who thankfully retires this coming year, I hope who regularly tells me that she is not a mental health institution and these kids should not be in her classroom, that they should be in other facilities. Whether that is true or not really doesn’t matter. The kids are in her classroom and she is the only thing that is really going to be able to help them in this moment in time. Maybe down the road appropriate things will be put in place for that child. But at this time, we need to work through the IEP [individual education plan] process, the IPRC
[identification, placement, & review committee] process, and engage with those parents, and keep revising what we are doing and try to make that child successful by affecting the environment that they’re in.

This particular teacher had a specific expectation for the students she wanted to teach; if the students did not fit this “mold” she would complain that the students should be placed other than in her classroom. Kristin wanted to make sure that this teacher adapted to suit the students’ needs and work together with the families to find solutions.

Debra stated that many staff members were not aware of how to include students in their classrooms. She mentioned that she has two staff members who “really don’t understand, or are afraid of trying something different or afraid of a parent, calling a parent and talking to the parent about real issues.” Debra also indicated that, with some staff members, there was fear and ignorance and little understanding of student issues.

Like many other principals, Anna indicated that staff members sometimes lacked confidence or the knowledge of student needs needed to promote real inclusion in the classroom. She discussed how special education students were often placed in the back of classes without much support. Anna cited the example of one teacher:

It’s not that she doesn’t believe in special ed., but I think she hasn’t got a strong background in it and is very curriculum-driven, in terms of her teaching methods, as opposed to being the kid-driven and [focused on] what the kids need. And I don’t think, I mean, it’s not a conscious thing. She is willing to try, but it’s baby steps. And I think that’s part of it, as well: knowing how far you can push, in terms of what they need to know to do their jobs effectively. And, how do I put
this now, it’s just a matter of, for me, the barrier is time. The time it takes to teach.

The teacher did not feel comfortable or capable of altering her teaching methods so as to include more students, especially those with special education concerns. And while she was willing to learn the strategies, it took a lot of time and put much pressure on Anna. This is another example of teachers struggling to adapt to varied students’ needs.

Susan indicated that staff members did not understand the importance of equity issues and cultural norms. She worked with OISE [Ontario Institute for Studies in Education] staff members to develop her staff members’ knowledge levels. Bringing in an outside group to teach staff members helped, because it was a learning situation for everyone, including the principal.

Peter indicated that there are staff members who did not understand the lives of the students in the school. He elaborated that,

There are more than one or two on staff [who] don’t often realize that the situations people face in the community. […] It’s not their [the students’] fault and they [these teachers] often will assign blame, or they’ll often say negative feelings towards them, and not feel that they need to go out of their way for these kids just because of the socioeconomic difficulties in that community. [They don’t realize that] poor people are marginalized in many, many different ways.

Some staff members, then, lowered their expectations for students from lower socioeconomic status communities and assigned blame to the individual students. Peter added that not every teacher can teach in teach in all communities; it takes an empathetic
teacher, one who is willing to examine how privilege is assigned in our society, to succeed in some schools with disadvantaged students. As well, there were certain staff members who did not understand how to support special education students in their classrooms. On that front, he pointed out,

They would much rather deal with those average or above average kids, and we’ll butt heads because it is those kids who are special ed. who, when they are marginalized, can often become your behavior problems. They become the ones who go […] looking for attention in negative ways because we’re not engaging them properly through the normal routes. So, often, I find that staff go out of their way not to deal with them effectively.

Peter said that one of the main reasons that staff do not interact with special education students effectively is that it was simply too much work. Including special education students academically requires developing or modifying programs. The special education students understood very quickly the teachers who were frustrated with them or unwilling to work with them. The result, as Peter pointed out, was that this frustration surfaced in behavioural disruptions that were detrimental for everyone in the class.

Matt mentioned that most his staff were white and from middle-class backgrounds, while most of his school’s students were neither middle-class nor white. He said that the staff members did not really understand the lives and experiences of the students:

There’s something of a class distinction that is largely subconscious, I think, because people think that they’re being generous or open-minded. But they have
some reactions towards the way the kids succeed, or [how] the parents behave, not looking at it objectively all the time, and sometimes shutting doors because people don’t match their expectations.

His staff members based their expectations of students and parents based on their own lived experiences; the staff members did not consider that their own lived experiences were not objective. Matt indicated that he worked with staff to alter these subconscious attitudes towards students and parents.

**Students’ socioeconomic status.** Several principals said that the student’s socioeconomic status was a barrier to inclusion in the school. The student’s socioeconomic status also includes his family members and the parents’ financial status. Kristin mentioned that she provided support for several families in the school who could not afford to pay for student trips. She understood that there were children of poor families who would not be included in the different clubs and activities that took place throughout the year were it not for her support.

Dave worked hard to get more Vietnamese parents out to the school council meetings. He hired interpreters to phone parents and invite them out. Dave added that, We found out that not all, but generally speaking, the reason that they don’t come is because they work three jobs and that they really can’t come. So at a certain point – we kept trying. We kept trying, but it was like it’s not that they’re sitting at home watching television that they’re not coming.

The parents had to work many low-paying jobs just to support their families and they simply did not have the time to participate more in the school. Dave, by allocating
money to hire interpreters, not only connected with a portion of parents in the school but gathered vital information that educated staff members.

Debra also mentioned that several the parents’ work situations limited their participation in school activities. And she discussed how special education parents could not always attend school council meetings or activities because they did not have transportation. Debra elaborated,

That distance [between home and school] is just not manageable for some of our families to come in to meet. And that’s a whole group that is also excluded because of distance and lack of transportation. So if I know a parent is very interested in coming or would very much benefit from hearing this parent’s perspective, [and that] we would benefit from hearing this parent’s perspective and vice versa, I would just go and drive the parent in, in the evening, for a council meeting.

She understood that the parents of bussed students often needed extra help to participate in the school activities and endeavored to have resources to support them. If they do not live close to the school, parents cannot always afford to travel to the school to participate in an event.

Nina identified some of the negative effects of poverty on parental involvement in schools. Parents who were struggling to support their families would then be less likely to want to participate in the school. She explained that these parents “don’t trust anybody. Poverty is very isolating, so when you’re living in poverty you’ve got lots of secrets usually, and you don’t want anybody to know them.” Nina outlined that these
parents were isolated because of their financial situations. They were less likely to trust and build relationships up with the school.

Peter worked to get more parents on school council. The current school council was comprised of working, educated families, but this was not representative of the school community. He tried to get more representation from the other elements of the school population but was, by his own admission,

largely unsuccessful because a lot of those moms are single moms, on social assistance [and] working two jobs, so it is not practical for them to participate. So the barriers of getting those parents involved are significant, and namely because of their socioeconomic status. They don’t have the time or the interest to become involved in school because they just simply have too many other things on their plate to deal with.

The parents’ financial situations made it extremely difficult for them to participate in the school meetings and activities. Being involved in the school was the not priority for many parents who were struggling to pay the bills.

**Parents who did not feel comfortable with the school.** Some principals claimed that one barrier to building inclusion in the school was that some parents did not feel comfortable coming to the school. Parents did not enjoy coming to or welcome in their child’s school for a variety of reasons. Nigel described how Chinese parents did not feel comfortable coming into his school. In response, Nigel worked with the Chinese parents to learn more about their needs and how to include them in the school more. He explained,
We [school staff members] are seen and they [Chinese parents] are seen as not the same as us or them. They’re different. I mean, previous experiences in school are always a huge piece. Some negative, some positive. Understandings of the kind of things that we should be doing and the kind of way that…. The kind of education that [you think] should be received is often dependent on what you received as a kid. And just the very idea that we’re seen to be different. We’re not seen to be the same as them. It’s an intimidating thing.

The Chinese parents felt different than the staff members at the school. Some of the Chinese parents’ previous experiences with the school were not positive. Moreover, Nigel believed that the Chinese parents’ own experiences as students influenced their perceptions of their child’s school. Not only were the staff members different here, but so too was the way in which education was delivered. These differences intimidated the parents from participating in the school.

Karen talked about the challenge of getting people to volunteer in her school. She remarked,

Again, that thing about feelings of comfort in the school [comes up]. I mean, for some people, school was not an affirming experience. And so they feel out of place there. So [you have] always [make] sure that you greet people and make it clear that you would value their presence in the school.

Some parents’ experiences as students were not positive ones; these people still held negative feelings about school. Knowing that some parents’ experiences were not
pleasant was a reminder for Karen that she and other staff members sometimes needed to work extra hard to welcome parents in the school.

On a similar note, Allan noticed that some parents do not trust schools. Some parents from other countries had different or negative experiences with schools. He explained,

A lot of the trust in the schools that I've been in is culturally based. Where, you know, parents are coming from countries[where] oftentimes [...] institutionalized organizations like education, policing, military, and so on [tend to play a more oppressive role in society], government are not trusted. And then they come over here to Canada, they extrapolate that distrust even before they've met us. And the other side of things is their experiences with other school principals.

Allan worked hard to gain the trust with parents in the community by being consistent and predictable when it came to dealing with situations with parents. He was aware that parents in his community had different experiences with schools and not all these experiences were positive ones. Setting a good, reliable example meant that these parents could begin to trust the school system in Canada.

Debra said that at her school there was not a lot of parent or family support in terms of encouraging attendance at school functions. She noted,

They [parents] are not a regular presence in our school. Part of it is a language barrier; part of it is an education [disparity, where the parents think,] “Well, I can’t help this child because I can’t even read myself.” And part of it is just fear of teachers being evaluated by parents if they are in their classroom.
The parents were concerned about how they would be viewed by staff members especially if English was not their first language, or they did not do well in school themselves. Parents might have felt intimidated interacting with staff members and avoided the school for activities because of that.

Like the previous principals, Anna outlined that some parents did not feel comfortable at school because of their own school experiences. She highlighted the example of her special education parents and said,

Many of our special ed. kids’ families came from special ed. backgrounds themselves, and of course, the inclusion piece was not part of their school experience. And they say, “Well, I remember getting shoved out and being [excluded,]” – very negative kinds of experiences at school. And [we’re] trying to say that “No, this is why we’re doing it.”

The parents’ previous experiences can make them feel very uncomfortable working with the school staff. Anna tried to communicate with these parents on how the current school system operated to counter their previous experiences.

Matt mentioned that parents who came from different countries did not always trust the Ontario system of education. He elaborated,

They [the parents] come from something quite different, and they don’t understand what we’re trying to do, and [they don’t understand] our assumptions, [which] have to be explained to them very carefully—especially if it’s special ed. or any kind of special help.
He devoted time to communicating with parents about what the school was trying to do for the children. Parents needed time to learn about how the Ontario educational system operated. Oftentimes, the assumptions of the teachers—the commitment to inclusion, for instance—needed to be clearly explained, since these assumptions were not necessarily a part of what these parents expected.

**Schools’ lack of autonomy to make decisions.** Many of the principals stated that schools needed more control over their day-to-day operations and their strategies concerning how to best meet the needs of their students. Nigel stated that the school system is very much “top-down” and centralized; this takes away much control and autonomy from individual schools. He elaborated that there is a “cookie-cutter” approach to school issues instead of allowing schools to adapt and develop programs to meet school needs. Nigel added,

I’ll be done a PhD, I mean, for God’s sake. I’ve taught at university for five years. I’ve read research. I’ve thought. I’ve looked at this. Spent a lot of time. I had 17 years in the classroom. It’s 10 years since I first became a school administrator. I think I have something to offer. — [Yet I feel] totally straitjacketed half the time. I’m trying to do the things that I value on the side. And that’s what drives me mad. I don’t like doing that and that’s why I’m leaving. I’ve done a year and I can’t stand it. I’m not going to live my life like this. ‘Cause I’ll end up like a dead body on the side of the road, you know, I mean, like road kill. I just have no time to have any life or focus if I’m going to do other things apart from what they want me to do. And inclusion is so not a
priority.

He felt that there was little control or time for him or his school to devote to issues of inclusion because of the emphasis on improving test scores. Nigel suggested that schools would benefit from resources, and tools, and supports, and money, and sport, of course. Allow the building of programs at the school level and within connections and webs of schools of like schools. And giving staff members time and resources to develop that programming, strategies around this and to release some of the control [to the individual schools].

Schools would then develop programming locally to meet the needs of their students and communities. Instead of assuming there is one solution for all schools, there would be resources available to individual schools to develop program and curriculum to support students.

Todd also conveyed concerns about the “one-size-fits-all approach” that schools have to follow. He added,

It’s very difficult to have a template that dictates what every school should have in place. I do believe that every school should have practices in place that reflect [their] community and the students that [they] have.

Schools were required to apply the same practices regardless of what the needs of the school community were. He was frustrated that he had to use the same template that identifies what every school should have instead of allowing schools to adapt and modify the approaches.
Karen discussed the influence of neoliberal ideas in the educational system. Students are not seen for their individual experiences but more as parts of an overall plan. She stated that,

It’s a corporate agenda, right? I mean, — […] a lot of what we’re doing now is really treating children like lumps of coal to fuel the corporate furnace. To fuel the economy. And that’s important to parents, too. Because parents want to see their children have good jobs when they graduate. So it’s also a very seductive kind of thing.

Many parents perceive the role of schools to prepare their children for future employment; this view connects neatly with the neoliberal view on the role of schools. Individual schools also do not have control to make decisions to counter this neoliberal influence. She explained,

Many of the important decisions have been taken away from school communities. I mean, our job is to implement what’s been decided elsewhere. So when — […] when you’re promoting inclusion in your school, you’re only getting that first half of the definition I talked about at the beginning. You’re making sure that you include them in the processes that are going on. But the processes themselves don’t necessarily promote equity.

Karen contended that including parents in processes that were not themselves equity-based was only one part of inclusion. Parents are included but the processes were not ones that promoted equity since the “ends” of the current agenda were based on neoliberalism and not on issues of equity or inclusion.
Kristin conveyed that she is of “little consequence to the board.” She indicated that the board is simply following the Ministry of Education’s orders. Kristin explained that he feels the message to principals is

“Please just fall in line, and do what you’re told, and don’t ask questions, and by the way I’d like no parents calling me today.” Whether that’s the director, the trustees or the superintendent, or whoever […] talking, I feel that’s the message]. I have an entire career invested in education as well, just like they do. And that’s how teachers feel, [too].

She had little control but to follow the board’s orders that were, in turn, only following what the Ministry of Education is dictating. Even as the principal of the school, she did not perceive that she had much input or control over the various foci at his school. The foci for his school were already determined by the Ministry of Education and the school board.

Brent argued that there needs to be a “major culture change” in the way educational organizations conduct themselves. He elaborated,

For me as a critical theorist, which is the theoretical perspective that I come from, I really feel that there needs to be a complete revolution in leadership. We need to [reconsider], for example, […] leadership at the Ministry and the board level. We have this huge nested pyramid of bureaucracy that starts with the Ministry and works its way on down through the school board and the schools. And I think […] the structure of bureaucracy [is] very supportive of traditional, authoritarian leadership. And I think that […] we need a new model of leadership that isn’t
singular and authoritarian and is much more democratic and inclusive.

Brent felt that this traditional, authoritarian type of leadership was not conducive to developing inclusion or democracy in schools. He advocated changing the structure of organizations so that principals and superintendents have the same formal authority.

Brent added,

There’s far too much meddling in the school-level affairs that goes on right now, from superintendents and trustees. Not “meddling” in the sense that they don’t have a right to do that, but often decisions are made from a political perspective rather than a professional perspective. And principals’ decisions are often ignored, and their input and their role in the school is often ignored in those kinds of decisions.

Brent observed that superintendents and school trustees interfered with the school and their decisions were not often based on educational practice. He also advocated for more local control in terms of planning and curriculum delivery. Brent continued,

Schools should be allowed, as a group, to have a much more active role in curriculum development, professional managing at the school level, [and] decision making. All those kinds of things at the school level should be the authority of principals in the schools.

He argued that with the current school effectiveness movement in Ontario, schools had very little control over programming or initiatives that took place in schools.

**District school boards have foci other than promoting inclusion.** Some of the principals believed that district school boards’ needed to refocus on other issues or
initiatives. John argued that the system needed to consider some other structure that would complete the myriad of organizational tasks required by the Ministry. There were too many operational tasks given to schools from the board. These operational tasks prevented him from devoting time to issues that supported students in the school. He also mentioned that for inclusion to develop, the board leadership has to change and model inclusive behaviour. John said,

I think that we spend too much time being talked at and not enough time being listened to. Does inclusive leadership really exist? Or are we merely paying lip service to it? Well, you want to listen to me talk, but you are not gonna change your behavior. Then don’t even ask me the question, right? And I find that we are on the receiving end of a lot of information. We don’t get to provide as much feedback. Now, my employer might say, “Oh, you have a voice through these various organizations.” Yeah, okay, in your theory I do. But I don’t remember signing up to be part of this organization. You assume this organization speaks for me. It doesn’t because I have never had a chance to talk about inclusion with this organization. They are not interested. They are fixated on operational stuff.

In John’s view, the board then needed to listen more and devote more time to issues and initiatives related to inclusion. He cautioned, though, that this is unlikely to occur because the system was so focused on operational tasks.

Dave said that in order to promote inclusion the board must make it a priority, the number one priority. He said, however, though that his board is more focused on testing results. Dave continued,
They’re [board senior administration] still completely focused on EQAO. Despite the craziness of EQAO, they’re completely focused on EQAO, [so much so] that they really believe that if you go down in reading in grade three from this year to the next year, that that somehow reflects what people are not doing in that school. Or that’s somehow a judgment of the school when it’s a completely different group of children. Like, it’s an absurd thing to base anything on.

The primary focus of his board was on improving the EQAO scores and focus on quantitative information.

Debra said that the district school board must allocate extra money to support the schools in marginalized areas. She discussed how the Ministry allocated $132 million to marginalized communities in the board. Yet Debra argued that the board did not follow through and use the money for what it was supposed to. She explained,

Part of the LOI [Learning Opportunity Index— monies that support schools in low s.e.s communities] comes from that [Learning Opportunity Index budget], but a lot of that goes to re-carpeting someone’s school, re-windowing someone’s this because the funds are needed. The funds are needed, and […] those are also necessary things. But, like, we used to have a special education position sweatered [protected]; you can’t touch it. You can’t just take that position and decrease everybody’s class numbers. That money has to be sweatered within a board’s budget because, truly, to offer a public education system that offers equal choices for everyone, or fair choices to everyone in the entire board, that money
can’t be touched. That has to be given to the communities that really need it; the substantial amounts that has to be done.

While the Ministry of Education allocated the monies to support those schools, the board did not dedicate all of it to those schools. Debra contended that some of the monies should have been used solely for the highest-need—in terms of socio-economic status—schools were used in other areas.

**Lack of support from the Ministry of Education.** The Ministry of Education has tremendous control over the functioning of public schools in Ontario, determining what foci the schools have. Several principals stated the Ministry of Education must change the way it operated and prioritize issues other than simply student achievement. Some of the principals pointed out that the Ministry of Education need to make inclusion a priority.

Karen stated that the Ministry of Education’s main focus on school achievement had resulted in all the district school boards following suit. This meant that social justice issues were not a priority. She explained,

People say they recognize that social justice issues are important, and they’ll support having those kinds of polices on the side, as long as they fit with this [emphasis on student achievement]. This takes priority. And what happens is that the whole structure of this, by virtue of its nature, makes a lot of the social justice issues not possible, you know. I think they don’t see that. So if the main focus of what was done [by the Ministry of Education] was developing a citizenry for whom social justice and equity was a priority — […] and part of that would
be student achievement for all, of those. But the focus on student achievement took priority over equity issues. She also added that many district schools did not even have an equity policy. Karen believed that the focus should be on social justice issues of which one part would be student achievement.

John indicated that the Ministry needed to examine its own leadership practices and determine whether it fit the inclusion framework. He added,

I think at the Ministry level, I think that we need to have a clearly articulated operational definition of inclusion. What is inclusion, period? Not what is inclusion that I tell you, but what is inclusion? And then allow some opportunity to have some reflective dialogue or critical conversation. Well, what do you think? I struggle quite a bit with both my employer and also the Ministry being sanctimonious about it. “Well, everyone is gonna have an inclusive environment.” How do you know? This whole interview – as long as we have been going – is how do you know? You can’t mandate that. You can’t say that this is something that we have to have, because you are not going to build the buy-in. I think you build inclusion through grassroots initiatives.

John believed that the Ministry should refrain from determining or defining what inclusion is and how to promote it in schools. But the Ministry of Education could indicate that inclusion in schools is important to all participants and provide opportunities for dialogue on how to develop grassroots initiatives.

Kristin said that if the Ministry of Education wanted a province that is inclusionary, they have to model these behaviours. She explained that,
I will say this as if I am speaking directly to the Minister of Education: Those stakeholder groups that we so conveniently compartmentalize, and have in for a three- or four-hour meetings, and then brush them off and complain about them once they’ve left the room, that is inappropriate. They [stakeholders] need to be heard. They need to be valued just as much as the senior policy advisor who is writing the policy. It is not appropriate to talk about Directors of Education as though they’re lazy, although some are. And it is not appropriate to talk about principals as though they don’t know anything because many do, and many work very hard.

Kristin felt that the stakeholders in the system were not valued or heard as much as they should be. The different groups had much to offer on how to make the system more inclusive.

Brent also discussed how the Ministry of Education needs to model inclusive leadership practices to all people. He said that the current structure promoted and supported a traditional, authoritarian leadership structure. Brent added,

We have this huge nested pyramid of bureaucracy that starts with the Ministry and works its way on down through the school board and the schools. And I think it’s – the structure of bureaucracy, it’s very supportive of traditional, authoritarian leadership. And I think that not only do we need a new model of leadership that isn’t singular and authoritarian and is much more democratic and inclusive. And I think if we’re gonna change education, we need to start leading education in that way. But it also implies a restructuring of the bureaucracies that have dominated
organizations for the past 70 years. That bureaucratic structure [and] pyramid structure is an authoritarian structure. Hierarchy itself breeds political power, and formal power in the organization, and reinforces authoritarian leadership.

Brent believed that changes are needed to the bureaucratic structure of the Ministry of Education to make it more inclusive and less authoritarian. He suggested,

The province should be responsible for setting policy and guidelines that are generated from the school on up. Not from the top down the way it currently is. And that’s the big problem with decision making is it’s all top down, and we don’t get an opportunity to have things that are generated from the actual practice in schools become policy of the board then become policy of the Ministry, which is the way it should work.

He felt that schools, then, should be helping set policy in the board, which in turn will provide the Ministry with input for provincial policy. The process begins at the school level and moves up to the board and then to the Ministry of Education.

Debra spoke about the need to change the way teacher education was developed and delivered to teacher candidates. She explained,

There has to be something built into the pre-service program (so we are talking about students who are going into teacher’s college) that really emphasizes what inclusion is, that really emphasizes the necessity to have a placement in a school where inclusion is not happening, where there is a diverse population whether it’s cultural or [in terms of] socioeconomic status or whatever the case is. But there is a diverse population. Because they [these student teachers] cannot get it
Debra stated that teacher candidates needed to learn about inclusion not just in theory, but also in practice. The Ministry of Education should then provide some guidance to teacher colleges to make sure that both the theory and practice of inclusion are part of the programs.

Tony wanted to remind the Ministry of Education that it should, “not forget about the whole child.” He added,

The previous ministry, the previous government ministry, definitely was moving in a direction that was just so isolated from the whole child, it was ridiculous. This particular government and this particular ministry seems to recognize that you can’t just focus on assessments and testing, that you have to develop the whole child. Now, they’re doing it through the accountability to safe schools. For us it’s our virtues program, which we’ve been doing for a long time. So I think that this particular government is starting to now recognize that you can’t just push kids through assessments and academics, that the child’s educational life has to be a full educational life. The full child has to be developed. So if I could make any recommendation to the government it’s keep that in mind. Keep that in mind and keep that, perhaps, foremost when you’re doing your academic planning around EQAO and so on.
Tony is hopeful that the current Ministry of Education will not allow the emphasis on assessments and quantitative data to diminish the focus on supporting the “whole child.”

Anna indicated a great need for the Ministry of Education to provide special education training. She wondered if the special education training should be made mandatory for all teachers. Anna added that there are many special education students who need to be included and teachers do not always feel adequately trained to do so in the classroom.

While there are many barriers to inclusion there are also facilitators who support and nurture the growth of inclusion in schools.

**Principals’ Perceptions of the Facilitators of Inclusion**

The principals identified individuals who supported and facilitated the promotion of inclusion in the schools. Many of these individuals had taken leadership roles within the school and they worked to promote a more inclusive school climate. These individuals were divided into two groups: staff members and parents.

**Staff members.** Many principals talked about how staff members were vital partners and leaders at promoting inclusion in their schools. Nigel mentioned that he had several strong staff members who volunteered to lead or be part of different inclusive initiatives at school. He explained that these staff members organize and they… they’re people who’ve picked things up. And so what we’re going to do for Black History Month [is] I will volunteer to organize things for that. I will volunteer to do things around that. I will volunteer to take responsibility for this piece. People who will actually take action as well so that
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you [the principal] can take leadership in a number of ways. I mean, one of the things […] we’ve talked about [is] the fact that we want more reverse integration with special education classes. One particular grade three teacher is a first-year teacher who said, “I’m going to [do it].” [So she] spoke to the teacher, the special ed. Teacher, and came to me and said, “I’m going to have an ongoing relationship with this MID (mild intellectual disability) class with my grade three class.” Done. And it happened all year and she just made a decision that she thought it was the right to do and went ahead and did it.

The grade three teacher took the initiative to implement a solution to the goal of more integration of the special education students. There were also a number of other staff members who both independently and collectively searched for ways to make inclusion happen in the school.

Karen also highlighted one teacher who sought to promote inclusion within her school. This teacher led a whole-school initiative to raise money to build a school in another country. Karen outlined how the project came about:

There was one teacher in particular who was the catalyst for it [building a school in another country]. It was her idea and so I just did everything I could to throw support behind it. And I invited her and a team of the students that she was working with to school council to present their ideas to school council.

Karen mentioned the importance of the principal providing these “go-to people” on staff with ongoing support so that they could pursue various initiatives. Karen’s main role in the building of the school initiative was making sure she was supporting the steps taken
by the main teacher and the other members of the team, which included students and parents.

Other participants also noted the assistance of staff members. Kristin cited the contributions of special education teachers who were critical to supporting the diverse needs of their students and providing staff with support. The special education teachers helped all staff members support special education students.

Brent had been principal in a variety of schools throughout his career and he said that at each school there were staff members who supported the inclusive views and goals for the school. Having these supportive staff members was important to moving the goals of the school ahead.

Dave discussed the importance of the staff members on the organizing committee in promoting inclusion in the school. The organizing committee provided guidance and expertise on building a more inclusive climate. The committee members addressed many aspects of school life, including the daily practices within the school. Dave also identified the community outreach teacher with whom he dialogued about “five million times a day” and the M.A.R.T. (Methods and Resource Teacher) as important facilitators of inclusion. He described the work of his M.A.R.T.:

It was her job to work with the special ed. resource teachers […] in order to support the integration of the kids. She would organize special ed. staff meetings, where they would talk about all the issues they needed to talk about, paperwork they had to do, and all that stuff. But […] she also worked with them
on how to team-teach, [and helped] all the teachers differentiate their instruction. [Doing] all that kind of stuff was her role.

The M.A.R.T. was essential to including special education students in the classrooms, through differentiating instruction, and meeting their varied needs. The M.A.R.T. also taught staff members to be inclusive of each other through team-teaching.

Additionally, Dave cautioned that it was important that, as principal, he was not too controlling with staff members. Dave explained,

It’s been my experience that the more open a principal is to not controlling everything that goes on, the more that goes on. So, like, people would come to me with ideas and I would never say, “You can’t do that,” unless it was dangerous or something. But you know. If you have this idea and you really want to try this, do it. And come back and let’s talk about what happens, whatever.

He promoted autonomy and creativity by being ready to listen to and support the staff members’ ideas and initiatives. Teachers had autonomy and this allowed them to be creative with their approaches and ideas to facilitate inclusion.

Allan also stated the importance of the special education teachers on staff. These special education teachers provided support to the classroom teachers and often had a better understanding of inclusion than did regular classroom teachers. The special education teachers had experience ensuring that the learning needs of special education students were included in the classroom.

Debra mentioned that the entire leadership team was critical to inclusion in her
school. This team of staff members used to be a very negative group: they were in the minority but, nonetheless, intimidated other staff members from speaking up. Thanks to Debra’s efforts, the dynamic changed; Debra said that the team was much more positive than previously. As a result, she reported that more staff members were voicing their opinions. Debra explained,

We have a lot of people now who are speaking up and saying, “When this happens, this is what this child is feeling. Or when this happens, this is the perception you are giving this child,” which is very, very different than it used to be. And they are coming to me now, “Sally, can we bring such-and-such in and talk about this? Can we purchase these books?”

More staff members were taking the initiative to begin trying new ideas. Debra saw an increase in the number of staff facilitators of inclusion in her school. The team members started expressing positive solutions and proposing ideas that support students. Debra also acted as a support to these staff members who had ideas that will promote inclusion.

Tony stated that, initially, there were two or three key staff members who “were on the same wave length” as him in terms of inclusion. These two or three staff members were involved in many different projects. But there were other staff too who became more involved as time went on. Tony discovered that more staff members became involved because they believed in the direction the school was going. He believed that if staff members believe that the school is “moving in the right direction,” they are more likely to take on initiatives. He also stated the importance of initially having the two or three staff members who were supportive of the direction.
Anna identified her special education teacher as her “right hand” person in the school. She consulted daily with this teacher on how to support the programming for all students in the school. Susan said that the staff member who acted as chairperson of the school equity committee was a powerful facilitator of inclusion. The equity chair coordinated all the initiatives set forth by the equity committee.

Nina commented that in her school all staff members were supportive of the inclusive practices in the school. She cited the example of the free after-school programming for 150 of her students at the local community centre and added that, “Not everyone’s involved in it, but every single one supports it and promotes it.” This is an important point; there are different degrees of facilitation. Some staff members initiate or lead, while others follow, while still others support the activity verbally. In her school, even though not all the staff members were directly involved with the after-school activity, all staff members were supportive of it.

Peter also identified his special education teachers as important facilitators in the school. He explained,

I think the special ed. teachers do an excellent job communicating and responding to the needs of those kids who are excluded by promoting it [solutions] with the staff.

The special education teachers worked with staff members to support the differentiation of program and servicing students who were at-risk academically. The special education teachers communicated with teachers about the typically excluded special education students.
Matt stated that he had been fortunate that “key” positions in his schools were always filled by staff members who advocated for inclusion. He elaborated to say that these staff members are in those positions like the special ed[ucation] coordinator, literacy coordinator, and kindergarten teachers. [They] are the parents’ first contact with the school, and remain the most important person in their memory even six years later. Because everybody has gone through the kindergarten, and then the siblings come through, and so that’s kind of your entry point. Psychologically, it’s your entry point into the school for the families. So that […] is a very important position.

Matt identified the kindergarten division as important strategically to the promotion of inclusion because for many families, their first connection with the school is with the kindergarten staff members. This positive first experience is especially important if the parents’ own educational experiences were not positive ones. Matt also highlighted the good fortune of having staff members who were advocates of inclusion in important positions in the school.

Craig identified his facilitators as the individuals who chaired the different areas of the school. He referred to these staff members as “champions”; it was a term that meant they were leading or facilitating a specific area of the school. Craig elaborated,

I try to put people in successful positions, or set them up for success, wholly and knowing full well that I want them to be even better than me. We have what’s called in our school champions. I refer [red] to Susan* before who was one of the
first [champions]. Our champions literally run the school. So these are people that I call champions—like in front of staff and everyone. They know Michelle, [for instance,] is one of the major champions of our school as far as our setting up of professional learning communities.

The champions of each area then meet together for the “Core of Champions” meeting. Staff members are provided with decision-making power and budget support. Craig developed his facilitators of inclusion through using the “champions” framework.

**Parents.** Some of the principals mentioned that parents were strong facilitators of inclusion in their schools. Some of these parents were also on the school council and used that role to facilitate inclusion.

Todd stated that in the past two years, school council chairs have been outstanding. He explained that the school council chairs distinguished themselves by being big on fundraising [and] big on graduation planning. They’re big on political turnarounds, or events that are occurring or policy, and health and safety is another one [of their areas of emphasis]. They have their own committees [in] each of those areas too.

The school council chairs provided opportunities through these various committees for parents to participate. The school council chairs were also active in the opposite direction: they became involved in board policy and its subsequent impact on the school.

Tony mentioned that one of his student’s grandmothers, a retired principal from Trinidad, was a terrific facilitator of inclusion. He stated that,
I had a lot of discussions with her, lot of discussions. And she was really instrumental in helping me to sort of move things ahead, because she was the quiet voice that would come in and say, well, how about this? We tried to start a steel band, steel drummers. It was too expensive, couldn’t do it. But she would come in with the greatest ideas and we would move with them.

Tony was able to use the grandparent’s knowledge and experience to help connect with the community and the children. He also identified that there were some very talented school council chairs that were very supportive of the school. One of the school council chairs even met with parents and community members on Saturdays to glean their ideas and opinions.

Anna outlined that her school council members had been strong facilitators for inclusion in the school. This past year, however, was different. Anna could not depend on the school council members as much this past year due to their work responsibilities outside of school. She explained,

This year, they are all working full time, and it’s been kind of difficult to get that communication out there. [...] So that’s not been the best experience this year. It was better last year when, I would say, three out of seven were working and the rest weren’t. Now they’re all working. And of course, when you’re working fulltime and trying to take that on, it’s been a bit of a struggle.

In previous years, the school council was more adept at facilitating inclusion because members did not have as many commitments outside of the school. This year, all of the school council members worked and they were not able to give as much time to the
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Susan noted how several parents were excellent liaisons with the school community. These parents connected with parents in languages other than English. They dialogued with parents and then reconnected with the principal to share information. The liaison allowed many parents who did not have strong English language skills to have their voices heard.

Nina described the dedication of some of her parents to daily snack program at her school. The snack program required a considerable financial commitment, costing $20,000 per year to operate. A couple of parents drove their cars each day to pick up and deliver food to the school. This was a year-long, nearly daily commitment for these parents.

Matt said that his school council chair was an excellent facilitator of inclusion. The school council chair had a lot of influence with the parents, especially with his own ethnic group. The school council chair was able to communicate what was happening in the school and supported parents’ participation in school events and activities.

Summary

The largest barriers to inclusion were the principals` staff members. Staff members were often resistant to change, whether the change pertained to school-wide issues or to changing their own practice in the classroom. Frequently, principals found that staff members opposed the direction the school was going in terms of becoming a more inclusive environment. Also, staff members oftentimes lacked an understanding of
how students’ needs, lives, and experiences presented as a significant barrier to their academic success in the schools.

These answers shared a common criticism of the power and influence the Ministry of Education wielded over the school boards, which in turn exerted control over the individual schools. This top-down structure prevented policy from adequately reflecting the needs of particular schools, and prevented successful strategies developed at the grassroots level to become policy. Chief amongst the practical problems with this structure, principals asserted the Ministry must prioritize inclusion, as opposed to placing so much emphasis on student test scores and the resulting quantitative data. Participants also maintained that school boards need to place a greater value on inclusion; principals seemed to understand that their respective boards were simply following the Ministry of Education’s orders. Nevertheless, school boards senior management could still model and behave in inclusive ways with staff members. Principals also stated that individual schools need more control over how they meet their students’ and communities’ needs. The Ministry and school board mandates and initiatives limited the amount of control that individual principals had to tailor the school to the students.

The other barriers cited pertain to the students’ parents. Parents’ direct participation with the school was hampered by having to work many jobs to make ends meet. It was also challenging to find times that parents could attend school events or activities. But some parents who could not attend did not because they did not feel comfortable in the school. Some parents’ school experiences were not positive ones, and they still did not feel comfortable. These parents needed extra outreach in order to feel
comfortable participation in the school community. Other parents from different cultures did not feel that the school staff members understood their needs.

Staff members were the key facilitators of inclusion. Some of these staff members took on extra initiatives at school or helped take leadership positions that supported inclusion. These staff members understood and valued inclusion. Special education teachers were identified because of their ability to help teachers include special education students in the classroom.

Parents can also be facilitators of inclusion. School council members helped organize and lead events in the school. Other parents who were not on school council acted as links to parents in the community.
Chapter Nine: Discussion

To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity (Freire, 2000, p. 47).

The findings in this study demonstrate that principals promoted inclusion using a variety of methods. I chose the elementary schools because they are the starting or entry points for children in the education system. It is most prudent to begin developing inclusion at the earliest level rather than begin the process at the secondary level when it might be too late. The urban schools are where, I believe, inclusion is most needed. Urban schools, given the diversity of needs of individuals, can be areas of significant exclusion.

Many of these methods involved the principals educating or teaching others about inclusion and exclusion. As well, principals also took time to learn about the lives of staff members, students and parents. In this chapter, I will examine four prominent themes that emerged from the study. Firstly, I explore the importance of the principal teaching teachers about inclusion. Secondly, I look at how principals learned about inclusion. Thirdly, I examine how teachers can be barriers to the promotion of inclusion. Lastly, I outline the negative consequences to principals who promoted inclusion.

The Importance of the Principal Teaching Teachers about Inclusion

Principals have little direct contact with students and certainly not enough to transmit the subtleties of an institution’s culture and beliefs. If a school is to have a powerful ethos, it is the teachers who must communicate it, embody it, and transmit it. Indeed, teachers are the one stable influence on a culture (Cohen, 2002, p. 532).
In order to have an impact on students, principals must nurture an understanding of inclusion with teachers. That is, teachers need to understand how others are excluded before they can become strong advocates of inclusion; teaching others about inclusion is an important part of promoting inclusion. Ryan (2006c) suggests that “For everyone to meet the challenges associated with inclusion, they will have to acquire new knowledge, understanding, and attitudes” (pp. 108-109). Bartolome (2007) describes the urgency of teachers learning how to meet the diverse needs of their students. She posits that

Given the social-class, racial, cultural, and language differences between teachers and students and our society’s historical predisposition to view culturally and linguistically diverse students through a deficit lens that positions them as less intelligent, talented, qualified, and deserving, it is especially urgent that educators critically understand their ideological orientations with respect to these differences and begin to comprehend that teaching is not a politically or ideologically neutral undertaking. (p. 265)

The assertion underscores the need for teachers to challenge and reflect on their own ideological assumptions, bias and prejudices. Working within a positivistic system, however, teachers will resist the notion that their worldviews should not be universal. Moreover, this “deficit lens” (or the prejudgment of assuming a student’s failure to succeed is nothing but the fault of the student) serves to as a way to rationalize an educational system that is not organized or structured to support and nurture students from diverse and non-privileged backgrounds. This insidious ethos assumes that students struggle in school academically because of internal deficits: a lack of intelligence, work ethic, ability, etc. In this manner, the critical focus is safely averted from the systemic injustices of the educational system at large.
In this study, the principals were the ones teaching inclusion to others in the school. That is, the principal taught others, specifically teachers, about inclusion. Teaching others about inclusion involves more than simply reciting facts or theories; it requires that stakeholders develop a critical eye so that they can question and critique. Learning about inclusion enhances the chances that individuals develop critical consciousness. Ryan (2006c) asserts that developing critical consciousness in stakeholders is vital (p. 113). Said otherwise, individuals need to learn to be critical about the aspects pertaining to their social situations (p. 114). This is important for the long-term sustainability of inclusion for a number of reasons, one of which is the fact that teachers tend not to understand their students’ lives. This was particularly evident in this study. Participants in the study believed that certain staff members were “locked in” to a “deficit model” of thinking about certain groups. The deficit model attributes students’ failures to their “internal deficits or deficiencies” (Valencia, 1997, p. 1). These recalcitrant teachers sometimes held highly discriminatory views, such as the belief that black students are not as smart as white students. Other teachers simply did not know how to include a diverse group of students in their classrooms. The principal as teacher of inclusion needs to counter deficit thinking and its potential infestation, and, in doing so, change the thinking of individuals, specifically teachers, who can, then, make differences for children. In the end, the principal cannot promote inclusion alone. In many ways, then, promoting inclusion is promoting this affinity for and awareness of inclusion in the staff.

But teaching others about inclusion is not as simple as it seems. It is not easy to
overcome the prejudices and discriminatory beliefs that the staff members have
developed throughout their lives. The principal would indeed be challenging “old
beliefs” that often run counter to the central tenets of inclusion and social justice. In
short, in order to have an impact on students, the principal must devote time educating
teachers about inclusion. In all cases in this study, discussions of inclusion were initially
led by principals. In many cases, the teaching and learning of inclusion was deemed as a
non-negotiable item. That is, the principal did not poll the staff or try to reach consensus
about whether or not to discuss inclusion, or determine whether it was an important
discussion topic. They just went ahead and did it.

Providing guidance for teachers learning about social justice is vital. In his study
of principals, Theoharis (2007) found that “They [principals] sought to increase staff
capacity by addressing issues of race, providing ongoing staff development focused on
building equity, developing staff investment in social justice, hiring and supervising for
justice, and empowering staff” (p. 235). As well, the principals in Theoharis’ study did
not want to rely on teacher preparation programs to prepare the teachers for social
justice.

I have organized the rest of this section on the teaching of inclusion into two
parts: direct and indirect. The direct methods refer to explicit pedagogies that confront or
identify issues related to inclusion. These methods can cause cognitive dissonance, a
process in which the individuals receive information that is not compatible with their
world views; this new information can be unsettling and uncomfortable (McFalls &
Cobb-Roberts, 2001, p. 165). Moreover, the cognitive dissonance can cause individuals
to question their thinking and look for new ideas (Ryan, 2006c, p. 106). But not all explicit and direct methods of teaching are confrontational; it depends on the approach one takes. That is, being explicit is not the same as being confrontational. The indirect methods involve pedagogies that are usually implemented over longer periods of time and tend to be less confrontational.

i) **Direct teaching of inclusion.** Participants in this study employed a variety of direct teaching methods. What I mean by direct is that the method used was geared toward specific learning outcomes. Some of these direct or explicit methods were confrontational but others were not. Nigel used an equity audit [a survey given to students, parents, staff members the serves to better understand perceptions of how equitable the school is] not only to gather information about the perceptions and practices of the school, but also to teach staff members. A key component of this audit was the realization the learning experience took place throughout the year and was not simply a “one-off”. Staff members used the equity audit as a starting point for discussing and planning with all stakeholders in mind. This process of collecting and examining information resulted in staff members gaining a more comprehensive understanding of stakeholders’ perceptions.

New to the school, Karen challenged a traditionally held practice in order to highlight the need for discussion on inclusion. Staff members were comfortable with the continuation of the practice, which excluded the school’s poorer students from going on the same number of trips as the richer, French-immersion stream students. She made certain that the exclusionary practice was discussed and that a more inclusionary practice
was put in place; she used her positional power to ensure that exclusionary practice stopped.

Tony brought in a speaker who confronted staff members about their beliefs by linking her personal experience with the experiences of many of students at the school; this speaker sought to provide another angle from which to examine ideas and teach staff members about how to better understand and include the students. Tony knew that the speaker would likely challenge many staff members’ beliefs in this kind of focused manner.

ii) Indirect teaching of inclusion. Not all practices require that the principal use positional power or explicit teaching to ensure discussion and learning take place. In this study, there were many more examples of indirect teaching of inclusion. This is consistent with Ryan’s (2006c) preference for less confrontation methods (p. 111). The indirect methods were geared around providing information in a non-confrontational way and modeling inclusive behaviour.

Brent provided staff members with educational articles on an ongoing basis, while Dave led a voluntary book club that examined equity-based books. Both principals approached the teaching of inclusion by providing staff members with information that was designed to help them learn over time. An important part of this approach was that staff members had opportunities to discuss topics and learn from each other. Brent and Dave made certain that inclusion was a constant focus for staff members and that there were many opportunities for discussion.

Another indirect way of promoting inclusion was accomplished through the
principal’s modeling of inclusive behaviour. Modeling inclusive practices is useful in teaching others about inclusion (Ryan, 2006c, p. 110). Nine of the sixteen principals in this study placed great importance on “walking the talk” of inclusion; they believed modeling inclusive behaviour would help teach all stakeholders about inclusion. Nigel discussed the importance of demonstrating the priorities through daily actions. Kristin modeled inclusive behaviour with parents who had been excluded, hoping to demonstrate how to include these parents. Tony mentioned that other stakeholders watched her actions to learn what she valued. A number of the principals in this study commented that modeling inclusive behaviour had to happen every day.

Sadly, given the pressures from accountability to Ministry and district school board directives, a principal cannot always focus on teaching others about inclusion. These current pressures are what Moller (2009) defines as “managerial accountability”, which is the focus on measurable student outcomes (p. 40). Volante (2007) argues that large-scale assessments are often the main or only indicator of whether an education system is deemed effective (p. 2). Duignan (2006) agrees and further adds that,

The high public pressure for accountability in schools, in terms of definite outcomes, means that there is constant pressure to improve performance outcomes. The economic rationalist philosophy and managerialist practices that have influenced governments since the mid-1980s are now driving many educational organizations. (p. 34)

Principals are under pressure to improve student achievement scores—ensuring that they are placing priority on being instructional leaders (Shellard, 2003; Good, 2008; O’Donnell & White, 2005; Hoerr, 2007; Stiggins & Duke, 2008; Johnson, J., 2008; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Kinney, 2009). In this regard, there has been a shift in how
instructional leadership is conceptualized. Reitzug et al. (2002), assert that, “More recently, principal instructional leadership has shifted from a focus on the principal as an “inspector of teacher competence” to the principal ‘as a facilitator of teacher growth’” (p. 695). “Teacher growth” is also narrowly defined in ways to promote higher-yield pedagogical practices that will result in improved test scores in reading, writing, and mathematics. While no one would argue against the notion that instruction is a critical component of schooling, my concern is that the term “instruction” is used to refer to how students are doing in the reading and writing and/or testing. The term “instructional leader” is also too limiting and narrow; the principal needs to educate others, namely the teachers, about inclusion in order to have an impact on students both now and in the long-term. This myopic focus on instruction ignores issues of social justice that impact how all children fare at school. More specifically, instructional leadership seems unconcerned about the diverse histories and identities of stakeholders. In many circumstances, the emphasis on student achievement (understood in this narrow sense) diminishes the roles and ends that schools provide. Ideally, teacher growth would include specific knowledge about social justice in general, and inclusion in particular; this knowledge would complement and support instructional strategies.

The Ontario Ministry of Education and the district school boards, however, are aligning themselves with these same philosophical and rationalist practices that emphasize quantitative data and testing. In Ontario, the results from the EQAO assessment provide the measurable outputs, which as part of managerial accountability, reinforce the importance of a very singular notion of school effectiveness. Even
principals who are advocates for, and knowledgeable of, social justice and inclusion can fall prey to this hegemonic pursuit of measurable outcomes. Teaching others about inclusion is the only way inclusion can grow and flourish. I do not advocate the teaching of inclusion at the expense of ensuring that high-yield instructional strategies are in place. Rather, I envision the melding of knowledge of and commitment to inclusion as well as instructional practices into one main core for both principal and teacher professional growth. Instructional practices can be modified and adapted to support the diverse needs of students. I do not accept the idea that one size fits all with regard to pedagogical practices.

The results of this study suggest that the principal would have to be the initial advocate until he/she developed a core of support in the school. It is the teachers, though, who have the greatest impact on the students’ lives at school. And in order to reach all students, the teachers must understand and value inclusion, and know how to make it a reality in their classrooms. While the principals in this study were the initial advocates of inclusion, the long-term health of inclusion requires that it has an impact on both teachers and students and becomes part of the way each school “does business.”

**Principals’ life experiences that shaped their views on inclusion**

"…if you learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along better with all kinds of folk. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."
- Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird (p. 34)

Understanding other people’s experiences and histories is critical to knowing how to best include and support them. The principals’ in this study provided insight into why they were such powerful advocates of inclusion. They learned about inclusion through
being excluded themselves or witnessing the exclusion of family members; these experiences served as the motivators that propelled them to promote inclusion as principals. In total, 15 out of 16 principals cited specific life experiences that taught them the value of inclusion. Perhaps more telling is that 12 of the 16 principals cited experiences prior to beginning their careers as educators as critical motivating factors. These early experiences were where they learned firsthand about exclusion. Twelve principals learned about exclusion and inclusion inside their homes. These experiences varied in terms of duration and depth. Some of these exclusionary experiences took place over days, but most were part of their everyday existence because of their gender, race, socioeconomic status, or religious beliefs. Waite et. al (2007) studied biographies of social justice leaders and found that their first “revolution is internal, and usually begins at home” (p. 200). These social justice leaders learned about social justice at home through a variety of personal/internal experiences.

Other research has also found that social justice educators’ beliefs have roots in their early lives. Theoharis’ study of school principals found that more than half attributed their commitment to social justice to their upbringing, while the others identified growing up in the 1960s and 70s as their major influence (2009, p. 26). Another study of advocates of social justice, some of whom were not educators, found that all of them identified parents or significant adults who taught them or acted as role models, and influenced their future practice (Merchant & Soho, 2006, p. 87). A common thread throughout is that learning about social justice, particularly inclusion, took place at home and often through negative experiences.
For some, like Nigel, exclusion happened daily both inside and outside of school because his family was poor. His family members, particularly his father, were also a source of information on how the world “operated” to exclude others. Nigel learned at home how the “outside world” worked. Nigel applied these theories and experiences to his life. Similarly, Karen witnessed her father refuse to acquiesce to racist and anti-Semitic pressures to sign a paper that would prevent him from reselling a house to “black, Hispanic or Jew” in the 1960s. Her father’s battles against these forces were not resolved in a day; she had opportunities to witness his fight with little support from anyone around him at time. Karen respected her father and used his actions as a model to follow. Dave’s life was similarly influenced by his family’s experiences in the Holocaust; he learned about these experiences from the many discussions with his relatives. These stories of activism and suffering taught him about inclusion and exclusion. He also endured his own exclusion when his mother divorced and he moved to a new neighbourhood in a different country. Dave’s learning took place over years and involved many discussions with family members. Debra, a Chinese-Canadian, endured racist slurs and comments at school; she did not know much about her Chinese culture until years later because her parents desperately wanted to “blend in” with Canadian culture. Debra learned the importance of all students being able to celebrate and feel pride in their identities, and concluded from her early experiences that schools must be places where all students can be who they are. These principals all learned lessons early in their lives that would forever alter their views of the world and what they would value later as administrators.
All of these principals were chosen for this study because they were known for their skill at promoting inclusion. This begs the question: Would these principals have been such powerful advocates for inclusion had they not had these life experiences? Whether or not they would have, it is clear that they learned about exclusion in such depth because of these life experiences. The pain that they experienced from ongoing, and sometimes multiple forms of, exclusion meant that they could no longer remain silent or passive on issues of inclusion. Debra still remembers the pain she endured as a Chinese-Canadian at school and vowed not to let that happen in her schools. She was taunted with racist names from both students and teachers.

I would expect that most of the urban elementary principals in Ontario, the majority of who are white, have not had similar exclusionary experiences. If they have, they have probably not been as intense as those of the principals in this study. If this is the case, where would principals learn about inclusion/exclusion, especially if they did not have the requisite life experiences?

Karpinski & Lugg (2006) posit that “educational administrators, both as a field of academic inquiry and as a profession, have historically been at odds with—if not in direction opposition to—social justice” (p. 279). Principals have often maintained the status quo and have opposed the challenge to change it (Ryan, 2003). The aims of social justice involve examining the status quo and seeking ways to ensure justice for all students. Even though promoting social justice has not always been a critical part of the principal’s role, Capper et al. (2006) believe that

School leaders need to embody a social justice consciousness within their belief systems or values. This includes need to possess a deep understanding of the
power relations and social construction including white privilege, heterosexism, poverty, misogyny, and ethnocentrism (p. 213)

Where and when will principals learn about inclusion if they have not yet learned about inclusion? Where and how will they develop this social justice consciousness?

The principals in this study, although committed to inclusion both in principle and practice, did not provide robust definitions of inclusion. Principals defined inclusion using broad-based concepts such “people participated in the school” or “the school welcomed people.” Within these responses there was only some evidence of a deeper level of understanding of what inclusion can entail. For example, Nigel hinted at students believing that the school is about “them,” as opposed to the students changing to meet the needs of the school. His example suggests schools move away from expecting students to change. This requires a critical reconsideration of the control and propagandizing aspects of schools, where students are inculcated with certain theories and facts that align with the privileged. John listed the typically marginalized groups in his definition, but did not expand or elaborate on the possible reasons for their marginalization. The answers in this study suggest that many of these principals only have a rudimentary knowledge of how this hegemonic system operates—with respect to the systemic processes that privilege some through various means—and compensate with what they learned from their life experiences. Said otherwise, many of these principals’ life experiences have instilled in them a dedication to include others. This finding suggests that principals with specific life experiences can promote inclusion, even if they have not been formally taught about the exclusionary practices in society. A principal can learn about inclusion through either formal or informal ways or both. Given we
cannot easily control a principal’s informal education in inclusion, I suggest that in order for a principal to teach others about inclusion he/she must have a strong formal education in how society operates. One main hope is that teaching about the oppressive nature of society will help people, specifically teachers, reflect on their own biases, worldviews, and practices and make adjustments. We need to examine the system within which these issues are occurring, which can only happen with a critical analysis and a thoughtful challenge of the status quo. The principals in this thesis were committed to inclusion because of their informal learning; they would be able to reach even more people with formal supports to critically analyze the system. Learning to critically analyze the system is not a simple process. Kincheloe & Tobin (2009) argue that the tenets of positivism are so engrained Western culture that they are “invisible” to researchers (p. 513). The following are various opportunities in a principal’s career that could be used as formal learning opportunities for critical thinking and inclusive practice.

i) **Principal preparation programs.** The content of principal preparation programs has the potential to teach candidates about inclusion and social justice. However, most principal preparation programs are lacking in content connected to inclusion, specifically, and issues of social justice, generally (Marshall & Oliva, 2006, p. 7). This is not surprising with the impetus on managerial accountability practices and a desire for quantitative/measurable student outcomes. Many researchers continue to emphasize the overwhelming importance of preparing individuals to be instructional leaders (Keaster & Schlinker, 2009; Davis & Jazzar, 2005; Barnett, 2004). Consequently, and unsurprisingly, the preparation programs have increasingly conformed
to the accountability pressures on schools. As a result, issues connected to inclusion and social justice are less likely to be central components of principal preparation.

Theoharis (2009) interviewed principals and found that a major barrier to promoting social justice was the “insufficient” content, or lack of associated content, in the preparation programs (p. 107). Aspiring principals, in this study, did not learn about social justice, equity, inclusion, to any degree in their preparation programs. Young & Laible (2000), on the other hand, posit that white principals do not really understand racism and how it is manifested in schools (p. 375). They argue that both current and future principals need to understand racism and oppression before they can become principals (p. 388). Lyman & Villani (2002) found that principal preparation programs only discussed issues of poverty very minimally (p. 273). Again, this is concerning because this study found poverty and socioeconomic status are exclusionary factors at school.

Nonetheless, it is clear that candidates can learn about inclusion and social justice if the preparation program is geared toward that end. Capper et al. (2006) suggest a three-pronged approach to preparing aspiring leaders for social justice work: critical consciousness, knowledge, and practical skills (p. 212). The candidates would develop social justice consciousness; examine the practices that would promote equitable schools, as well as the requisite skills needed to achieve the goals (pp. 212-213). But these three goals ought not to come at the expense of students becoming proficient in reading, writing and mathematics. Rather, these goals can also support students’ academic achievement.
Preparation programs need to be designed by university faculty members who believe that social justice issues are part of the principal’s requisite knowledge base. Pounder et al. (2002) add that the professor needs to provide “inquiry-based learning experiences” for candidates that would help them understand how social justice, diversity, teaching, learning, leadership, management, etc. are related to daily practice (p. 275). Candidates would apply these concepts to the daily experiences of school life. One of the important points here is that the applicants would have to both learn to identify the social justice challenges, and to address them in their schools (Cambron-McCabe, 2006, p. 124). Unfortunately, Marshall (2004) argues that many university faculty members are not adequately prepared to teach courses that support social justice leadership components (p. 4).

ii) Ongoing learning opportunities for principals. This is another possible avenue to teach principals about inclusion. It would be naïve to believe that the long tentacles of managerial accountability do not reach and dictate many of the professional development experiences. Moreover, given these pressures from above, principals might not want to participate in learning that activities that involve risk-taking and innovation (Kochan et al., 2002, p. 291). It is much easier to learn how best to conform to the Ministry and district demands. As well, the principalship continues to be dominated by white males and females (Marshall, 2004, p. 7). But there were specific instances in this study that demonstrated the possibilities for ongoing learning. First, Debra enhanced her understanding of inclusion through visits to different religious organizations. Second, a visiting speaker taught Tony [and others] about racism and its direct impact on black
students. Third, Nigel and Todd used surveys to learn about how parents, students and staff perceived the school.

In more general instances, however, principals listened and gathered information from a variety of sources that continually impacted on their understanding of inclusion. Principals learned about what people were feeling and thinking. Ongoing learning is just that: it is a process that continues to add information that shapes and modifies understanding.

**iii) Selection of principals.** Another potential avenue to pursue is to hire or recruit principals who have a social justice attitude, bent, or leaning. This is perhaps the more challenging solution, more so even than modifying the principal preparation programs, since it would require widespread system and district changes about what is deemed important in education. Changing the curriculum for the principal preparation course is less daunting that the requisite system and district changes. Nonetheless, without system and district changes, principal selection will continue mirror the current priority of student achievement, albeit achievement defined very narrowly. There are two components of principal selection: district and self-selection.

District selection is the process whereby individuals are interviewed and granted permission to become principals. Again, the selection process for a principal in most, if not all, districts is aligned with student achievement (which, as I have said before, is almost invariably defined narrowly and at nearly always of the cost of social justice and equity). Quinn (2005) argues that the recruitment of principals should be based on “knowledge of curriculum and instruction, keen work ethic, strong communication skills,
and a passion to improve student learning” (p. 14). Notoriously absent from this list is any mention of social justice issues. This system-wide pressure has resulted in searching for individuals who will be best suited to raise the students’ test scores; it does not follow that these individuals will also pursue social justice or equity issues. Furthermore, here is no incentive or support for the principal to advocate for a broader notion of social justice if they believe they are meeting the requirements. Moreover, the system of recognition rewards for principals, from system directors and superintendents, reinforces the impetus to raise student achievement.

That said, changes to the district level could be made to ensure that candidates have some component of social justice knowledge and experience in their application package; simply add the criteria that the candidate must have demonstrated knowledge and application of social justice in a school context. Part of the application package could also be a reflective piece on the candidate’s personal experiences with social justice, and how this has affected his or her pedagogical practice. This minor change to selection criteria would immediately put social justice issues in the conversation, and highlight to all principals the importance of inclusion.

As these accountability pressures and policies place a greater stranglehold on the educational system, there will be less movement and autonomy for principals and teachers to support all students, and a movement back toward a Taylor-esque model of leadership that preaches collaboration and democracy, but in reality requires little input from teachers and principals. Given the systemic barriers that exist to prevent issues of social justice from becoming a focal point, the key to developing principal leadership
knowledge of inclusion resides in teacher training. It is much more plausible and possible to prepare principals for social justice if they have learned about social justice as teachers. I would expect that most of the urban elementary teachers in Ontario – the majority of which are white (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009) – have not had similar exclusionary experiences or if they have, they have not been as intense as those of the respondents in this study. This current collection of teachers represents the pool from which administrators are chosen; if the overwhelming majority of teachers are white then likely so too will the future principals in Ontario. But principals can still hire teachers who are passionate for inclusion. Dave hired student teachers who had worked in the school; he knew that they connected well with the students, the parents and the school culture. Craig, too, took time to observe student teachers when they worked at his school to determine if they would be a good “fit” for his school. Susan hired staff members who culturally were more representative of the student population. Debra sought teachers who brought much needed skills to the school; she cited the example of a teacher –who also had child and youth worker training experience- who was able to support and serve many students in her school.

Given the current pressure from managerial accountability, principals do not have enough wiggle room to be subversive enough. The pressures on principals to mediate an ongoing and overwhelming set of expectations makes it challenging to change perceptions mid-flight.
Teachers as Barriers to Inclusion

In truth, beneath its positive public persona, change lives a very different private life. Though we exalt in principle, we oppose it in practice. Most of us resist it whenever it comes about us. We dislike alterations in even our smallest daily routines, such as a highway improvement detour on our route to work, for example, let alone in the larger aspects of our life and career, such as a major restructuring of our workplace. Change is neither natural nor normal, constant nor common (Evans, 1996, p. 25).

Promoting inclusion brings the prospect of change to staff members and students. This change can often stir up feelings of resistance and fear. Teachers are the key players in almost all initiatives or reforms in education, and their reluctance to participate in initiatives or reforms can severely limit the possibility of the initiative’s success (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 238). Seven of the 16 principals identified teachers as barriers to the promotion of inclusion. Teachers resisted the changes being promoted by the principal. In Theoharis’ (2008) study of principals, he found that they encountered resistance from staff members’ attitudes and beliefs toward social justice applications in the school (pp. 315-316).

Teachers’ resistance to change is not new to public schools (Cuban, 1988, as cited in Richards, 1991). In fact, resistance is to be expected. Hultman (1995) organized resistance to change into two categories: passive and active. Passive resistance can involve some or all of these actions: agreeing verbally but not acting on the belief or agreement, avoiding starting the change process, pretending not to understand the change process and avoiding helping or supporting the initiative. Active resistance is much more overt and can involve some or all of the following actions: arguing, manipulating the situation, sabotaging, identifying faults and being critical, and using fear of the change to
i) Passive resistance. Staff members were often resistant because they did not agree with the principal and/or were used to behaving in a set way. Staff members might openly disagree with the principal, while others might agree in public forums or discussions but privately disagree, either individually or with others, and simply avoid participating. Some of this passive resistance can be countered by explaining a rationale for the change; sometimes, however, even when provided with a convincing rationale, staff members do not change their minds. Nigel, for instance, had to contend with some staff members who simply disagreed with him and his views on inclusion. Moreover, these staff members were adamant in their belief that the system was “fair” and the students deserved what they got. They believed that black students were in special education because they were not as smart as white students. This is an example of outright racism that surfaced due to the staff discussion on issues of equity. It is disappointing that anyone holding these views is permitted to teach, let alone elementary students. These individuals were, shockingly, responsible for the education of these students whom, they had determined a priori, were constitutionally incapable of learning at a level of excellence.” A further challenge is uncovering and bringing these beliefs to the surface so that they can be challenged; it is much more difficult to confront exclusionary and racist beliefs when they are “below the surface.” Even though Nigel argued for his inclusive beliefs, these staff members had fundamentally different understandings and did not accept his ideas. In the end, staff members who do not agree with the rationales for an initiative were far less likely to be fully committed to it. These
staff members might be part of the school plan on inclusion, but because they do not agree with the rationale, they are less likely to ensure the necessary actions take place.

Karen lamented that certain staff members were used to behaving in certain ways that were not conducive to inclusion. Apparently, no one had previously confronted these staff members on their behaviour. Unchallenged, over time, these behaviours had become normalized and more difficult for Karen to alter. Tony believed staff members were resistant because they did not understand the reasons for the change; without having an alternate rationale, the staff members had no reason to change their perceptions. Peter cited an experienced teacher who was “set in her ways” and did not internalize or apply the recommendations for change. Peter added it was particularly challenging because of a particular teacher’s personality; he tried several methods over the years but was still unsuccessful at promoting a noticeable change. Without a strong need or rationale for change, staff members will likely retain their current perspective (Greenberg & Baron, 2000, in Zimmerman, 2006; Stringfield & Ross, 1977, in Rutherford, 2009). And sometimes, even with a strong need or rationale for change, staff members will still resist.

ii) Active resistance. Active resistance is more easily identifiable because it is overt, or out-in-the-open, and may involve staff members working together. Ido (2002) cautioned,

"certain individuals within your school may be highly resistive, resistive enough to cause difficulties that go beyond the individual. It is important to recognize that negative behaviour can be contagious, especially if the negators also feel they are being victimized. Others in the faculty will get caught up in the negative and resistive movement." (p. 199)
This means that some individuals will work to influence others in negative ways. These individuals can be particularly challenging if they believe that they are being victimized by the process. Allan described how one or two staff members were part of a saboteur minority that went against the administrators regardless of the issue. The saboteur minority silenced other staff members because they were “loud, aggressive, and confident people.” Allan not only confronted these saboteurs, but also worked to support other staff members’ voicing their opinions. Matt also outlined that some people resisted the change simply because the message came from the principal. Nina, likewise, had to contend with staff members who were openly confrontational. The staff members had verbally attacked the previous principals when it came to professional development; the staff members tried to continue the behaviour. Nina put an end to this disrespect, stepping in to discipline the staff while emphasizing her expectations of them. Even after some of these active resistors changed schools, Nina still had to contend with active and open resistance to the change over the next couple of years. Nina confronted the resistance, but it still took a few years to reduce it. Matt encountered staff members who became very angry at the prospect of change, especially if it was directed by the principal or leadership within the school. These staff members resisted in order to undermine the principal’s positional power within the school. Matt was not convinced that these staff members resisted the change because of the content of the change, but because it was delivered by someone with power.

Understanding resistance—the whys, the hows and the whos—is critical to the principal being able to promote inclusion. The principal must continually evaluate the
situation to determine where the resistance is coming from, from whom, and why (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 244). Promoting inclusion nearly always results in change from the status quo. Duke (2004) outlined,

Resistance can arise during every phase of the change process and from a variety of predictable and sometimes unpredictable sources. Only a naïve leader would anticipate no resistance when undertaking educational change. (p. 191)

The change involved in promoting inclusion can be classified as a “second-order change,” as opposed to “first-order change.” First-order change examines methods to increase the effectiveness or efficiency of things that are already taking place. In contrast, second-order changes, “are systemic in nature and aim to modify the way an organization is put together, altering its assumptions, goals, structures, roles and norms” (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974, in Evans, 1996, p. 5). Promoting inclusion demands that second-order changes take place; the resistance associated with second-order change can be greater because of the magnitude of possible changes involved. A fourth box -principals’ understanding of inclusion (see below) -would better represent the process of inclusive leadership:
Understanding inclusion involves principals learning more about inclusion and how these learnings alter both the impact and the strategies. Principals continually gather information about how the strategies are blocked or supported and the impact they have. The above diagram shows how change occurs when particular strategies are implemented. At that point, the barriers and/or facilitators become part of the process. In other words, the principal uses a strategy to promote inclusion and this process nearly always results in some form of resistance that impacts the process. For example, if the principal is using a whole-school initiative to promote inclusion, but finds there is a barrier in the form of teacher resistance, he/she must adapt the strategy. The principal needs to understand the reasons behind the resistance and develop strategies to reduce this resistance. From the responses of the principals I interviewed, it is clear that barriers are not always easy to identify or predict. Moreover, barriers can appear at any part of the change process. As cited earlier, sometimes teacher or staff resistance to a change stems from failing to understand the rationale for the change. In this case of staff
resistance against a whole-school initiative, perhaps the principal needed to devote more
time to communicating this rationale. The whole-school initiative strategy would,
consequently, be altered somewhat as the principal works to reduce resistance by
devoting more time to communicating the rationale. Barriers are to be expected during
the change process, and the principal must be able not only to recognize these barriers
but also adapt strategies so that the promotion of inclusion continues.

The Negative Consequences for Principals Who Promote Inclusion

…with rapid changes such as school-centred decision-making, pressure for
greater accountability, shrinking resources, and changing demographics,
principals are expected to accept more and more responsibilities and the
overwhelming task of trying to be all things to all people. How much more can
be expected before the daily pressures overshadow the rewards of working with
young people? (Whitaker, 1992, pp. 115-116)

Although Kathryn Whitaker’s important study on principal burnout was
published eighteen years ago, her insights are even more applicable for current practicing
principals today. The demands on principals have increased in the last number of years,
and the demands for principals who promote inclusion are even greater. Among other
things, principals can experience “burnout” from the everyday demands of the role.
Sadly, principals who promote inclusion can experience a range of unpleasant
consequences that only serves to heighten the risk of burnout. For my purposes, burnout
will be defined as “a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause,
way of life, or relationship that failed to produce expected reward” (Freudenberger
principal burnout is unequivocal: Nearly seventy-five percent of principals (11 of 16)
cited serious negative consequences as a result of promoting inclusion. These
consequences ranged from feelings of exhaustion to discouragement. This was no surprise because in all cases, the pursuit of inclusion required the respondent to go “above and beyond” what was typically required of the position as principal, which is undeniably draining without these extra demands.

The promotion of inclusion, because of its depth and breadth, requires years to build long-term structures and support. It would follow, then, that the principal needs to be an active part of the process during these years. But if the principal “burns out,” the promotion of inclusion is likely to stop or be significantly reduced. Whitaker (1995) outlined that, “Principals are especially susceptible to burnout due to the complex nature of their jobs. Role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload appear to be particular problems for principals” (Savery & Detiuk, 1986; Murphy, 1994; in Whitaker, 1995, p. 287). This holds true for the principals in my study; there were explicit examples of role conflict, ambiguity, and overload. Without these drains on the principals’ energies, they could more easily address inclusion in their schools. Moreover, as the principals in this study show promoting inclusion exacerbated the stresses resulting from these three types of problems with the role of principal.

i) **Role conflict.** Role conflict is when the roles that the principal plays conflict with one another. Having too many roles means that principals cannot focus or devote sufficient time to any of the roles they have. Nigel, for instance, was frustrated and discouraged that he could not follow through on the items he deemed important because the Ministry of Education mandates took up so much time. In this case, his role at promoting inclusion conflicted with the Ministry of Education directives. Issues of
equity and inclusion were pushed to the side. Nigel was an experienced principal, so he believed that his ability to meet his site-specific school needs was being controlled, unnecessarily and inefficiently, by the Ministry. Similarly, Kristin also was frustrated with the “over-prescription” of curriculum that prevented her from responding to issues of equity and inclusion. She, too, believed that there were directives from the District and Ministry that became the foci for the school and conflicted with her promoting inclusion.

Cushing et. al (2003) argue that for principals “[s]tress comes from high levels of responsibility while authority and flexibility are simultaneously reduced via union contracts and fiscal and legal requirements. It [stress] comes from being the first head to roll if reform demands and targets aren’t met” (p. 29). The lack of autonomy to meet students’ needs, while at the same time being required to implement central office targets were also sources of stress (Johnson, 2005; Adamowski & Petrilli, 2007). Principals did not have the flexibility to innovate or attend to issues they deemed important because their energies were tied up meeting the demands of the Ministry of Education. For the principals of this study, fostering inclusion was the major issue that fell by the wayside.

Role conflict can also encompass conflicting personal and professional roles (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003, p. 17). This means that the role at school can conflict with the individual’s ability to fulfill a role at home. Debra and Nina both outlined how their family lives suffered because they spent so much time at school. Nina’s family members understood why she spent so much time at school, but she admitted that her family has still been affected. Cushing et al. (2003) concur that long hours and many
nights at school are reasons why it is not easy to find people who want to become principals (p. 29). Sarros (1988) added that there was more home-work conflict with principals than teachers. Females, in particular, were more likely to experience this conflict (in Friedman, 1995, p. 642). This conflict and cost to their personal lives can cause principals to question whether they want to remain committed to the organization (Duignan, 2006, p. 28).

ii) Role ambiguity. Role ambiguity was also a factor because principals were not always clear on what their roles were. That is, principals were torn because of their desire to promote inclusion while at the same time meet the Ministry and district school board requirements. Nigel argued that there were many things dictated by the Ministry of Education that he could not devote much time to promoting inclusion. Karen, too, was concerned with the pressure on her school from her district school board for improving the EQAO scores and the lack of support to deal with social justice issues.

iii) Role overload. Role overload is a common stressor for school principals, even when they are not promoting inclusion. In Ontario, although there is substantial pressure on principals that the Ministry and District initiatives are implemented, there are still many demands in the regular school day that must be placed ahead of promoting inclusion. It is not only the outside requirements but the daily demands of the job that can overwhelm principals. In this study, the principals, in addition to their regular duties in the role of principal, also occupied the role of chief promoter of inclusion in their schools. Promoting inclusion took time, energy and ongoing commitment from all the principals. Theoharis’ study concurred that the numerous roles principals played

In addition to the common sort of role overload that principals experience, the principals in my study reported that the role of promoting inclusion was, in particular, often very challenging. Although the demands of the role changed day-to-day, even adapting to these different levels of demand proved stressful.

Promoting inclusion also carried the risk of failure; some of the principals in this study felt discouraged because their attempts to promote inclusion did not “bear fruit”. Anna tried to encourage more parents to participate in the school but was somewhat demoralized when she was not successful. Peter outlined how there were days when it was a challenge to get staff members to support each other or him; on other days things were more positive. Matt also identified how he tried to encourage staff members to “buy into” inclusion; he provided added support to help these staff members and even with this added support some staff members still did not participate. All three of these principals highlighted how demanding it is to promote inclusion.

What will happen if these principals come to the point where they simply cannot “go above and beyond” anymore? Given the current mandate of raising student achievement scores, it is not likely in the foreseeable future that principals will have the support, from either their district or the Ministry, to devote more time to issues of equity, social justice, and inclusion. My study demonstrates the critical importance of principals in the promotion of inclusion in schools. Without principals advocating for inclusion, I do not envision long-term or large-scale changes to the system. All the principals in this study led the promotion of inclusion in their schools. Without the efforts of the principal
I would expect that inclusion could occur, at best, only in pockets of classrooms throughout the school, if at all.

The emotional and physical well-being of principals, especially those who are willing to go above and beyond to promote inclusion, is vitally important. Unfortunately, principals who advocate for inclusion can burn out in a relatively short time; besides the physical and mental impact on the individual principal, burnouts can also have an impact on the school. The promotion of inclusion will stop or lessen if the principal is no longer able to advocate for it, especially if the promotion of inclusion is in its earliest stages.

**Summary**

*Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.*

- Henry David Thoreau

Even with some these obstacles and constraints there is much hope for inclusion in our schools. I write this because these principals have made differences - I believe significant ones-to making their schools more inclusive places for everyone. The principals in this thesis were excellent “farmers” of Thoreau’s metaphorical seeds, indeed. The hope and seeds of inclusion must take place at these “grassroots levels” in schools where the most important people, the students, learn and live. There are opportunities to work within this narrow positivistic notion of student achievement to promote inclusion in schools. The principals in this thesis have demonstrated that schools can combat outside that create exclusion and sustain privilege and begin to create anew. Moreover, many themes in this thesis centred on planting seeds and nurturing the
growth of all members of the school community. When I refer to “growth” in this instance, I want to be clear that I am speaking about growth in two senses: i) students’ personal, social, moral and intellectual development and ii) students’ ability to critique, understand, and shape their world. The principals planted the seeds by devoting time to teaching about inclusion. Once an individual gains a more critical understanding of the world, his/her perceptions are changed forever. And yes, this planting took time away from other tasks and duties but these principals believed that it was critical to the long-term success. While students should always be the first priority in the school, all groups were taught about inclusion in order to support this priority.

Planting took time but even more time was spent on nurturing the seeds. It was during this stage that principals had to combat with staff members who did not believe that inclusion was needed or necessary. They sought facilitators in the school or community to support the growth. Some of these facilitators challenged others’ worldviews in presentations at staff meetings. Principals also nurtured these seeds by modeling inclusive behaviour at every available opportunity. Schools are influenced by the greater society but they do not necessarily have to mirror it. Yes there are costs, both emotional and physical, to promoting inclusion but as these seeds of inclusion grow, there will be more facilitators who will become networks of support.
Chapter Ten: Conclusions and Implications

A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has. Margaret Mead

This study is for current and future urban elementary principals. From my experiences as an administrator in four urban elementary schools, I understand how important it is that students be included in all aspects of the school. But my experiences have also shown me that there are forces, both systemic and individual, that work to constrain administrators’ ability to make inclusion a reality. One of my hopes is that the results from this study will create cognitive dissonance for readers who believe that Ontario is indeed a meritocracy and students “get what they deserve” in school. For other readers who have had that felt the tension and conflict between system mandates and what they could be doing for students in terms of social justice, I hope that they will find solace in learning that they are not alone in their pursuit of social justice in schools. For all readers, I hope this study illustrates that inclusion can be promoted in Ontario elementary schools.

The Principal as Public Intellectual

The role of public intellectual is critical to principals being powerful advocates for inclusion in their schools. Moreover, this role is consistent with how I understand the purpose of education and my hopes and visions for inclusion in schools. I envision this role as encompassing a number of different facets: i) the critical lens to examine the world; ii) the responsibility to advocate publicly for students using universal principles of freedom and justice; and iii) the expectation that principals continue to learn from others’
experiences, histories and beliefs. While there are many conceptions of public intellectuals, I am using Said’s (1994) definition; he wrote

The central fact for me is, I think, that the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publically to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose raison d’être is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behaviour concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously (1994, p. 10).

As public intellectuals, principals must advocate for all students, especially those who are marginalized and excluded by the current educational system. Moreover, principals must resist and combat against the pressures of the school board and accompanying Ministry of Education directives that conflict with these universal principles of freedom and justice. In certain cases, the principals would have to confront their employers—their respective District School Board or Ministry of Education—to uphold these principles. Upholding these principles—especially when it involves confronting their employers—will be challenging for many principals. Typically, the principalship is characterized by maintaining order and control in schools, which in turn secures and supports the status quo.

In order for principals to fulfill the role as public intellectuals, ongoing learning is required. A much more comprehensive understanding is required of how societal issues and institutions impact on schools and, more specifically, on the learning
experiences and possibilities for all students. Only this type of training and learning can never end because the issues that impact on students are always in a state of flux. Barth agrees and he states that,

> What is desperately needed in deliberation about our reform in our nation’s schools is a continual conversation between social science research and craft knowledge, and between social scientist and educator. Each has tough and important questions to ask the other (in Mai, 2004, p. 4).

These discussions must be ongoing in order for the principals and their staff members to adequately prepare for each school day. Giroux (1997) takes the discussion even deeper with his assertion that educators must understand the relations between culture and power in society. The failure to understand how these relations shape, constrain, and reproduce existing inequities, will only doom current educational approaches or reforms (p. 130).

Even though this study opposed the conception of the “hero-leader”, hierarchical and authoritarian leadership model, this study’s findings demonstrate the importance of having the administrator, initially taking the lead. In other words, the principal must take the lead, at least initially, to begin the process of promoting inclusion and making inclusion a school reality. Consistent with Said’s definition, teachers, students, parents and community members can also become public intellectuals. This is important to the long-term sustainability of inclusion, that there are many individuals within the school who can discuss and advocate for inclusion.

There are instances, furthermore, when a principal must exclude the voices and opinions of others in order to promote inclusion. This exclusion of certain stakeholder voices might cause tension for some individuals who value and practice the democratic
ideals of inclusive leadership. Democracy, however, does not entail that “anything goes.” Exclusion is sometimes necessary because the inclusion of all voices can sometimes dilute the strength of the practice and the end product. That is, including the voices of the naysayers and resistors to inclusion could result in compromise in which both sides “give and receive” and exclusionary practices continue. For example, fascist, racist, and/or exclusionary worldviews will detract from inclusive efforts and results. As a practicing urban elementary school principal, I know that this compromise could simply weaken any notion, concept or practice of inclusion. Some staff members are resistant to the concept and application of inclusion in schools; their negative opinions could contribute to other staff members joining them. In this study, there were explicit examples of principals confronting the resistors and the “naysayers” on staff. Said otherwise, building inclusion in schools involves considering all opinions but being able to object to some of them on moral and educational grounds.

But there is much hope for the future. The Ministry of Education has produced a document, *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Leadership Strategy*, which outlines steps and strategies to better meet the needs of Ontario students. The focus of this document is “to understand, identify, address, and eliminate the biases, barriers, and power dynamics that limit students’ prospects for learning, growing and fully contributing to society” (p. 6). The vision for this document involves two key beliefs: first, students, parents and community members are welcomed and respected in the school; and two, all students are supported in a “culture of high expectations for learning.” (p. 10). Moreover, this four-year plan involves training staff members on equity and inclusive education, and
ensuring that schools will implement “board equity and inclusive education policies, programs, and action plans that reflect the needs of their diverse schools” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 23). The document outlines specific school district goals in each of the four years. For example, in year two, schools must “…embed equity and inclusive principles in board and school improvement plans” (p. 36). This means - in practice - that improvement plans must identify and discuss how these principles are part of the way schools operate.

Even with this document and accompanying strategic plan, it is probably unwise to believe that many changes will happen on a grand scale throughout school districts. There is no doubt that this document provides a starting point for discussing inclusion and its aims; its goals are progressive compared to the continued emphasis on quantitative data and market accountability measures.

Teaching about inclusion and inclusive education, however, requires that individuals develop some notion of critical consciousness. In my study, all sixteen principals have achieved some level of critical consciousness. This critical consciousness is the major driver that propels them to promote inclusion; they understand that the system operates to advantage some while it disadvantages others. This understanding of how the system operates provides the “why” impetus for change. The “how” outlines the approaches or methods. I believe very strongly that the “why” drives the “how” (although the “how” is not dependent on the “why”). The Ministry of Education strategy remains focused on the “how”, while ignoring the “why.” For example, this strategy could educate principals that one method for promoting inclusion
involves having interpreters at parent nights, interviews, etc, so that parents feel included; the strategy is the “how” and could be implemented without the principal having much understanding of the “why”. I worry that this strategy will focus strictly on the “how” as opposed to teaching others about the “why” which is crucial to developing critical consciousness. I think of the proverb attributed to Lao Tzu, “Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime.” Providing an individual with a strategy to promote inclusion is a start. But only when the individual develops critical consciousness will that individual be able to ensure that others are “of the school” and not simply “in the school.” The “why” of inclusion is what is needed.

Principals will still have to work within this system of market accountability, yet they must ensure that inclusion is at the forefront. To combat these pressures the principal must subvert the system. What I mean by subvert is akin to stickhandling in hockey: where the object is to shield and protect the puck from others within the rules of the game. Principals, too, must shield and protect their commitment to inclusion from the many other systemic demands and constraints. Rapp (2002) writes,

If there are fewer and fewer cracks from which to develop consciousness, resistance, subversion, and liberatory action against systemic injustice in schools, universities, and professional associations, educators committed to critical pedagogies and social justice must respond by gravitating to groups and sites where they can form coalitions, confidence, and positions of power. (p. 228)

Principals will need to develop their coalitions within their schools to build support for social justice. Using the strategies mentioned in this study, the principal must work to include all students, staff, parents, and community members in the school. But in order
to develop and grow the coalition, the principal must teach others and provide opportunities to learn about inclusion.

Moreover, these coalitions need protection from the systemic forces that will seek to protect and preserve the status quo.

Are schools responsible for more than just improved results on test scores? Of course they are, especially when these tests are based on a very narrow view of achievement and also are democratically racist. Do the achievement gaps amongst students groups result or stem from systemic and individual processes in our educational systems and society? Yes, undoubtedly they do—but only through our ongoing learning and teaching will these processes become more visible to all. There is a common retort to students who struggle at or who are marginalized and excluded at school: work hard, follow the system and you will be rewarded. This belief in the system ignores that the system and the processes that flow from it are at the root of the problem. The current singular notion or definition of achievement—that aligns so effortlessly with positivism—will not survive with the development of principals as public intellectuals. What will emerge are processes and conceptions of education that are much more inclusive and socially just.

**Implications for Practice**

This study provides elementary principals with specific strategies to promote inclusion in their schools. There are so many different strategies that are practical and applicable in schools. The implications for practice runs deeper, however, than these strategies. Make no mistake, the strategies outlined in this study are the means to
promoting inclusion in school and, are, as a result, important to the end goal of inclusion.

The most important implication of this study is that practicing principals might consider a broader notion of the role of education in our society. That is, principals will begin to reflect on, question and challenge the assumptions consistent with the market accountability we are currently encountering in Ontario. Paulo Freire wrote,

Education as the practice of freedom— as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from men. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without men, but men in relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it (1970, p. 76).

A major hope of mine is that, for many principals, this becomes another step in their growth toward critical consciousness, both of their roles in the system and the system in general. I am not so naïve or egotistical to believe that mine is the only way to understand the role of schools or education; the importance lies in the actions of reflecting, questioning and challenging.

Implications for Future Research

This study’s findings have many implications for future research. First, a follow-up study with these same principals would examine the impact of inclusive efforts on students, staff, and parents. This would be an opportunity for more people to shape and guide our knowledge of inclusion.

Second, more investigation is warranted in finding out what urban elementary principals’ purposes of education are. I am interested in whether the market accountability practices have completely dominated and shaped their views. I outlined,
in the discussion area, the need for principal preparation and on-going learning to enhance social justice knowledge and practice. Knowing more about how practicing principals define the purposes of education could help define what social justice preparation and training supports are needed.

Third, a more precise and directed examination of how principals navigate the tensions and demands of promoting social justice in the current context in Ontario is in order. My study identified the stresses and tensions principals faced when promoting inclusion. These stressors can result in principals “burning out.” Future research would continue to focus on principals who promoted social justice, but not in any singularly defined way. That is, principals would be principals who promote social justice using a variety of methods. The research would examine how these principals dealt with the system and district pressures while at the same time advocating and promoting social justice in their schools. I have great concern that more knowledge is needed to support principals as they handle the myriad of pressures and demands. Further research could suggest strategies that would help principals cope and continue.

Fourth, while the intent of this study has been on examining the leadership in urban elementary schools, much more research is needed to learn about students’ experiences of inclusion and exclusion in Ontario and Canadian schools. There is no doubt that exclusion, for myriad of reasons, is commonplace in all schools. What are the thoughts and experiences of Ontario and Canadian elementary students? One of the strengths of qualitative research is the ability, I believe, to showcase or identify an individual’s life. Moreover, we need current information from Ontario and Canadian
students to guide our practices at school. That way, our hope for great inclusion can proceed with greater clarity.

Fifth, there is a need for further examination into principals in other countries who have fought against the neoliberal and neoconservative pressures to promote inclusion in their elementary schools. This research could present a number of approaches and learnings that are inclusive of different countries and cultures but alike in the promotion of inclusion.
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PROMOTING INCLUSION IN URBAN CONTEXTS


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PROMOTING INCLUSION IN URBAN CONTEXTS


APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Letter

Date

To the participants in this study,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project about elementary principal leadership and inclusion. The purpose of the study is to examine how urban elementary principals promote inclusion in their schools and communities.

This study will be carried out under the supervision of Professor James Ryan, Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education, *The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto*. The study is part of the requirement of an Ed.D degree.

Your participation will consist of a face-to-face or telephone interview of approximately forty five minutes to one hour. During the interview you will be asked questions about how you define inclusion, the strategies you use to promote inclusion with students, staff members, parents and community members, the barriers you face and consequences, both positive and negative that, result from your efforts to promote inclusion in the school. As the interview proceeds, I may ask questions for clarification or further understanding, but my part will be mainly to listen to you speak about your views and experiences as they pertain to promoting inclusion in school.

It is my intention that each interview will be audiotaped and later transcribed to paper; you have the choice of declining to have the interview taped. All identifying information will be removed from your transcripts and interviews. Your transcript will be sent to you to read in order for you to add any further information or to correct any misinterpretations that could result. The information obtained in the interview will be kept in strict confidence and stored at a secure location. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons, schools, school districts, and communities cannot be identified. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

Participation is voluntary; you may withdraw from the study or refuse to answer any question at any time. Finally, you are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement with it and may request a summary of the findings of the study.

Thank you for your participation.
By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and that you are fully aware of the conditions above. Please keep the copy of this letter for your files.

Name: _________________________   School: _________________________
Signed: _________________________   Date: _________________________

Please initial if you would like a summary of the findings of the study upon completion: ________

Please initial if you agree to have your interview audiotaped: ________
APPENDIX B – Interview Questions

How do urban elementary principals promote inclusion in their schools?

Interview Questions:

1). How would you define inclusion?

2). What are the motivators (life experiences, work experiences) for you to advocate for inclusion?

3). What strategies do you use to promote inclusion with:
   i). Staff members; ii). Students; iii). Parents

4). What barriers do you face when you promote inclusion with:
   i). Staff members; ii). Students; iii). Parents

5). Are there other facilitators of inclusion in your school and what are their roles and responsibilities with regard to inclusion?

6). What are the consequences (both positive and negative) for you for promoting inclusion with:
   i). Staff members ii). Students iii). Parents

7). How do you know if inclusion is actually taking place in your school? In other words, what are the indicators that identify inclusion is taking place in your school?

8). What recommendations would you make to the Board and the Ministry of Education, regarding inclusion in schools?