A CASE STUDY OF AN EFFECTIVE WORKING RELATIONHIP INVOLVING AN EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANT AND AN EDUCATOR

by

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ABSTRACT

The nature of the working relationship between an educational assistant and the classroom teacher can have a significant impact on the successful inclusion of students with exceptionalities (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). However, many teachers and educational assistants report feeling unprepared to work together (Riggs, 2001). Furthermore, the available publications for doing so are mostly recommendation papers based on a limited amount of empirical research (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001). Thus more research is needed to discover new ways, and to report on existing means, for educational assistants and teachers to effectively and collaboratively support students with exceptionalities in regular classrooms.

The purpose of this study was to present a case study of an effective working relationship between a teacher and an educational assistant and to give an account of how the principal and special education resource teacher in the school supported this working relationship. Interviews and a classroom observation were used to collect the data. The three specific research questions were: (a) How do the educational assistant and classroom teacher describe their roles, beliefs, and practices that enable them to work together effectively, providing inclusive education for exceptional students? (b) How do the educational assistant and classroom teacher describe their beliefs about inclusive educational practice and how are these related to their practice? (c) How do the principal and special education resource teacher report they provide direct and indirect support to the working relationship between the teacher and educational assistant?

The four themes that emerged from the data were: (a) Shared Beliefs About Working Together and With Students in a Caring Manner; (b) Responsive, Student-Centred Practice, Together, but in Distinct Roles; (c) Supportive Working Environment;

and (d) Inclusive School Culture. The findings supported previous research on effective working relationships between educational assistants and classroom teachers (Schnell, 2001) and also added the role of the principal and special education resource teacher. The case in this study provides the opportunity for educators to reflect on their own working relationships and learn from the models provided by their colleagues presented in the case study described. The findings from this research can inform the development of pre-service and in-service training on creating and maintaining effective working relationships between EAs and classroom teachers and on the support provided by the special education resource teacher and principal.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Over the past two decades, the number of students with exceptionalities in regular education classes in Ontario schools has increased (Hutchinson, 2007). This move to more inclusive education has dramatically changed the make up of the regular classroom and hence the role of the classroom teacher (French, 1999a). Teachers need to consult and collaborate with other professionals, such as special education teachers, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists to meet the complex needs of their heterogeneous classes (Riggs, 2002). Teachers also need to work with educational assistants who support students with exceptionalities in the classroom in order for inclusion to be successful (Giangreco, 2003; Hutchinson, 2007; Stanovich, 1996). The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario website states that, "Teachers and support personnel working together are integral to the success of every school staff" (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2007).

The working relationship between teachers and educational assistants is unique, hierarchical, and complex. Unlike other working relationships within the school, educational assistants and teachers often work together in the same classroom for the majority of the day. Like most other jurisdictions in Canada, Ontario does not have a specific, accredited training program that is required of all educational assistants who work with students in schools (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, 2007). This results in people with widely different levels of skills and qualifications being employed as educational assistants (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001). The roles and responsibilities of educational assistants are also not clearly defined (French, 1999b;

Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001), and teachers often report having insufficient training to supervise educational assistants (Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001).

Many teachers and educational assistants have reported that their relationship takes place at the survival level (Sundmark, 2003). An ineffective working relationship between educational assistants and educators can have a negative impact on the inclusion of students with exceptionalities (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005). The support provided by educational assistants for students with exceptionalities must extend far beyond ensuring these students' physical proximity to their classmates (York-Barr, Schultz, Doyle, Kronberg, & Crosset, 1996).

Most of the available publications on the topic are recommendation papers about the roles and responsibilities of educational assistants based on a limited amount of empirical research (Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001). More research is needed to discover new ways, and to report on existing means, for educational assistants and teachers to effectively and collaboratively support students with exceptionalities in regular classrooms.

The initial purpose of this research was to present a case study of an effective working relationship between an educational assistant and a classroom teacher, and to describe how the principal at the school supported their working relationship. During the data collection, the educational assistant, teacher, and principal identified the importance of the role of the special education resource teacher at the school in supporting the working relationship between the educational assistant and teacher. Based on the recommendation of the participants, the special education resource teacher at the school was recruited to participate in the study, and the three research questions were revised to include the role of the special education resource teacher. The three specific research

questions were then: (a) How do the educational assistant and classroom teacher describe their beliefs, practices, and roles that enable them to work together effectively, providing inclusive education for exceptional students? (b) How do the educational assistant and classroom teacher describe their beliefs about inclusive educational practice and how are these related to their practice? (c) How do the principal and special education resource teacher report they provide direct and indirect support to the working relationship between the teacher and educational assistant?

Rationale Based in Experience

Before becoming a teacher I worked at a local Community Living Association supporting children and adults with exceptionalities to participate in their communities. Based on these previous experiences, I was committed, when I began teaching, to providing an inclusive education for all the students in my class. In my five years of teaching at the elementary level, I have had students with exceptionalities in my class and at least one educational assistant working in my classroom every year. During my time as a teacher, I came to recognize that the relationship between classroom teachers and educational assistants was vital to the effective inclusion of students with exceptionalities in the general education classroom. I also noticed that this relationship was often problematic, and educational assistants and teachers did not always receive the necessary support from administrators to develop and maintain an effective working relationship.

From my perspective, the positive working relationships that I developed with the educational assistants in my classroom had a significant impact on the level of inclusive education for the students in the class. Each educational assistant was an integral and valued member of the class, and this helped to facilitate the inclusion of all students. I wanted to learn more about the nature of this crucial relationship that is often neglected. I

wanted to understand how the relationship could move from "gracious host" and guest to engaged teaching partners (Giangreco et al., 2005).

Definitions of Terms

Educational Assistant, Classroom Teacher, and Collaboration

Three terms are critical to a reader's understanding of this thesis: educational assistant, classroom teacher, and collaboration.

The role of educational assistants in the education system is not standardized, and this diversity is reflected in the numerous terms used to describe the position and in the complexity of defining the term. Some examples of terms used are: teaching assistant, paraeducator, teacher's aide, and paraprofessional. For the purpose of reporting the findings of this thesis I used the term educational assistant because it reflects the usage of language by the participants. The use of the term educational assistant may make the research more accessible to educators who would most likely be familiar with the term educational assistant.

In contrast, in the literature review in Chapter Two, the term paraeducator is used throughout because it is a widely used term in the research literature. The definition used was taken from a paper written by French (1999b) on who paraeducators are and what they do. The term paraeducator is defined in that paper as:

> a person who works in a school in an instructional capacity alongside a school professional and is supervised by the certified or licensed professional who holds ultimate responsibility for the student and programmatic outcomes. (French, 1999b, p. 65)

The teacher in the present study is responsible for teaching the core subjects to a class of 25 students. The responsibilities of the teacher are outlined in the Ontario

Education Act (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b). The responsibilities of the teacher include: preparing lesson plans and teaching classes, encouraging students, evaluating student work, and supervising student behaviour (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b).

The terms collaboration and effective working relationship are used interchangeably in this thesis to describe the way the teacher and educational assistant interact and work together. In their work on collaborative teams, Friend and Cook (2003) define collaboration as "a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 5). This definition of collaboration is well suited to describe the working relationship between the educational assistant and teacher in the present study. However, there is a power imbalance between the educational assistant and teacher; they are not coequal partners, and this imbalance must be considered when examining their collaboration.

Exceptional Student and Inclusive Education

The educational staff are all working together to provide an inclusive education for an exceptional student. The Education Act of Ontario defines an exceptional student as,

> a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program. Students are identified according to the categories and definitions of exceptionalities provided by the Ministry of Education. An exceptional pupil requires the support of special education services (e.g., speech and language pathologists, educational assistants). (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a)

Inclusive education is defined as "the value system that holds that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning achievement, and the pursuit of excellence in all

aspects of their education: incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendship, and interaction" (Hutchinson, 2007, p. 333). As in most of North America, the ideological shift towards inclusive education continues to be the dominant influence on policy and practice in Ontario (Hutchinson, 2007), and inclusive educational practice continues to evolve.

Principal and Special Education Resource Teacher

The Ontario Education Act also describes the responsibilities of the school principal.

> Principals are responsible for the organization and management of individual schools, including any school budget assigned to the school by the school board. They are also responsible for the quality of instruction at their school and for student discipline. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a)

The principal is also responsible for assigning teachers to classes and supervising teaching staff.

A special education resource teacher is the educational professional responsible for planning and evaluating alternative programming for students with developmental disabilities and for other exceptional students who are not following the provincial curriculum at their age/grade level. Special education resource teachers are usually responsible for day-to-day scheduling and for supervision of the support provided by educational assistants.

Overview of Thesis

The second chapter of this thesis contains the literature review, which is written in four parts: paraeducators' work in the classroom, parallel research in the medical field on working relationships, the working relationship between paraeducators and classroom

teachers, and the role of principals and special education resource teachers in supporting the working relationship between teachers and paraeducators. The theoretical frameworks that informed the data analysis in the current study are briefly introduced at the end of the chapter. The third chapter describes the method and includes a rationale for the use of case study methodology. It also describes sampling procedures, data collection details, and procedures for analyzing the data. Chapter Four reports the findings, while Chapter Five contains the discussion.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The intent of the following literature review is to critically review the available research on: (a) paraeducators' work in the classroom, (b) parallel research in the medical field, (c) the working relationship between paraeducators and classroom teachers, and (d) the role of principals and special education resource teachers in supporting the working relationship between teachers and paraeducators. This chapter closes by briefly introducing the theoretical frameworks that informed the current study.

Paraeducators' Work

Most of the available publications about the work of paraeducators are non-empirical papers based on a relatively small amount of research (Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001). This section of the literature review describes empirical studies that focus on three topics concerning the work of paraeducators: (a) how paraeducators perceive their work, (b) paraeducators' roles and responsibilities, and (c) possible impact of paraeducator support on students.

How Paraeducators Perceive their Work

Researchers have studied paraeducators' perceptions of their work using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative studies have used case studies, interviews, surveys, and observations to examine paraeducators' perceptions of their work. For example, Lewis's (2006) qualitative study reported the stories of 17 paraeducators working in inclusive elementary classrooms. The dominant themes and reoccurring topics from the paraeducators' narratives were identified and sorted. Overall, an ethic of caring was the reason that most paraeducators were motivated to work with students and to take on new roles and responsibilities. Many of the paraeducators felt that

there were no boundaries to their roles, and many described taking on instructional roles without supervision from teaching staff.

The paraeducators were frequently indigenous to the school's community and sometimes served as a connection between families and schools. There was often a strong emotional bond between paraeducators and the students whom they supported. The paraeducators' narratives revealed that teachers provided the majority of their training. The teachers had not received training themselves on working with paraeducators or on ways to provide training to paraeducators. Overall, the researchers learned from the discussions with the paraeducators that the paraeducators felt marginalized within their schools.

Lewis (2006) made four policy recommendations to improve paraeducators' status and effectiveness in schools. The first was to periodically survey paraeducators' views. An opportunity to have their opinions and observations heard may be a good way to make paraeducators feel more valued. The second recommendation was to redefine the word "staff" to include paraeducators. This redefinition could influence the type of communication that occurs between staff members. Paraeducators would also have more opportunities to participate in workshops and conferences. The third recommendation was to provide high-quality professional development for paraeducators. To ensure that the professional development is of high quality, evaluation tools should be developed to gauge the effectiveness of the training. The last recommendation was to improve local union leaders' representation of and communication with paraeducators. Lewis argued that the needs and views of paraeducators must be addressed because paraeducators are "key educational personnel who affect the daily lives of students" (p. 145).

The narratives of paraeducators' experiences collected and summarized by Lewis (2006) allow the reader to hear the voice of the participants. The free flow of information, as compared to answers to set questions, allowed the participants to express what they felt was important. However, it is possible that only outgoing and confident paraeducators would have felt comfortable to share their stories with researchers and, if this were so, it might leave out some possible participants who would also have stories to tell. Perhaps an additional, anonymous, open-ended questionnaire would have allowed the opportunity for paraeducators who were reluctant to express their opinions to be heard. Riggs (2001) used surveys and interviews to collect data in her study.

To "find out what it was like to be a paraeducator in an inclusive setting" was the purpose of a large-scale study conducted by Riggs (2001). Both qualitative means (23 interviews) and quantitative measures (789 surveys) were used to collect data on paraeducators' perceptions. The findings from the interviews and surveys were similar. Ninety five percent of the participants were female and were over the age of 35. The education level of the majority of the participants was high school diploma. Most paraeducators reported receiving on the job advice and assistance from other paraeducators and teachers more frequently than formal in-service training. The participants consistently requested more training in behaviour management and curriculum modification. The participants felt unclear about their roles and about who was supervising and evaluating their work.

Staff relationships were not always characterized by mutual respect. However, in many cases, the paraeducators reported having a positive relationship with the classroom teacher. The importance of good communication and of having time to plan together were two issues raised by a number of paraeducators. Riggs (2001) wrote, "the most striking

finding of the research was the paraeducators' acknowledgment of the complex and intense relationships that they developed with various members of the school community" (p. 63). An interview study, with 16 participants, by Downing, Rynak, and Clark (2000) reported similar findings to Riggs (2001). Most of the paraeducators felt that teamwork with teachers would be the best approach for working with students. The paraeducators often worked independently and made unilateral decisions about consequences for student misbehaviour when there was no collaboration with the teacher. The paraeducators felt responsible for adapting curriculum, facilitating interactions with peers, and teaching new concepts to students. Some of the paraeducators reported feeling overwhelmed, isolated, and unprepared to perform all the duties expected of them.

The special education teachers, who had recently received training from the researchers, selected the paraeducators for possible participation in the study. This sampling procedure may have biased the findings. Downing et al. (2000) stated that this study was exploratory and that it provided a snapshot of paraeducator support and by no means represented the full picture. This study did, however, report similar findings to a study by Marks, Schrader, and Levine (1999).

The 20 paraeducators interviewed by Marks et al. (1999) reported being responsible for modifying curriculum on the spot and functioning as the exceptional students' primary teachers. Parents contacted the paraeducators rather than the teachers to discuss the academic needs of the students. The paraeducators felt personally responsible for the successful inclusion of the exceptional students. They described themselves as the "hub" or expert about the student with whom they were working.

There are some limitations to interpreting the findings of the Marks et al. (1999) study. The participants worked for a private company contracted by the school; therefore,

the school staff may have reacted differently to the paraeducators than if they had been employees of the school board. Eighteen of the 20 paraeducators had university degrees. The most common level of education for paraeducators reported in other studies has been a high school or college diploma (French, 1998). There was no triangulation of the data through classroom observations.

In summary, studies reviewed in this section suggested that paraeducators' perceptions of their work were influenced by a strong ethic of caring for students (Lewis, 2006). Although paraeducators articulated the desire to work as a team, they often felt that they were making unilateral decisions about students' education, were unclear about their roles and responsibilities, and reported feeling isolated. The next section of the literature review presents studies on the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators from the perspectives of other educational staff, as well as the perspective of the paraeducators.

Paraeducators' Roles and Responsibilities

A number of researchers used questionnaires to gather the perspectives of paraeducators as well as special educators, classroom teachers, and, in some cases, parents (e.g., Giangreco & Broer, 2005) on the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators. These studies ranged in size from less than 100 participants to over 700.

Giangreco and Broer (2005) undertook a large-scale (n=737) descriptive, quantitative study to examine paraeducator support in inclusive classrooms. Special education teachers, general education teachers, paraeducators, and parents of students with exceptionalities all responded to questionnaires about the percentage of time that paraeducators engaged in seven distinct tasks. Some examples of tasks were clerical support, implementing instruction planned by teacher or special educator, and engaging in self-directed activities. The study participants were asked to answer the questionnaires to

reflect what did happen rather than what they thought should happen. On average the paraeducators were reported by all the participants to be spending 47% of their time providing instruction planned by a professional, 19% providing behaviour support, and 17% engaged in self-directed activities.

The results of the questionnaires revealed that many students with exceptionalities were receiving a substantial amount of their instruction from paraeducators rather than from special education teachers. Nearly 40% of the paraeducators (n=153) reported that they provided the majority of the instruction for the students whom they supported. Over 53% of the paraeducators indicated that, at report card time, the teachers relied on them to provide information about the exceptional students' current level of performance because they knew more about the students than the professionals. Seventy percent of the paraeducators reported that they had a high level of autonomy and often made curricular, instructional, and activity-participation decisions without consulting with a professional. Giangreco and Broer (2005) questioned whether "extensive reliance on paraprofessionals to educate students with disabilities is nothing short of a double standard that simply would not be considered acceptable if it was applied to students without disabilities" (p. 19).

Minondo, Meyer, and Xin's (2001) survey study was intended to develop a list of roles and responsibilities for paraeducator self-assessment of specific job profiles. The researchers first compiled 116 statements about a wide range of possible roles and responsibilities of paraeducators. The statements were developed from a comprehensive review of the research and from job descriptions from 12 diverse school districts in New York State. After the list of statements was compiled, five researchers, with expertise in

the field of inclusive education, discussed the list and reached consensus on the 15 categories that were used as the survey items.

Thirty-four general education teachers, 31 special education teachers, and 29 paraeducators ranked the 15 categories of roles and responsibilities of paraeducators using a 7 point-Likert scale from 1, not appropriate, to 7, most appropriate, with a mid-point of 4, appropriate. Some examples of the 15 categories used on the survey of roles and responsibilities were: (1) Personal Care, (2) One-to-one in-class, (3) Material Adaptation, (4) Peer Facilitator, and (5) Classroom Support.

Factor analysis was used to identify the five category groupings: instructional role, school support role, liaison role, personal support role, and one-to-one in-class role. The findings of the survey were analyzed for possible differences across the three groups of respondents using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). A significant between-group difference for school support role, $F(2,91) = 4.05$, $p<.05$, and for liaison role, $F(2,91) = 5.28$, $p<.01$, was found. The post hoc analysis determined that paraeducators rated these two categories significantly higher than did the general education teachers, meaning that paraeducators reported that these two roles were more appropriate than did the general education teachers. There were no significant group differences involving the special education teachers. All three groups rated the single item category one-to-one in-class support role highest of any factor.

To interpret the results, the researchers and a group of 50 paraeducators discussed the findings from the survey at a training workshop. It was reported that the majority of paraeducators had regular communication (e.g., a home school notebook) with parents, although this was perceived to be in the purview of the professional. This is similar to Chopra et al.'s (2004) interview study that found that, according to parents, paraeducators

were the primary source of communication between them and the school. Minondo et al. (2001) suggested, "with appropriate training and supervision for paraeducators, professionals might be more supportive of recognition of a formal family liaison role for paraeducators" (p. 116).

In the discussion of the findings, Minondo et al. (2001) wrote that the list could be used "by educational teams to develop a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities and priorities for roles of individual team members including the paraeducator" (p. 116). The researchers also suggested that observations and interviews would provide richer data to describe the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators in inclusive classrooms.

Whereas the list is useful for a discussion starting point on a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities, it does not address the question of whether or not what members of the educational team perceive to be appropriate is what is most effective. More research is needed, as identified by Minondo et al. (2001), to critically evaluate and review the appropriate use of paraeducator support. The survey is a useful tool in understanding the perceptions of the members of the educational team on the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators. Further research that focused more on strategies and practices of educational teams who are providing successful inclusive education could also provide much needed information on effective use of paraeducator support.

Lamont and Hill (1991) also used questionnaires to describe the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators in inclusive classrooms. Fifty paraeducators and 50 classroom teachers from five British Columbia school districts responded to the 50-item questionnaire. The questionnaire asked participants to rate their perception of tasks paraeducators were performing as actual, preferred, not appropriate, and not applicable. The tasks were grouped into five types of support: Instructional, Behaviour Management,

Diagnostic, Classroom Organization, and Personal Care Assistance. The responses for the actual and preferred tasks were similar for teachers and paraeducators. However, the paraeducators' responses showed more willingness to assume responsibility for instructional and diagnostic tasks than the teachers felt was appropriate. This discrepancy highlights the lack of clear expectations for paraeducators working in inclusive classrooms.

The response rate for the questionnaires Lamont and Hill (1991) sent out was only 50%. Although this is a standard return rate, the pairs that did not return the survey could have had significantly different responses than the participants reported. There is also a chance of different interpretations for questionnaire items with many parts. For example, "alter curriculum, modify written material and help students work on assignments" (Lamont & Hill, 1991, p. 6) could have different meanings for different students depending upon student need. Items that refer to only one action would have been better.

The paraeducators reported assuming instructional responsibility for exceptional students in many cases and perceived these responsibilities to be appropriate. Teachers, on the other hand, tended to report judging instructional responsibilities as less appropriate than the paraeducators. The lack of well defined roles and responsibilities for paraeducators could impact the education of students with exceptionalities who they are supporting. The next section of the literature review presents studies on the possible negative impact of paraeducators' support on students with exceptionalities.

Possible Impact of Paraeducator Support

Little outcome data have been collected to show the impact of paraeducators on the learning and participation of children. Three studies are discussed in this section. These studies used both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Hemmingsson, Borell, and Gustavsson (2003) used field observations, informal interviews, and planned semi-structured interviews to describe how help was provided by paraeducators to seven students with physical disabilities. The field observations occurred for two full school days for each participant. The focus of the field observations was on how the paraeducators provided support to the students and how the paraeducators influenced the students' participation in the classroom. Individual interviews were conducted with each student participant, the participant's teacher, and the paraeducators. The intention of the interviews with the 19 individuals was to explain situations observed during data collection and to understand the various perspectives.

In general, the findings from the study suggested that the interactions between paraeducator support and the success of the students in school were complex and ambiguous. Six themes on the type of assistance that the paraeducators provided emerged from the analysis of the observation and interview data. The first theme described three assistant types: stand-in for the student, assistant as teacher-helper, and assistant as back-up resource. The teacher's perspective on learning had a significant impact on the assistant type. If the teacher believed in "learning by doing," then the assistants provided back-up resource assistance. The focus on the students' task performance and curriculum was adjusted so students could do as much as possible on their own. If the teacher emphasized "learning by knowing," then the assistance provided was of the teacher-helper and the stand-in for the student styles. The assistance was provided to compensate as much as possible for obstacles presented because of the students' disabilities so the focus could be on the students' understanding.

Another theme that emerged was the nature of the classroom affecting the type of support provided. In classrooms that were arranged and equipped (e.g., with specialized

keyboards) to support students with disabilities, the assistance provided was much more hands-off, back-up resource style. In classrooms that were not easily accessible for students with disabilities and not equipped with assistive devices, there was a greater need for the paraeducator to sit close and to be a stand-in-for-student assistant type.

The lack of influence that the students had on the type of assistance provided was another theme that emerged. The paraeducators made the decisions about whether or not help was needed. "For example, the back-up assistant might withhold assistance to train self-care skills and the stand-in assistant might give support without request" (Hemmingsson et al., 2003, p. 94). The students being supported had little control and influence concerning the support provided.

The last theme was the students' desire for social participation illustrated by the students trying to avoid help in situations where the help might threaten their inclusion in the group. The researchers' analysis also illustrated that assistance was accepted if it would facilitate more opportunities for the students with disabilities to interact with their peers.

The data collected provided a concise description of the type, amount, and impact of the support provided by paraeducators for seven students. Factors that had a significant influence on the support provided, such as the teacher's perspective, were also described. This study clearly highlighted the dilemma of support, meaning that students with disabilities need support to participate in the regular classroom; however, the support can also be a hindrance to their social inclusion with their peers. Social participation was shown to be a very strong motivator. Although there were only seven students in this study, the report did not provide the thick description or transcript excerpts that would enable the readers to get to know the students. Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, and

MacFarland (1997) also reported on the impact of the physical proximity of the paraeducator to the student whom they support.

Giangreco et al.'s (1997) study involved 134 team members (paraeducators, teachers, related service providers, parents, and administrators) who supported 11 students with multiple disabilities in regular classrooms. Giangreco et al. observed the students at different times of the school day and collected two to three hours of observation data for each student. The observation notes were then reviewed with the team members and semi-structured interviews were conducted. One important finding from the study was that the paraeducators were in close proximity to the students the majority of the time; for example, one student with disabilities was sitting on a paraeducator's lap while the other students in the class were seated on the floor.

Eight sub-themes emerged from the qualitative data collected related to paraeducators' close proximity. General education teachers were much less engaged with and responsible for students receiving support from paraeducators than with other students. The paraeducators often separated the exceptional students from their classmates. For example, prompting the student to leave the classroom after the other students had left and then walking with the student far behind the class. Students often became dependent on the paraeducators and did not attempt to independently solve problems. Peers were sometimes intimidated by the hovering paraeducator and did not interact with the exceptional students. Paraeducators sometimes lacked the training necessary to teach effectively and they were the students' only instructors. For some students there appeared to be a loss of gender identity. For example, a female paraeducator would take a male student into a female bathroom. Paraeducators sometimes interfered with the instruction of other students by doing different activities. The findings

described many possible negative outcomes related to using paraeducators to support students with exceptionalities in regular classrooms.

Although the findings in Giangreco et al.'s (1997) paper were qualitative in nature, the large sample size, and number and variety of observations and interviews enhanced the validity of the findings. Suggestions, such as assigning paraeducators to classroom teachers instead of to individual students, were made in the conclusion of the paper.

A descriptive quantitative study by Giangreco and Broer (2005) again found excessive close proximity of paraeducators to students whom they were supporting. Paraeducators in the study (n=153) reported spending an average of 86% of their time within 3 feet proximity to the student whom they were supporting, 46% of the paraeducators indicated that students thought of them as among their primary "friends" at school, rather than their classmates, and more than 36% reported that the students spent more than half of their social time at school (e.g., lunch, playground) with paraeducators. It is also noteworthy that 46% of paraeducators indicated that some students whom they supported communicated, via language or behaviour, that they found paraeducator support unwanted.

There are many unresolved issues concerning the role of paraeducators working in inclusive classrooms, and there is a small amount of empirical research. The roles and responsibilities of paraeducators are ill defined, and ineffective use of paraeducator support may be an impediment to the goal of inclusive education. A clearly defined description of what paraeducators should be doing in the classroom is needed, but that alone will not address the concerns. The working relationship between the teacher and paraeducator also impacts the support provided by paraeducators.

The available non-empirical sources support the importance of good working relationships between paraeducators and classroom teachers as a way of enhancing effective paraeducator support and hence successful inclusive education (French, 1999a; Giangreco, 2003; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Riggs, 2001; Stanovich, 1996). The limited amount of empirical research on the issues surrounding the working relationship between paraeducators and colleagues has encouraged me to review parallel research in the medical field. After describing the available parallel research in the medical field, the few studies found that specifically focused on the working relationships between paraeducators and teachers are reviewed.

Working Relationships in the Medical Field

Rationale for Inclusion of Nurse and Doctor Literature

An argument can be made for the inclusion of doctors' and nurses' collaboration in a review on paraeducators' and teachers' collaboration. Doctors and teachers have more education and receive higher pay and therefore are considered to have higher status and more autonomy in their working lives than do nurses and paraeducators (Chaboyer & Patterson, 2001; Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001). The lack of time to collaborate and the ambiguity of the roles of nurses and paraeducators are identified as barriers to effective collaboration (Hill, 2003; Lockhart-Wood, 2000).

The medical research and the educational research have used a similar definition of collaboration. The definitions describe collaboration as a style of communicating in many different contexts. The medical definition of collaboration identifies necessary characteristics of collaboration that are similar to the characteristics defined earlier in this thesis (Friend & Cook, 2003; Lockhart-Wood, 2000).

Changes in the last 20 years in both schools and hospitals have blurred the professional roles (Chaboyer & Patterson, 2001; French, 1999b). The education of nurses has changed from apprenticeship hospital training to a university education. The work of paraeducators used to be closely supervised by special education teachers in resource rooms. The inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms means that paraeducators are now working with significantly less supervision in regular classrooms.

An interesting finding from Baggs and Schmitt (1997) has a parallel concern in education. The rationale used by doctors for not always collaborating was the legal power they hold for decision-making. The consequences of decisions made in a medical setting may possibly have more dire outcomes than in education. There is, however, mention in the education literature of the legal implications of the use of paraeducators in inclusive classrooms (French, 1999a; Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001; Katsiyannis, 2000). Teachers are responsible for supervising paraeducators because ultimately teachers are legally responsible for ensuring that all students are receiving an appropriate education.

The differences between hospital contexts and school contexts, the gender inequity between often female nurses and more often male doctors, and the fact that both nurses and doctors are professionals are three limitations to the use of this parallel research. However, I believe there are more similarities than differences and reviewing these studies provides information that may be relevant to understanding collaboration between teachers and paraeducators.

Nurse and Doctor Collaboration

Positive outcomes such as improvement in job satisfaction and positive patient outcomes have been partially attributed to increased collaboration between nurses and doctors (Chaboyer & Patterson, 2001). Although the positive benefits of collaboration

have been recognized, it is often not the norm (Baggs & Schmitt, 1997). Two quantitative survey studies conducted to explore the issues surrounding the collaboration between nurses and doctors are reviewed first, followed by an interview study and an ethnographic study.

Chaboyer and Patterson (2001) hypothesized that critical care nurses perceived more collaboration between themselves and doctors compared to the amount of collaboration generalist nurses perceived between themselves and doctors. The researchers mailed a survey to all the nurses working in critical care and to a random sample of generalist nurses. There was a response rate of 56%, and there was not a significant difference between the two groups on response rate. The survey used was the Collaboration with Medical Staff Scale (CMS). The CMS is reported to have good construct validity and to have been used in previous research on medical staff collaboration. The results of the survey indicated that even after taking into consideration education and years of experience, the critical care nurses perceived more collaboration with the doctors than did the generalist nurses.

In the discussion, Chaboyer and Patterson (2001) proposed possible reasons for the higher level of perceived collaboration by the critical care nurses. The critical care discourse was more closely aligned with the medical discourse used by the doctors. The nurses in critical care had cognitive and technical expertise so perhaps they felt more parity with the doctors. The researchers suggested that joint training on some aspects of medical care could improve collaboration between more doctors and nurses. One limitation of this study was that it only examined the nurses' perceptions of collaboration, which may not be representative of the occurrence and quality of collaboration between doctors and nurses.

Copnell et al. (2004) used a similar survey with a five point Likert scale to examine the perceptions of interdisciplinary collaboration held by both doctors and nurses. Two hundred surveys were distributed in two neonatal intensive care units. The results of the surveys showed a moderate collaboration score for doctors and nurses. This is defined as no perfect scores and no extremely dissatisfied scores. The doctors reported a statistically higher amount of collaboration than the nurses did. This finding has been consistently reported for 20 years. The doctors felt that they were including the nurses in making decisions but the nurses did not feel like the doctors valued their input.

There are several limitations to using a quantitative survey to try to understand collaboration between doctors and nurses. Some participants in the Copnell et al. (2004) study reported that it was too difficult to complete the survey because they could not "respond in general about a large group, who all may act very differently" (p. 110). When researchers solicit perceptions from participants the findings are dependent on the participants' ability to remember their thoughts and actions at a particular time and place. There is the risk that the participant "may paint a normative picture rather than the day to day practice and experience of collaboration" (Reeves & Lewin, 2004). The interaction between doctors and nurses is subjective and highly variable and a large-scale survey study may not be sensitive to this variation and complexity.

Baggs and Schmitt (1997) used an interview study to compare the perceptions of doctors and nurses on the process of collaboration. The researchers interviewed ten intensive care unit nurses and ten medical resident physicians using vignettes to elicit their perceptions. The vignettes were described as typical collaboration occurrences in the hospital setting, and the doctors and nurses described their perceptions of the collaboration process. The grounded theory method for theme development was used in

this study. The findings suggested that important antecedent conditions for collaboration were: (a) being available, (b) having appropriate knowledge, (c) being receptive, and (d) demonstrating respect and trust for the other profession. Again the limitation of this study is that there were no data about the actual occurrence of collaboration, just a description of the medical staffs' perceptions based on their responses to the vignettes.

Reeves and Lewin (2004) used an ethnographic method to offer an in-depth account of inter-professional collaboration and to explore the meanings of those encounters. "Collaboration was defined for the purposes of this study as activities in which staff with different professional training came together to discuss or deliver care or related tasks" (Reeves & Lewin, 2004, p. 226). The two researchers were marginal participants for three months (total hours = 30) at two medical wards. Detailed descriptions of the wards were included in the study. The information collected was triangulated by the use of interviews, observational data, and small group intra-professional interviews.

The findings from the study reported that the verbal interactions between the nurses and doctors were terse, short (lasting 1-2 minutes), and were usually initiated by the doctors. The doctors' behaviour was described as highly task oriented and did not include social niceties. The findings from the interviews showed that doctors perceived collaboration to mean interactions within their profession not with other types of medical staff.

Reeves and Lewin (2004) cited the large numbers of medical staff working at the same time, the high pressure of fast paced activity on the ward, and differences in status as barriers to collaboration between the doctors and nurses in this study. Reeves and Lewin also reported that the physical layout of the wards was not conducive to

collaborative actions. There was not a convenient central meeting place for all medical staff. Baggs and Schmidt (1997) also reported the physical layout of the medical intensive care unit they studied was a barrier to collaboration amongst all medical staff.

More collaboration was reported amongst the nurses themselves and with the nursing assistants. These two groups worked closely together and the description of the working relationship between the two by Reeves and Lewin (2004) was more in line with the characteristics of educational collaboration described by Friend and Cook (2003). The nurses and nursing assistants had the common goal of patient care and the available time and space to communicate. The higher level of collaborative behaviours between the nursing assistants and nurses highlights the importance of time and a physical setting that is conducive to collaboration. The relationship between nurses and nursing assistants may more closely parallel the relationship between teachers and paraeducators and so three available studies on the working relationship between nurses and nursing assistants are reviewed next.

Rationale for Inclusion of Nurse and Nursing Assistant Literature

There are many names given to the position of nursing assistant (e.g., unlicensed assistive personnel, health care aide), which suggests that their role is not clearly defined. This is similar to the numerous terms used to describe paraeducators. The increase in number of nursing assistants has been a response to budget cuts, and there has been no patient outcome data to support this increase in the use of nursing assistants (Keeney, Hasson, McKenna, & Gillen, 2005). In their review Giangreco, Edelman et al. (2001) also stated there are no student outcome data to support the increase in paraeducator support. Nurses and nursing assistants are similar to teachers and paraeducators because of the differences in professional status. The findings in the research on nursing assistants have

been similar to the findings from the few studies available on paraeducator and classroom teacher collaboration.

Nurse and Nursing Assistant Collaboration

Similar to educators, health care workers have reported feeling unprepared to work effectively with others in a restructured system because of the unclear roles and responsibilities for the staff (Barter, McLauglin, & Thomas, 1997). Barter et al. (1997) used a 21-question survey to look at how the role of the registered nurse has changed since the introduction of nursing assistants into the system. The sample was a convenience sample of 171 nurse team leaders who had experience working with nursing assistants. The participants reported moderate to profound changes in six areas. Three areas, for example, were delegation of patient care and responsibilities, assignment of unit tasks and duties, and handling of patient care management responsibilities. Based on the results of the survey, Barter et al. (1997) recommended that improved communication between nurses and nursing assistants was needed to help integrate nursing assistants into the system. They recommended doing this by continuously updating a database that detailed the qualification of each nursing assistant in the system. The lack of an accredited program for nursing assistants resulted in a group of workers with widely varying levels of skill and education. Keeney et al. (2005) also reported similar findings in their interview study on the integration of nursing assistants into the health care system.

Keeney et al. (2005) used interviews to explore nurses', midwives', and patients' perceptions of nursing assistants and to gain a broader understanding of the phenomenon of the increased use of nursing assistants in the health care system. Twenty-five randomly selected nurses and midwives completed a 15 statement questionnaire (Likert scale) on their perceptions of the impact of nursing assistants on their work, on the working

relationship between nursing assistants and themselves, and on work allocation amongst nursing assistants and themselves. The overall result found that nurses and midwives were satisfied with the support the nursing assistants were providing by undertaking non-professional tasks.

Keeney et al. (2005) also interviewed six women patients on their perceptions of the work of nursing assistants. The women reported that nursing assistants were giving direct care and were more available than midwives. The obvious pieces missing from this study were the nursing assistants' perceptions of their work and of their working relationships, and observations of the nursing assistants providing care and interaction with the other members of the medical team.

Rheaume (2003) used archival data from nursing associations from 1978-1999 to describe how nurses and nursing assistants work together. Rheaume also interviewed 19 people involved in nursing associations. The events reported were found to be internally consistent. Based on a summary of the findings Rheaume made three recommendations to facilitate the working relationship between nurses and nursing assistants and maximize the strengths of each group. The first recommendation was that nursing assistants should not be used in areas that required specialized care because this could seriously jeopardize patient safety. Nurses should not delegate hands-on nursing care to nursing assistants because nurses need to maintain the essence of nursing, which has always been a hands-on approach rather than delegating responsibilities. Rheaume suggested that nurses and nursing assistants work in a buddy system as partners. Nurses could delegate specific tasks to nursing assistants but still retain hands-on contact with patients so the nurses' professional judgement and decision-making skills in relation to patients were not affected. Rheaume suggested that in order for the nursing unit to function well, the work

of nursing assistants must support not supplant the work of nurses. The findings and recommendations from Rheaume's research may apply to the use of paraeducators in education.

Paraeducators support students with the most challenging learning needs, and paraeducators usually have the least amount of education and training of any of the educational staff (Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001). Researchers have argued that paraeducators supplant the work of teachers and, therefore, students with exceptionalities are often receiving their education from the least qualified staff, essentially a second-rate education (Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001; Riggs, 2002). The work of paraeducators is often done in isolation and not in the buddy or partner system suggested by Rheaume (2003). Perhaps, following the suggestions made by Rheaume to improve the functioning of the nursing unit could also help facilitate more effective inclusive education.

A number of barriers to collaboration were identified in the medical research. These included differences in status, role confusion, shortage of time, collaborating within professions more than across professions, and the doctors' and nurses' legal responsibility for making decisions. The research reviewed on doctor and nurse collaboration also found that the physical set up of hospital wards might have been a barrier to collaboration. With the findings from the parallel research in mind, the available research on the working relationships between paraeducators and classroom teachers is reviewed next.

Working Relationships between Paraeducators and Classroom Teachers

The relationship between paraeducators and classroom teachers is unique in schools, hierarchical, and complex and has received little attention in the educational research literature (Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001). The only two studies available to review were one quantitative study conducted by Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, and Stahl

(2001) on the competencies required by a teacher to supervise the work of a paraeducator and a case study by Schnell (2001) on the working relationship between two dyads of paraeducators and classroom teachers.

Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, and Stahl (2001) wrote that "Increasingly, teachers are expected to determine how to best work with paraprofessionals. Teachers, however, are rarely prepared through pre-service or in-service training to work effectively with paraprofessionals in ways that will improve student performance" (p. 522). Wallace et al. developed a survey study to identify competencies needed by teachers to supervise or direct the work of paraeducators.

Wallace et al. (2001) used separate focus groups of administrators, teachers, and paraeducators to gather information about the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators. The groups spent six hours in total generating responses to stem questions about the knowledge and skills needed by teachers to direct the work of paraeducators. The seven competency areas that were generated for the survey were: Communication with Paraeducators, Planning and Scheduling, Instructional Support, Modeling for Paraeducators, Public Relations, Training, and Management of Paraeducators. The survey was administered to three groups: administrators (n = 92), teachers (n = 266), and paraeducators (n = 211).

The results of the survey showed that all three groups rated the seven competency areas as important. The paraeducators rated training for teachers to work with paraeducators as more important than the teachers and administrators rated this item. Paraeducators also rated Public Relations (role of teachers as advocates for role clarification, support for training) more positively than the other two groups.

In response to the question about whether or not the teachers demonstrated the competency areas, the paraeducators' responses were significantly lower on all seven competency areas than the teachers and administrators. This mismatch in perceptions about teachers' behaviour suggested that there were misunderstandings between teachers and paraeducators. Teachers reported that there was a significant lack of training for teachers in the training and management of paraeducators. The results of the Wallace et al. (2001) study highlight the incongruent expectations among the teachers, paraeducators, and administrators. More research is warranted to examine more closely some possible underlying reasons for the differences in responses. This study examined what competencies the teachers possessed but there was no description of the application of those skills in an effective working relationship.

Schnell (2001) conducted research that focused on the working relationship between classroom teachers and paraeducators. Using a multiple case study design, Schnell (2001) explored the meaning of the working relationship of teachers and teaching assistants in two elementary schools. Both dyads were nominated by their principals and worked together in primary classrooms in rural Alberta schools. Schnell collected data about the two dyads for over five months. She used semi-structured interviews, observational field notes, and informal conversations to develop a better understanding of the working relationship within each dyad. Schnell made connections between the extant research literature, her research questions, and the themes that emerged from the case studies.

Schnell (2001) identified the overall culture of the school as critical; individual personalities and willingness to work together were important influences on the relationship between the paraeducators and teachers. Openness, flexibility, acceptance,

communication, trust, mutuality, and social issues were seven characteristics that emerged from the data as vital to the effectiveness of the teamwork between the teachers and paraeducators. These findings were similar to the findings of Reeves and Lewin (2004) on the important antecedent conditions for collaboration: (a) being available, (b) having appropriate knowledge, (c) being receptive, and (d) demonstrating respect and trust for the other collaborator.

The teamwork approach described by the participants in Schnell (2001) resulted in an ongoing negotiation about their individual roles and responsibilities. Both teachers referred to the Alberta School Act when describing how their role differed from that of the paraeducators. The ambiguity that often surrounds the roles and responsibilities of teachers and paraeducators has been consistently reported in other studies as a reason for difficulties in the working relationships between teachers and paraeducators (Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001).

The shortage of time available for paraeducators and teachers to meet was identified as a barrier to effective collaboration in Schnell's (2001) study. The available literature has consistently reported the finding that there is not enough time to collaborate (French, 1999b; Hill, 2003; Riggs, 2002). The dyads in Schnell's (2001) study described how they took the initiative to make time to meet. Both dyads reported meeting on their lunch hours, and before and after school. The teachers and paraeducators felt that the availability of coordinated planning time would have facilitated collaboration, and they reported that they had suggested this change to their principals.

Schnell's (2001) study contained thick description of the participants and of the contexts in which they worked. The description made the situations resonate for this reader. The information collected was triangulated because a variety of methods were

used. An audit trail of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation was provided. These steps made the qualitative study credible (Patton, 2002). The findings answered the research questions and provided the reader with useful and insightful information about the meaning of the relationship between paraeducators and teachers.

Missing from the multiple case studies in Schnell (2001) was a description of the beliefs about inclusion and inclusive educational practices held by the teachers and the principals at the school where the case studies were done. Non-empirical sources have described the importance of the principal in promoting and maintaining the inclusive educational practice of the school staff (Kugelmass, 2004; Riggs, 2002; Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

Research has also identified the influence of the principal on the inclusive culture of a school. "There is considerable evidence that the staff members of a school, and the administrative leaders in particular, have an important influence on what individual teaching staff believe, know and do" (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004). The next section examines some of the available literature on the role of the principal in inclusive education.

Support Provided by Principals and Special Education Resource Teachers

A Canadian study conducted by Stanovich and Jordan (1998) illustrated the influence of the school principal on the inclusive educational practices of the teachers. Stanovich and Jordan (1998) collected data from 33 classroom teachers (Grades 2 to 8) in 12 schools on measures of attitudes and beliefs about students with exceptionalities and their inclusion in general education classrooms. The data were collected using interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations.

The data collected from the teachers were placed on a pathognomic-interventionist scale. Interventionist beliefs "are characterized by the assumption that the teacher is responsible for all students and that all students can profit from learning and instructional opportunities, irrespective of their individual differences" (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998, p. 31). Pathognomic beliefs are characterized by the assumption that a specialist is needed to teach students with disabilities. The pathognomic perspective searches for the pathology or medical deficit of a disability that is assumed to be internal to the student.

Zero-order correlations and hierarchical regression analyses indicated that the strongest predictor of effective teaching behaviour (interventionist beliefs) of teachers was the beliefs held by the principal on the pathognomic and interventionist scale. The school norm, operationalized as the principal's beliefs on the pathognomic-interventionist scale, "not only influences the decisions of individual teachers but also sets the standard for the entire educational delivery process for dealing with students in the school" (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004, p. 41).

In the findings of her focus group study in Canadian schools, Sundmark (2003) described the influence of the principal on the work of the paraeducators in the school. Sixteen paraeducators were interviewed and participated in focus groups. The paraeducators were nominated to be participants in the study by their school principals. The principals nominated the paraeducators because they were perceived to be successful in their work. The principals were not interviewed nor did they participate in the focus groups. The participants in this study were all paraeducators who supported students with severe behaviour disorders. Sundmark chose to focus on paraeducators supporting students with severe behaviour disorders because of the extreme challenges associated with including these students.

One theme that emerged from the findings of Sundmark (2003) on factors affecting the work of paraeducators, from their perspective, was the role of administrative support. Sharing information about students with the paraeducators and asking for the paraeducators' input were two examples, given by the paraeducators, as ways the principal was supportive of their work. The paraeducators also reported that if the vice-principal and principal were involved with the exceptional students then the other school staff members were more likely to accept more responsibility. For example, paraeducators described how staff members would report the misbehaviour of the student to the paraeducators instead of managing the situation themselves or asking for help from the principal. The participants perceived that the principal set the tone for the school. One participant was quoted as saying, "Our principal has instilled in the staff that assistants get the same respect as teachers...Our principal would not tolerate anyone saying, 'you're just a T.A.' (Sundmark, 2003, p. 87).

Although the role of the principal was discussed in Sundmark (2003), the perspectives of the principals or the teachers were not included. To date, no study was found that included a focus on the role of the principal in supporting the collaboration between teachers and paraeducators as seen from the perspective of the principal. Another perspective to also be considered is that of the special education resource teacher (SERT).

The supervision of paraeducators is most often a responsibility of the SERT (French, 1998). French studied the working relationship between 18 matched pairs of paraeducators and SERTs. The paraeducators and the SERTs completed questionnaires and evaluated the paraeducators' performance on a scale designed in an earlier study. The paraeducators also charted their daily activities by ten-minute intervals for two one-week periods. The results of the questionnaires, evaluations, and records of time found that

overall the role of the paraeducators was primarily instructional and performance was satisfactory. Only three of the nine SERTs in the study provided written lesson plans that included steps and also the purpose of the lesson. Time was reported as a constraint to communication, and most meetings between the paraeducators and SERTs were informal and spontaneous.

The SERTs were also interviewed on the roles and responsibilities of the paraeducators. The strongest theme that emerged from the interview data was the crucial role of paraeducators in the education of students with exceptionalities. SERTs expressed two distinct perspectives on the role of paraeducators, assistant to the teacher or assistant to the student. For example, SERTs who held the perspective that paraeducators were assistants to the teacher were more likely to ask paraeducators to do clerical tasks. Some teachers viewed the role of paraeducators as a team member, "a second teacher" (French, 1998, p. 363). Some teachers clearly distinguished between the roles of the paraeducator and SERT and described how paraeducators were to "help carry out an education plan that was written for them" (French, 1998, p. 363). Most of the SERTs felt reluctant to provide supervision for paraeducators and preferred to think of paraeducators as peers. The specific number of SERTs who held the view of assistant to the teacher as compared to assistant to the student was not presented in the findings. There were also no observations to triangulate the data collected. The paraeducators and SERTs in the study are all described as working in resource programs, and therefore the role of a regular classroom teacher was not included.

Levac's (2003) interview study described the practice of collaborative consultation of three exemplary dyads of classroom teachers and SERTs. The SERTs were collaborating with the classroom teachers to meet the needs of students with

exceptionalities in their classrooms. The four central themes that emerged from the interview data on how the exemplary dyads described their collaborative consultation were: (a) building and maintaining strong relationships, (b) growing and developing professionally, (c) maintaining regular contact, and (d) time as a challenge to collaborative consultation. The role of the paraeducators working with students with exceptionalities in the classrooms was not included in the study.

The ethnographic study by Snell and Janney (2000) examined the collaborative problem solving approach of the entire educational team working to include students with exceptionalities in regular classrooms. The data were collected over a 14-month period using field notes, interviews, written documents of students' progress, and written documents of formal meetings. The focus of the study was on two students with exceptionalities and the educational team (classroom teacher, SERT, paraeducator, and occupational therapist) that was working with the two students. The purpose of the study was to describe the actions of the educational team, not to judge if inclusion was successful.

Snell and Janney (2000) identified that the educational team usually used traditional approaches to problem solving (i.e., identify problem, plan strategy, implement, evaluate, modify); however, this process happened most often in quick informal meetings with whomever was present. It began with the paraeducator and classroom teacher who were most often in the classroom with the student with exceptionalities. The classroom teachers and paraeducators reported that they often had to skip straight to the implementation stage as the need arose because of student behaviour and then, when there was a chance, more planning was done. A challenge that was identified was that the SERT was not always available to meet because she was only at

the school three days a week because of her heavy caseload. This meant that decisions were often made in haste and without the input of the SERT and without other outside consultation. The teams in this study did not have the advantage of proximity to each other as described by Levac (2003) in her study. At the end of the school year the participants came to value the teamwork approach and sharing responsibility for decision-making. The participants also stated that ongoing attention needed to be focused on the functioning of the team.

In conclusion to this literature review, researchers in the field have identified the unique working relationship between paraeducators and teachers as key to effective inclusive education; however, there are only a few studies to date that have addressed this topic. The roles of the school principal and SERT are vital to inclusive schooling; yet to date no study has been done that includes the principal's and SERT's perspective on supporting the working relationship between paraeducators and classroom teachers. The working relationship between paraeducators and classroom teachers, and the support provided by the principal and SERT deserve more research attention.

Theoretical Frameworks that Informed Analysis of the Data

In this section, I describe briefly two theoretical frameworks that informed the collection and analysis of the data. While the issue of teacher beliefs has already been explored in the relevant literature, no previous studies have used role theory, although many studies have found a need for role clarification.

Beliefs about Inclusive Practice

"Differences in beliefs are associated with differences in practice and have a significant impact on teaching behaviour" (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004, p. 321). "The beliefs teachers hold influence their behaviour in the classroom, so one cannot proceed far

in studying implementation in classrooms without attending to the beliefs and knowledge held by the teachers involved" (Munby & Lock, 2000, p. 267).

Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, and Schattman (1993) carried out a study that is often cited in the literature on teachers' beliefs about inclusive education. Giangreco et al. interviewed 19 general education classroom teachers who had students with severe disabilities in their classes. Seventeen of the 19 participants described transformational attitudes about the inclusion of students with severe disabilities in their classes. For example,

> At the beginning of the year, if I was making copies of something I might forget to count Jon: I just didn't deal with him...When I count the kids in my class now, I've counted Jon. It just took me a while. (Giangreco et al., 1993, p. 359)

The classroom teachers (participants) who had experienced success with inclusive education had changed their beliefs about inclusive education. Interviews were the only method of data collection for this study. Pajares (1992) stated that because of the strong relationship between educational beliefs and instructional decisions, observations of actions, not just predisposition to action, should be reported. Recording teaching behaviours and then having the teachers reflect on those behaviours results in coherent data about teaching beliefs and actions (Pajares, 1992). Case study method enables the use of both observations and interviews, so both actions and beliefs are described for the paraeducator, teacher, SERT, and principal in the current study.

The beliefs held by teachers need to be considered in educational research because there is interdependence between teachers' beliefs and teaching practices (Calderhead, 1996; Munby & Lock, 2000; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 2003). The present study focused on inclusive education, which is a belief that all students have the right to be

educated with their peers in their neighbourhood school. The beliefs held by teachers about inclusion have a significant impact on the effectiveness of their inclusive teaching practice (Stanovich & Jordan, 2004). It is unlikely that teachers who do not believe in the value of including students with exceptionalities in the mainstream will effectively implement inclusive education (Raths & McAninch, 2003). This study sought to describe the beliefs of teachers who are providing effective inclusive education and to gain insight into the beliefs held by these participants that guide their actions and decisions (Pajares, 1992).

Researchers agree that teachers' beliefs are difficult to change (Richardson, 2003). There is no conclusive evidence that changes in belief follow changes in action or vice versa (Calderhead, 1996). Richardson (2003) suggests that there is a constant interaction between beliefs and actions. The current study provided a contextualized account of effective teaching practices including the beliefs of the participants and this provided an opportunity for educators to reflect on their own beliefs and actions about inclusive education.

Role Theory

The collaborative relationship between the paraeducator and the teacher, and how they work together within the system, that is the school, was the focus of this study. Role theory, described in Barter et al. (1997), is well suited to helping us understand the complexity of the roles of the study participants. In role theory, "each role exists in relation to another role and is associated with a set of expectations about how the person behaves towards another occupying a complementary position" (Barter et al., 1997, p. 31). The roles of paraeducators and teachers have changed dramatically with the inclusion of students with exceptionalities in regular classrooms. According to role theory, changes in

roles, which are not accompanied by adequate support and information, result in role strain (Biddle, 1986). Role strain also occurs when there is no congruence between demands, on one hand, and time and resources, on the other. This concept of role strain has been identified for educators trying to make inclusion a reality for students with exceptionalities (French, 1999a). Role theory provides a theoretical framework that assisted in interpreting the data to reflect the complex system (classroom, school) within which the participants were interacting.

Conclusion to Literature Review

There is a limited amount of empirical research on the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators and on the impact they have on the students they support, and on their working relationships with other staff members (Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001). A clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators is necessary but more than a job description is required to facilitate effective working relationships between paraeducators and teachers. The presentation of a case study of the working relationship would allow the details and complexities of the working relationship and the beliefs of the educators to be presented.

Schnell (2001) presents two detailed case studies on the effective working relationships between two dyads of paraeducators and classroom teachers. Missing from the case studies was the role of the principal and SERT in supporting the working relationship between the paraeducators and classroom teachers. Previous research has described the importance of the role of the principal (Stanovich & Jordan, 2004) and the working relationships between SERTs and classroom teachers (Levac, 2003).

In response to the gaps identified in the reviewed research this study presents a case study of an effective working relationship between a paraeducator and classroom teacher and describes how the principal and SERT supported the working relationship.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Rationale for Use of Case Study Methodology

Case study, which is often used in educational research, was the specific qualitative approach used. Stake (2000) described case study as not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. Understanding the complexity of the relationship between teachers and educational assistants (EAs), and of the support provided by school principals and special education resource teachers (SERTs), in the context of delivering an inclusive education to students with exceptionalities, requires the in-depth and holistic approach offered by the case study.

Stake (2000) argued for the need for a population of cases to improve the understanding of the single case. Considering each case in the context of others makes each individual case richer. Schnell's (2001) multiple case study of the working relationship between teachers and EAs provided the only two cases I have found in the research literature to date. The current case study adds to this limited population of cases currently available on the relationship between teachers and EAs and also adds the focus on the role of the school principal and SERT.

Role of Researcher

The researcher was an active participant during the interviews and a more passive observer while conducting classroom observations. The researcher is the instrument in qualitative research, and the information collected is dependent on the skills of the researcher (Patton, 2002). The researcher needs to use a wide variety of skills and approaches to gain a better understanding of the phenomena being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The instrumental nature of the role of the researcher means that the biases

of the researcher must be acknowledged at the beginning of the study and the researcher must be cognisant of her biases during the research. A biographical statement by the researcher assists the reader of the study in understanding how the biases of the researcher may have impacted the study (Patton, 2002).

Biographical Statement

Before becoming an elementary school teacher I worked for a Community Living Association for seven years. I supported parents of children with disabilities to advocate for inclusive educational opportunities for their children. I have taught elementary school, in primary grades, for five years. While working as a teacher I had the opportunity to work with EAs in my classroom every year. The relationship that I had with the EAs was, from my perspective, positive, supportive, and definitely collaborative. I thoroughly enjoyed working as a team member and felt that all the students in the class benefited from the support of the EAs. Based on my experience and on my reading, I feel that this relationship is vital to promoting the inclusion of all children in regular education classes. I recognized my desire for inclusion to be successful, as a bias, when studying inclusive educational practices and was conscious of this bias during the data collection and analysis phases of this study.

Sampling Procedures

Participant Selection

The planned unit of analysis for the study was a triad consisting of an EA, a classroom teacher, and their school principal. The participants were recruited using extreme case sampling: I sought a teacher and EA who had carried out excellent collaborative work. "In essence, the logic for extreme case sampling is that extreme cases may be information-rich cases precisely because, by being the unusual, they can

illuminate the unusual and the typical" (Patton, 2002, p. 234). The sample is not biased to make the practice of inclusion seem best but rather provides an opportunity to learn from the exemplary practices of others.

To recruit participants I sent an email to two school principals who were well respected and had a professional reputation for being supportive of inclusion. I included a description of the study and asked if they were willing to participate. I approached the two principals simultaneously so there was no pressure for either principal to agree. One principal contacted did not respond to my email so I phoned her in case the email address I had was not current but she did not return my phone call. I sent two more emails requesting responses from the principals. I waited one month and after no response I sent an email to two more school principals, who were also well respected and had a professional reputation for being supportive of inclusion. I included a description of the study and requested their participation.

During the four weeks that I was waiting for a response I spoke to two colleagues and two EAs, who were not known to each other, about participating in my study. All four reported that they did not feel that the working relationships they were in were "good enough to be part of a study." They felt that the lack of guidelines and of job descriptions left them feeling unsure about the roles and responsibilities of teachers and EAs in their working relationship.

One month after I had sent the first two emails, one of those principals responded and reported that he was able to participate. He apologized for not responding sooner and described how the school had been especially hectic during the last month because of an outbreak of illness. The principal was asked to nominate a classroom teacher and an EA whom he perceived to have an effective, collaborative working relationship. The principal

was instructed to nominate the pair based on his perception that the pair worked together effectively not based on specific criteria generated by me, the researcher. He was interested in learning more about the study so we set up a time to meet. We met four weeks after our first communication because of the principal's and teacher's report card responsibilities and March Break.

Our first meeting was at the school in the principal's office and I answered his questions about the study, and we briefly discussed his Master of Education thesis. The meeting lasted for 20 minutes, and it concluded with him giving me the contact information for the teacher and EA whom he had recommended to participate in the study. The teacher and the EA were away from the school that day so I left a note for the teacher to introduce myself and asked her to call me to set up a time so we could meet.

The teacher called me two days later to ask me questions about the study, my teaching background, my experience working with EAs, and her participation in the study. We spoke on the phone for approximately 30 minutes, and at the end of the conversation we set up a time to meet. One week later, as planned, the teacher, EA, and I met one hour before school started. We met in a small meeting room just inside the front doors of the school. I again answered questions about the study and explained my teaching and working experience that had led to my interest and research on the topic. After 30 minutes of discussion, the EA had to begin work so she left the meeting. The teacher remained in the meeting room with me, and we began her interview.

The teacher, followed by the principal and the EA, recommended that I include the Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT) in the study because she was a significant source of support to the teacher and EA in their working relationship. As I describe later, I took this advice.

Description of Participants

Pseudonyms are used in the thesis to protect the identity of the participants. Sharon has been an EA for 17 years with the same school board. The first 9 years of her work experience were as a supply EA. Sharon has supported students with complex medical needs and developmental disabilities. Elizabeth, the classroom teacher, has been teaching for 17 years at the primary-junior level. She has taught Grades 1 to 4 and Grade 8. Over her career, Elizabeth has worked with approximately 20 different EAs with whom she has had excellent working relationships from her perspective. Elizabeth has also worked in Special Education with children with autism and at a local centre for students with severe behaviour disorders. Sharon and Elizabeth have worked in the education system for the same length of time and both have a lot of experience working with students with exceptionalities.

Sharon and Elizabeth worked together 17 years ago for the first 6 months at the beginning of their careers. Currently, they have worked together for the last two years in the Grade 3/4 class at the school. They both described themselves as morning people and were often at the school at least one hour before the bell rang. Their classroom is diagonally across the hall from the principal's office.

Tim, the school principal, has been at the school for two years. At the beginning of his career, Tim taught in the primary, junior, and intermediate divisions for five years and then he moved to teaching Special Education and Computers. Tim was then a vice principal for two years before becoming a principal. He has been a principal for the past nine years. Tim took courses while teaching and completed his Specialist in Special Education and also a Master of Education degree. The foci of his graduate work were

learning disabilities, standardized testing, and behaviour disorders. Detailed descriptions of the school and of the classroom appear in the first section of the findings chapter.

Data Collection

Rationale

In order to obtain the data needed to present a detailed case, interviews and observations were conducted. Interviews were used because "they are the most common and powerful way in which we try to understand our fellow human beings" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 645). The complexity of the interactions between the participants in multiple contexts requires the use of more than one method to collect data (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Using interviews and observations allows the researcher to better understand both the beliefs and actions of the participants (Pajares, 1992).

The method of interviewing the teachers and EAs was similar to the method used by Beveridge (1997) in her observation and interview study of teachers' beliefs and inclusive educational practice. Beveridge used a combination of a semi-structured interview guide and conversation style interview following classroom observations of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The method was also similar to the method used by Stough and Palmer (2003) in their study of the thinking and teaching behaviours of expert special educators. Stough and Palmer videotaped the teachers and then had the teachers reflect on their actions to have a better understanding of the teachers' thinking while teaching. Next is a description of the interview and observation procedures of the present study.

Data Collection Specifics

All participants received and kept a copy of the letter of information about the study (Appendix A) and of the consent form (Appendix B). The letter of information and consent form that the participants signed clearly stated that participation was completely voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, and that the data collected would be stored in a secure location. They were told that their identities would be kept confidential, and a contact number for the university that gave ethical clearance for the research was provided on the letter of information that participants kept.

At the beginning of each interview I thanked the participants for being interviewed and reminded them that they did not need to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable and they could withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences to themselves or the school.

The first interview was with the teacher and it took place immediately following the first meeting of the EA, the teacher, and myself. The interview lasted for 25 minutes and then the teacher needed to be in the classroom. We set up a time for me to return to the school one week later.

One week later, I first met with the EA an hour and 15 minutes before school began. We met in a meeting room located just inside the front doors of the school. The interview lasted for 20 minutes. The teacher then came to the meeting room and the three of us set a time for the classroom observation. I then interviewed the teacher for 25 minutes. Later that morning I returned to the school and met with the principal. The interview, which lasted 25 minutes, took place in the principal's office. All of the interviews were audio taped and then transcribed verbatim.

One week later I returned to the school to conduct the classroom observation of the teacher and the EA working together. I arrived at the school 15 minutes before the observation was to begin to discuss the observation with the participants. We discussed where I should locate myself in the classroom so I would not cause disruption but be in a position that allowed me to hear and see as much as possible of the interactions between the teacher and EA. The teacher and I decided that my sitting on a small chair at the edge of the carpet relatively close to the student whom the EA was supporting but out of the way of the activity in the classroom would be the optimal location.

I observed the teacher and EA for the first 45 minutes of the school day, in the Grade 3/4 classroom. The observation included morning announcements, opening circle time, music, and explanation of work to be completed by students. During the observation I recorded notes on the classroom routines, communication, interaction between teacher and EA, and the location of the EA in relation to the student and the teacher. I wrote point form reflections on my observations in a column next to my observational notes. At the end of the observation, I spent 10 minutes visiting with the EA, the exceptional student the EA was supporting, and another student whose day it was to be the "Special Helper." The EA wanted to show me some of the innovative activities she carried out with the exceptional student outside the classroom.

After the visit I left the school and went to read and re-read my observational notes and reflections in order to formulate the interview questions for the follow-up interview. I wrote ten questions to be asked at the follow-up interview based on my observational notes and reflections. Three hours later, I meet with Sharon and Elizabeth in the classroom during Elizabeth's planning time. The SERT at the school covered Sharon's responsibilities so she was also able to participate in the interview. The interview lasted

for 35 minutes. After the interview, Sharon went to the Special Education Centre in the school to get a copy of the very complicated EA schedule we had discussed in the interview. I looked at the schedule with her and gained a sense of the complexities of coordinating responsibilities of all the EAs and meeting the needs of the exceptional students. Elizabeth walked me to the end of the hall and thanked me for taking the time to talk to her and Sharon and said that she hoped they had been helpful. I again thanked them for their time and said I would be in contact with them after the transcription was complete.

Emerging Design

In conversation and during the interviews, all the participants mentioned the importance of the supportive role of the school SERT. I spoke to my thesis supervisor about the participants mentioning the role of the SERT and we decided to ask the SERT to participate. I left a note for the SERT to call me about possibly being interviewed for the study. She returned my phone call the next day, was enthusiastic about participating, and we set up a time the following week to meet.

Melissa has been in the education field for nine years. She has taught French and Grade 7/8. For the last three years she has been in a SERT position. She has completed Special Education Part I and also a Master of Education degree. She has presented at academic conferences on collaborative consultation between SERTs and classroom teachers.

For the interview I met Melissa in a room off the Resource Centre. I gave her a copy of the information letter for her to keep, and she read and signed the consent form. The interview lasted for 30 minutes. I asked Melissa to describe her role in supporting the working relationship between the EA and teacher.

Table 1

Summary of Description of Participants

Pseudonym	Position	Years of Experience
Sharon	Teacher	17
Elizabeth	Educational Assistant	17
Melissa	SERT	9
Tim	Principal	10

Data Management and Analysis

I kept a reflective journal throughout the process of designing and conducting my research to record thoughts and insights, and to provide guidance in framing the next set of interview questions and observations (Schnell, 2001). The data management and data collection occurred simultaneously, and I was cognisant of the need to balance analytical thought and openness to the data (Patton, 2002). I transcribed verbatim each interview and each set of observation notes shortly after they were recorded to fully immerse myself in the data.

When the pre-planned interviews and observations and the transcription were completed, then data were "tidied up" as described by LeCompte (2000) by: (a) making copies of all the data, (b) filing and dating data, (c) reviewing the research questions in relation to the data collected, (d) identifying possible holes in the data, and (e) returning to the field to collect any required data. I did not need to return the field to collect more data but I did use the member check meeting for clarification on a few minor issues.

One month after all the data had been collected, the transcription was complete so I called the school to set a time to meet to do a member check. I phoned the school twice a week and left messages for Elizabeth but she did not return my phone messages. On the

third week she phoned my home. She apologized for not returning my phone calls and explained that she had been very busy at school with provincial testing, track and field coaching, and year-end extra curricular activities. We set a time to meet at the school the following Friday.

I prepared a package for each participant and took the package to the school five days before my meeting with Elizabeth. Each package contained: a letter thanking the individual again for participating, a suggestion of a pseudonym and a request for a different pseudonym if the participant did not like my suggestion, the time and day that I was meeting with Elizabeth so each could meet with me before or after that time or could contact me by email or phone, a copy of the individual's interview transcript, and a chart of the initial codes.

I went to the school at the set time and met briefly with the principal who handed me his package and reported that everything looked "ok." He asked to meet with me again so he could read the finished thesis. I was unable to contact Melissa. However, Elizabeth reported to me that she had talked to Melissa and they had looked at the transcripts together and there were no problems. I met with Elizabeth for 20 minutes and we reviewed the initial codes and I asked her to clarify a few comments in the interview transcripts. I did not meet with Sharon at this time because I did not have any points that I needed to clarify with her. She returned the package that I had sent to the school and did not have any further questions.

Following the process described by LeCompte (2000), I read and re-read the data and made a preliminary assessment of the data. Patton (2002) states the importance of reading and re-reading the data until one is completely immersed in the data that have been collected.

An inductive method of data analysis was used. The codes emerged from the data and were not imposed upon the data by the researcher (Erikson, 1994; Patton, 2002). I used word-based coding (Patton, 2002). Specifically, I underlined word or phrase repetitions, the use of professional jargon, and key words in context. I next made annotations in the margins of the transcripts. The next time through the data I noted the recurring phrases and words and assigned initial codes (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). After all the data had been initially coded, I made multiple drafts of the initial codes in a chart format, to determine which could be collapsed together to make a new code, and developed focused codes (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). After the codes were finalized, I then coded a blank copy of all the transcripts to ensure that the codes were representative of the data. The codes were grouped into categories using multiple drafts of a concept map and many discussions with my thesis supervisor along with guidance from my committee member. The categories and themes are presented in table format at the end of this chapter (Table 1).

Verification of Interpretation

To establish trustworthiness, I provided the participants with copies of the interview transcripts and discussed some of the emerging concepts. This member check was offered to all the participants to ensure the quality and credibility of the data collected through interviews. I collaborated with my thesis supervisor on a regular basis throughout the research process to ensure that my biases were not controlling decisions about data collection and analysis.

My intent was that the transferability of the findings would be improved by the thick description that the case provided. "Readers assimilate certain descriptions and assertions into memory. When a researcher's narrative provides opportunity for vicarious

experience, readers extend their memories of happenings...The reader comes to know some things told, as if he or she had experienced it" (Stake, 2000, p. 442). I hope the experience of reading the case will encourage readers to reflect on their own beliefs and practice.

My reflective journal also included ongoing interpretations, reviews from my thesis supervisor on the work in progress, and plans for analysis (Patton, 2002). The use of a reflective journal provided a constant description of the changes in the context of the study and enhanced the dependability of the data collected. The use of two different methods of data collection helped to triangulate the data. Comparing the data to the findings from the research literature also triangulated the data.

The next chapter, Chapter Four, presents the findings of the study. The three specific research questions were: (a) How do the educational assistant and classroom teacher describe their beliefs, practices, and roles that enable them to work together effectively, providing inclusive education for exceptional students? (b) How do the educational assistant and classroom teacher describe their beliefs about inclusive educational practice and how are these beliefs related to their practice? (c) How do the principal and special education resource teacher report they provide direct and indirect support to the working relationship between the teacher and educational assistant? Chapter Four is written based on the themes and categories that emerged from the data. The research questions are addressed sequentially in the discussion chapter, Chapter Five.

Table 2

Theme and Category Development

Themes	Categories
Shared Beliefs About Working Together and With Students in a Caring Manner	
	Importance of Recognizing Demands of Job
	Trust in Each Other
	Feeling Like Partners
	Caring for Students
	Being Open to Alternatives
Responsive, Student-Centred Practice, Together, but in Distinct Roles	
	Role Definition
	Reciprocal Assistance
	Rapport
	High Level of Engagement with Students
	Flexible Classroom Routine
	Creating Opportunities for all Students
Supportive Working Environment	
	Direct Support from SERT
	Direct Support from Principal
Inclusive School Culture	
	Culture Throughout the School
	Equity Among Staff Members
	Creating Opportunities for all Students to Learn Together

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The trend towards more inclusive education has resulted in EAs working in regular education classrooms instead of under the close supervision of SERTs in segregated classrooms. Although there is discussion in the literature about the importance of teachers and EAs collaborating to provide effective inclusive education, teachers and EAs have consistently reported a lack of training and preparedness to work together. To further complicate this sometimes troubled relationship, the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and EA are often ill defined.

This chapter presents the findings from the case study of effective working relationships between an EA and a classroom teacher and an account of how the SERT and the school principal supported that working relationship. Participants were recruited by contacting principals who have the professional reputation of being supportive of inclusive education. The school principal then nominated the EA and teacher based on his perception that the EA and teacher had an effective working relationship.

As described in Chapter Three, data were collected through a series of interviews complemented by one classroom observation. One brief interview was conducted with the teacher alone, followed by an individual interview with the EA, a second individual interview with the teacher, and one interview with the principal. Then one classroom observation was conducted with the focus on the teacher and the EA; their manner of interacting with each other and with the students was recorded, particularly with the student for whom the EA had responsibility. After rereading the observation notes, a

number of times, I met with the teacher and EA four hours later to interview them about the observation. The final interview was with the SERT.

Abbreviations used to identify the data sources for the quotations used in this chapter are listed in Table 2. For example, data from the classroom observation are coded OBS, whereas quotations from the first teacher interview are coded TI.

Table 3

Abbreviations for Data Sources

Data Source	Abbreviations
EA Interview	EAI
EA and Teacher Interview	EAT
Classroom Observation	OBS
Journal – Field Notes	FN
Principal Interview	PI
Special Education Resource Teacher Interview	SERTI
Teacher Interview	TI
Teacher Interview (second)	T2

Description of Setting

A description of the school and classroom precedes the presentation of the findings with the intention of helping the reader situate the case as it is presented.

The main entrance to the school is wheelchair accessible and has a power assisted door. The school foyer contains photo albums with pictures of students having fun at school. There were many pictures of students with visible exceptionalities and students without visible exceptionalities in the photos. There is a large table in the hall by the

office that displays a wide variety of brochures of community events, summer programs, and information from community organizations such as the Public Health Unit. The halls are brightly decorated with children's artwork.

Four rooms are available for meetings and each has a weekly schedule posted on the door so people can book room times. The schedules showed bookings for music lessons, speech and language sessions, volunteer visits (e.g., Big Brothers), and counselling by community agencies. Everyone that I met in the hall greeted me with a friendly hello and some asked if I needed help finding someone.

Approximately 300 students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8 attend the school. It is located in a middle-income neighbourhood in the suburbs of a medium-sized city. The principal reported that the student population does not fluctuate greatly due to students moving in or out of the area. A centre for students with developmental disabilities, which serves an area of the school district, is located in the school. Two SERTs and 13 to 15 EAs work in the centre with approximately 12 students with developmental disabilities.

In the class where the teacher and EA in this study worked, there were 25 Grade 3/4 students. There was a warm and inviting atmosphere in the classroom and the teacher described the classroom as a "busy place." The desks were grouped in fours and there was a carpeted meeting area by the front chalkboard. The students' creative artwork also decorated the classroom walls. There was evidence of hands-on learning projects (e.g., plasticine and toothpick 3D shapes). Displayed prominently on the front chalkboard were two photos of Sharon, the EA, enjoying swimming with the exceptional student for whom she had primary responsibility. Posters reminded children to think positively and to treat each other with respect. Cards and drawings given to the teacher by the students were

displayed on the filing cabinet by the desk. Overall, the school and the classroom had a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere and I learned from talking with many teachers that the school has the reputation in the teaching community of being "a great place to teach."

During the mornings, Sharon, the EA in this study, was primarily responsible for an exceptional student, Kathy, who has multiple and severe disabilities. Kathy is developmentally at the level of a very young child but is similar in chronological age to the children in the Grade 3/4 class. Although the exceptional student, Kathy, was not the focus of the study, Elizabeth and Sharon described specific examples of their beliefs and practices when describing how they worked together to provide an effective inclusive education for Kathy.

The principal had nominated both Sharon, who worked in Elizabeth's classroom in the morning and another EA, who worked in Elizabeth's classroom in the afternoon, to participate in this study. The EA who worked in the afternoon was not able to participate because of a personal matter that was occurring at the same time as the study.

Overview of Results

The four themes and the corresponding categories are presented in the following order. First is the theme of Shared Beliefs About Working Together and With Students in a Caring Manner, which includes categories of importance of recognizing demands of job, trust in each other, appreciating feeling of teamwork, caring for students, and being open to alternatives. The second theme is Responsive, Student-Centred Practice, Together, but in Distinct Roles; and the categories are role definition, reciprocal assistance, rapport, high level of engagement with students, flexible routine, and creating opportunities. Supportive Working Environment is the third theme with categories of direct support from SERT, and direct support from principal. The fourth theme is Inclusive School

Culture with the categories of culture throughout the school, equity among staff members, and creating opportunities for students.

The beliefs expressed by the EA and the teacher are presented first followed by a description of their practice. Previous research suggests that there is constant interaction between teachers' beliefs and their practice (Richardson, 2003) and that the beliefs held by teachers have significant influence on their decisions and actions while teaching (Giangreco et al., 1993). A presentation of the beliefs expressed by the participants and also their teaching practice provides a coherent and thorough description (Pajares, 1992).

Shared Beliefs About Working Together and With Students in a Caring Manner

Sharon and Elizabeth held five prominent beliefs that they shared about creating and maintaining an effective collaborative working relationship and working with students. The five beliefs were: importance of recognizing the demands of job, feeling like partners, trusting each other, caring for students, and being open to alternatives. The first three categories (importance of recognizing the demands of job, feeling like partners, and trusting each other) are all focused on the working relationship between Elizabeth and Sharon so they are presented together. Caring for students and being open to alternatives focus on their beliefs about working with students so they are presented together.

Importance of Recognizing Demands of Job, Feeling like Partners, and Trust

Sharon and Elizabeth were both focused on the positive aspects of their jobs; however, they also discussed the demands of each other's jobs and their own jobs. For example, Elizabeth explained how Sharon was responsible for monitoring the very high medical needs of two exceptional students. I also observed Elizabeth expressing support for Sharon when Sharon was performing a potentially unpleasant medical task with Kathy, the student with exceptionalities. Sharon commented on how she sometimes had to

stay in the room a little bit longer than planned if Elizabeth had to step out of the room or address some problem behaviour of another student. She also spoke of how difficult and unsettled the class had been at the beginning of the year because of some difficult student behaviour, and of how Elizabeth never had a chance to leave the room. Elizabeth and Sharon were empathetic to the challenges the other faced. Understanding the challenges the other faced helped, in part, to create their strong partnership.

When Sharon and Elizabeth described their experiences there was a sense of a shared experience, of working as partners. They often used the words "we" and "us" when talking about events in the classroom. Elizabeth described a class event they had organized, "We did a pancake house and we made menus and the children came in and ordered pancakes...she [Sharon] helped me completely and so we are very creative together.... we make things better for each other" (TI, p. 2). Sharon helped out in the class in a way that Elizabeth described as "complementary" to her teaching. She said how great it was that Sharon found a craft idea on the Internet, purchased the supplies, Elizabeth reimbursed her with school money, and then they did the craft with the whole class. It is of interest to note again that Sharon worked with Elizabeth in the morning and a different EA worked in Elizabeth's room in the afternoon. Although Elizabeth and Sharon only spent the morning together there was a strong feeling of working as partners.

Elizabeth and Sharon believed that a necessary part of any effective collaborative partnership is trust, and Elizabeth and Sharon both had trust in the other. Elizabeth stated, "I think that we trust that we are there for each other" (TI, p. 2). Sharon articulated a similar sentiment "anything, I mean anything that you ask she will do her darndest to get it" (EAI, p. 5). During the observation I saw that Sharon trusted Elizabeth because Sharon was at the back of the room while the student she supported was at the front with

Elizabeth. When I asked Sharon about this in the post observation interview she said, "I know that she [exceptional student] is ok, Elizabeth is at the front" (EAT, p. 3). Elizabeth and Sharon felt that they could depend on each other.

In summary, the beliefs that Elizabeth and Sharon articulated about the importance of recognizing the demands of the other's work created empathy for the challenges that person faced. Their understanding of each other's challenges bolstered their strong feeling of partnership. The trust they had in each other allowed them to share their experiences and work collaboratively. The next two shared beliefs presented are focused on their work together to support students.

Caring About Students and Being Open to Alternatives

Elizabeth and Sharon demonstrated care and concern for every student's emotional and physical well-being. All the students were greeted in the morning with a warm smile. Elizabeth explained, "I work with each child and their individual needs...and I teach to the whole child" (TI, p. 1). Sharon said, "that is my big role to make sure that they [students] are safe and they are loved" (EAI, p. 5). The comfort level of the students with Elizabeth and Sharon was obvious in the classroom and the students seemed happy to be at school. The students were eager to share their thoughts and bits of news about their day with Elizabeth and Sharon. They were smiling and eager to get to the carpet to begin the day. Sharon entered the room pushing Kathy in her wheelchair. Sharon was smiling and laughing, pretending to be a bad driver. The students responded to Sharon by laughing and pretending that she was knocking into them.

Elizabeth and Sharon were very concerned about Kathy's comfort level. She had very high medical needs and often cried and extended her body to communicate her level of discomfort. Elizabeth reflected to Sharon, "remember she was doing extensions, and

she [student's mother] asked if we could get her on the floor as much as we could" (EAT, p. 2). Sharon explained how sometimes you just needed to hold her in your arms because that was all that worked when she was having a bad day. They both also worried about her safety and said that getting her to school and home on the bus safely was one of their biggest concerns. Elizabeth said, "I would do anything to keep her comfortable and have a good day" (EAT, p. 7). Elizabeth and Sharon had spent time visiting Kathy in the hospital when she was very ill. Elizabeth and Sharon were gentle and affectionate towards Kathy and their level of care and concern was evident. They were concerned with the emotional and physical needs of all the students in the class. This care and concern for students led Elizabeth and Sharon to be open to alternative forms of teaching and learning.

Sharon and Elizabeth both demonstrated an appreciation of and openness to alternative forms of teaching and learning. For example, Sharon and Elizabeth had both learned sign language on their own initiative and had taught the students in the class over 15 songs in sign language. Sharon explained, "I took a sign language course a couple of years ago...and the kids liked it and they like to learn those things" (EAT, p. 3). Elizabeth described how "the whole primary division ended with a sign song at the Christmas celebration ... and you could just see them all signing together and it was really emotional and it puts everything together for the children, and I don't know why we don't use it at every mass" (EAT, p. 3).

Another way that Elizabeth and Sharon demonstrated their openness was through their display of contagious enthusiasm for Kathy's accomplishments. She had very limited abilities and she expressed her reaction to stimuli by smiling, sometimes turning her head and if very stimulated she would vocalize and laugh. Elizabeth, Sharon, and the students worked very hard to get a reaction from Kathy. While I was observing in the classroom,

the other students, Sharon, and Elizabeth were all singing and signing and looking for Kathy's reaction. Most of the other students were following Elizabeth's lead in being animated and trying to make eye contact with Kathy. Sharon told me a story about how excited she and the students were when Kathy was laughing at a supply teacher's voice:

> The French teacher was talking to them and all of sudden these smiles....she [Kathy] gave this big smile [and] all the kids starting laughing and I had to apologize because they were not listening to the teacher when he was talking because they were so distracted by Kathy smiling so much and moving her head and I started to laugh. So I had to take her out of the room (laughing). So I told them all, she is being disruptive, she has to be taken out of the room and she did it yesterday with [Elizabeth] and the kids just think that it's great. (EAI, p. 3)

A student from the class and Elizabeth relayed this same story to me and both were very excited about the reaction by Kathy, the exceptional student.

Summary of Shared Beliefs about Working Together and with Students in a Caring Manner

Sharon and Elizabeth expressed beliefs about the importance of recognizing the demands of their own jobs and expressing empathy for the demands their partner faced in her job. They felt secure in the trust they felt with each other and had a sense of feeling like partners. When working with students, Sharon and Elizabeth expressed beliefs about the need to care for students and being open to alternative learning and teaching styles. The beliefs that Sharon and Elizabeth articulated were congruent with their practices that are described next in the theme, Responsive, Student-Centred Practice, Together, but in Distinct Roles.

Responsive, Student-Centred Practice, Together, but in Distinct Roles

Elizabeth and Sharon interacted with each other and made teaching decisions that were in line with their beliefs described in the previous section. In observing, recording, and asking questions about their actions, I developed a coherent understanding of their working relationship and how they worked with students. The next section describes the practices of Elizabeth and Sharon as they worked together to provide an inclusive education. The categories that emerged from the data were: role definition, reciprocal assistance, rapport, high level of engagement with students, flexible routine, and creating opportunities for students.

The category of role definition is presented first because it provides a holistic description of the working relationship. The categories reciprocal assistance and rapport focus on the working relationship between Elizabeth and Sharon so they are addressed together. The categories high level of engagement with students, flexible routine, and creating opportunities for students focus on practice while working with students, so they are discussed together.

Role Definition

Elizabeth, the classroom teacher, and Sharon, the EA, both reported that their roles and responsibilities in the classroom and within their working relationship were well defined. Elizabeth described her role, "I think the most important thing is that I am a facilitator and I provide a positive environment and those are the two most important things to me" (TI, p. 1). Sharon described her role as different from Elizabeth's role, "I let her do all the instructing in the classroom" (EAI, p. 1).

Their clear role definition was most apparent when I observed Elizabeth and Sharon working together in the classroom. They were moving about the classroom,

demonstrating an awareness of one another, but the two were engaged in separate tasks. For example, when the morning bell rang, Elizabeth was at the front of the classroom readying some materials for the morning writing assignment, and Sharon was doing the time consuming administrative task of checking the students' agendas for messages from home. Sharon knew when to refer a message on to Elizabeth and when it was appropriate for her to answer a student's request or question. After the bell rang and O Canada had been sung, Elizabeth began instructing the students by the chalkboard, including the exceptional student Sharon focused on. Sharon was finishing checking the agendas. When Sharon had completed this task she moved to the back of the classroom and helped monitor student behaviour and participated in the morning discussion. Sharon was available, but not hovering over the student with exceptionalities. It was clear that the roles and responsibilities were well established.

An additional part of Elizabeth's role in the working relationship was the role of "ambassador for EAs" (FN, p. 35) and she demonstrated this role during the observation and throughout the research process. Elizabeth recognized the power imbalance that exists between teachers and EAs and was conscious of this in her interactions with Sharon. Elizabeth stated,

> ...when the EA comes in they have certain job requirements, they are not as much [as a teacher's responsibilities], an EA can go home and enjoy the weekend, while a teacher is always a teacher, so I try not to put pressure on an EA, knowing that they do not have the same salary as I do. (TI, p. 1)

Elizabeth repeatedly described the gifts and talents that every EA in the school had to offer. Baking, organizing, making backdrops for plays, and music were a few examples of the gifts Elizabeth described EAs sharing with the school. Elizabeth felt that it was

important to offer EAs a choice in what they did in the classroom. "So everything that they bring is like a gift, as I said earlier, and I really encourage them and I think that it is important to look at an EA and see their strengths and always give them choice" (TI, p. 1). She articulated her appreciation of an EA's contributions and explained how the staff had organized a special luncheon for the EAs to demonstrate their appreciation.

Elizabeth's ambassador role was also evident during the interview with Elizabeth and Sharon together. Almost every time that I asked a question Elizabeth waited for Sharon to reply first and Elizabeth would often encourage Sharon to add more to her response. Elizabeth expanded on what Sharon had said to highlight ways Sharon helped in the classroom. For example, when I asked about the fact that Sharon was not in close proximity to Kathy during the morning routine, Sharon responded "Yes," and Elizabeth added "And does she just sit there and do nothing? (laughing), no, that is another amazing thing about Sharon, ...Sharon is always helping me and saving me time" (EAT, p. 2). Elizabeth also highlighted how close Sharon was to Kathy's family and how Sharon was responsible for the EA schedule when the SERT was away. Elizabeth also emphasized how the professional development that Sharon had done, such as a course on autism and sign language, added to the class as a whole.

It is interesting to note that during my member check with Elizabeth I described this part of Elizabeth's role to her and asked her if she thought advocate was a suitable term and she quickly responded that "ambassador for EAs" would be a better description. In our first interview, Elizabeth also reported to me that she had worked with over 19 EAs over her 17 year teaching career and she described the working relationships as "99% positive" (TI, p. 3). Elizabeth told me that an EA gave her a card one year at Christmas

time and it read, "This gift is very small, it is in no comparison to the biggest or maybe greatest gift you have given me and that is respect" (T2, p. 5).

In summary, Elizabeth and Sharon reported and exhibited clear role definitions for each of their unique roles in the classroom and for working together to provide an inclusive education for the student with exceptionalities. This clear role definition helped to foster an effective collaborative working relationship.

Reciprocal Assistance and Rapport

Elizabeth and Sharon gave each other reciprocal assistance. Sharon helped Elizabeth when she needed help, and Elizabeth helped Sharon when she needed help. For example, Sharon reported that "I never lift Kathy alone, Elizabeth always helps me" (EAI, p. 2). I observed Sharon making eye contact with Elizabeth when it was time to lift Kathy back into her chair, and Elizabeth stopped handing out papers and came to help Sharon. The type of assistance that they offered each other was not only physical assistance with lifting or clerical tasks in the classroom. Elizabeth said that she shared her thoughts about the students and happenings in the classroom. She also looked for feedback and input from Sharon. Elizabeth said, "I think that I ask her [Sharon] a lot, I ask her opinion on what went well, how do you think that went, what could we have done differently?" (TI, p. 2). Their willingness to help each other made for a comfortable and supportive rapport between Sharon and Elizabeth.

The rapport between Elizabeth and Sharon was evident both when they were working together in the classroom with students and were talking together outside the classroom setting. They used humour and appeared to be very comfortable together. They did thoughtful things for one another like bringing tea during an interview or helping to coordinate meeting times with the researcher. They teased each other in a good-natured

way about silly mistakes or a messy desk. During their interview together, Sharon joked motioning to Elizabeth's desk that they were going to do a "Clean Sweep [TV show that cleans areas when people are away] here, we are calling them in" (EAT, p. 5).

They were able to communicate using eye movements and gestures if it was not an appropriate time to talk. They could handle student misbehaviour quickly and seamlessly. For example, Sharon reminded a student to do the signing with respect and, without a moment's hesitation, Elizabeth asked if the student needed to come to the front and then the student changed his behaviour. Elizabeth looked to Sharon and motioned with her eyes, 'can you see him, is he ok?' and Sharon nods. I asked Elizabeth and Sharon about my interpretation of this event and they explained the situation as I have described it. Elizabeth affirmed "Sharon always says it in a very positive way, just as I would say...and we finish each other's sentences a lot" (EAT, p. 4).

Elizabeth and Sharon both offered input into discussions and did not always agree. For example, while teaching Elizabeth looked up at Sharon and asked a question for clarification about a playground rule, and Sharon responded that she thought Elizabeth was wrong on her interpretation of the rule. There was no evidence of conflict; they agreed to disagree and moved on. The reciprocal assistance offered to each other and the rapport between Elizabeth and Sharon was evident to me throughout the time I spent with them collecting data. The rapport between the two extended to their responsive practice with students, which is presented next.

High Level of Engagement, Flexible Routine, and Creating Opportunities for Students

Sharon and Elizabeth were engaged with all the students in the class, including the student with exceptionalities. They were observant of and responsive to the students' physical needs and emotional needs. During the interview both Elizabeth and Sharon

described to me Kathy's abilities and shared success stories about strategies they had tried to encourage her to respond. Sharon and Elizabeth were knowledgeable about the physical challenges that the student faced. They were very willing to hold Kathy if she was uncomfortable in her chair. They discussed Kathy's vision in detail and reviewed with each other the best way to present stimuli to Kathy in hopes of a response. Elizabeth and Sharon were also knowledgeable about Kathy's medical needs and were up to date on changes and possible complications. For example, the assistive device that Kathy used would sometimes need adjustment, and they were able to perform the necessary adjustments. Sharon and Elizabeth were engaged with the students in the class and this was reflected in their knowledge about and insight into the student with exceptionalities.

When working with students both Elizabeth and Sharon demonstrated a willingness to change and to learn how to continue to be engaged with the students. Elizabeth spoke of a little girl who had a brain injury and she said: "she had really special needs because of the injury, so there you are reading everything about brain injuries and explaining to the children she could act like this" (T2, p. 3). Sharon was interested in ways that some older students were using switch technology. She stated, "Her EA, they have been so good with her this year, teaching her to use switches so if she wants more music she is going to have to hit the switch...and it's amazing all the different techniques" (EAI, p. 5). Sharon and Elizabeth made conscious decisions on how best to create an environment that would suit the students with whom they were working.

The routine in the classroom was well established and organized but at the same time was flexible and accommodating to the changing needs of students and staff. Elizabeth had the daily schedule posted on the board in an easy to read fashion and classroom messages were posted at the front of the room. Sharon said that Elizabeth was

willing to change the routine at a moment's notice if it meant that Kathy could be involved in an activity that was potentially beneficial. Elizabeth explained how she and Sharon reviewed the posted routine quickly every morning and "if something doesn't match and I want her there for Religion or we're having something touch, feel, smell, something sensory for Kathy then I will switch the timetable so she can be there" (TI, p. 1).

The practice of the flexible routine ties into Elizabeth and Sharon's conscious decision making for creating opportunities for the students to form a relationship with Kathy, the student with exceptionalities. Elizabeth and Sharon felt that it was important to share information about the student's medical needs so the other students would be more understanding. Sharon stated:

> She [Elizabeth] makes certain that [Kathy] feels welcomed in the class and kids adore her...When she came home from the hospital with her [assistive device], Elizabeth asked the class how many wanted to see how she was hooked up to an [assistive device] and they all wanted to see. They are not scared of Kathy, to go up to her to touch her or to give her a hug or whatever. (EAI, p. 4)

It appeared that sharing information about Kathy's medical needs helped the other students to be understanding and feel comfortable.

Elizabeth and Sharon also implemented daily strategies in the classroom to help foster relationships among all the students. There was a Star of the Day and that student was Kathy's helper for the day. Students were encouraged to assist Kathy waving the flag during the singing of O Canada, and helping hand over hand in sorting tasks. The students also assisted Kathy to operate a switch that could turn on and off a tape recorder that played stories read aloud or music. Most days Elizabeth and Sharon reported that Kathy

was out of her wheelchair and close to the students during the morning routine when the other students were on the carpet. Also, as previously described, Sharon was not in close proximity to Kathy at all times so this may have encouraged other students to interact with Kathy. In my observation of the morning routine, I noted that Kathy was in a location where all the students walked by her as they entered the room and went to get their shoes from their desks and over half of the students smiled at, waved at, or touched Kathy as they walked by. Elizabeth and Sharon described to me how much the students loved Kathy and how excited they were when she returned from the hospital after being very sick.

Summary of Responsive, Student-Centred Practice, Together, but in Distinct Roles

The clear role definition between Sharon and Elizabeth facilitated their effective collaborative working relationship. In their working relationship Sharon and Elizabeth provided reciprocal assistance to each other that was physical, such as helping each other lift a student and also involved providing feedback. The use of humour and a sense of comfort with each other created a strong rapport. Their knowledge of the students' strengths and needs were a result of their high level of engagement with the students. The flexible routine in the classroom allowed for the creation of opportunities for students to participate fully in the community of the classroom.

Supportive Working Environment

Sharon and Elizabeth's effective working relationship existed in a supportive working environment. For the purposes of this study only the SERT and principal were interviewed on their roles in supporting the working relationship between the classroom teacher and EA.

Direct Support from SERT

Melissa, the SERT, was recruited to participate in the present study because the principal, the teacher, and the EA all said that they appreciated the support provided by Melissa. Elizabeth also acknowledged how well the SERTs at the school worked with EAs. During my interview with Elizabeth she commented "if you want to study EA and teacher relationships you should talk to the centre teachers [SERTs], they work with 13 to 15 EAs, now that's teacher and EA relationships" (T2, p. 6).

During the interview, Melissa described a positive perception of the working relationship between Elizabeth and Sharon when she stated,

> I know that they work very well together. Kathy is doing really well, she is enjoying her classmates and they are enjoying her and I think that is a real tribute to their working relationship. They obviously have the same goal for Kathy and it is benefiting her in the long run. (SERTI, p. 4)

Melissa provided direct support to Elizabeth and Sharon by programming for Kathy and also provided resources to facilitate the inclusion of Kathy into the regular classroom. During their interviews Elizabeth and Sharon described two examples of programming ideas provided by Melissa for Kathy. The ideas were Kathy waving a small flag during O Canada because she was unable to sing, and providing a specialized foam pillow so Kathy could lie on her side to be physically closer to the other students. Sharon described how Melissa did the planning for Kathy's program; however, Elizabeth also offered input, ideas, and suggestions on ways that Kathy could participate as fully as possible in classroom activities. Melissa also met with Sharon daily to review the students' programs and she was available to speak in general about any issues that arose. Elizabeth was not present at the meetings between Melissa and Sharon, which highlights

another role distinction between Elizabeth and Sharon. Melissa and Elizabeth met at least once a term formally and as often as necessary informally to discuss the needs and progress of the student.

Melissa explained that a major part of her role was to collaborate with the teacher and the EA. She reported that attending regularly scheduled meetings, being available for spontaneous meetings, and advocating for students were all part of working as a team. Melissa said that,

> ...most of the meetings are spontaneous; they come up as the needs come up, especially with our students within our centre because their needs are so immediate, and we have to make changes to their educational assistants or the programming. (SERTI, p. 3)

Melissa stressed that a major part of her role was helping to define the roles and responsibilities of EAs. She provided an example of how she did this:

> ...ensuring that the teachers understand the role of the educational assistants. That has been our biggest role this year, making sure that the educational assistants, although they are assigned to particular students, they are working with the teacher. So at the beginning of the year we made sure that the teachers had a list of jobs of what is expected of an educational assistant and we encourage them to follow that. We had numerous staff meetings where we had to revisit that and remind teachers what EAs can and cannot do, and what EAs are entitled to do, and we just have ongoing meetings just to make sure that they are meeting a lot. (SERTI, p. 3)

As exemplified by this quotation Melissa also supported the working relationships between teachers and EAs by helping to define their roles and responsibilities.

Direct Support from Principal

Both Elizabeth and Sharon described Tim, the principal, as very supportive and approachable. Elizabeth described that she and Tim have worked together closely to help students, and she felt that they both believed that "time spent helping a child is time well spent" (TI, p. 3). Elizabeth observed: "I think that Tim works with me the way that I work with EAs, with Sharon, ... he is an administrator but he is not a manager, number one he cares for kids" (TI, p. 5).

Elizabeth reported that Tim "puts total support behind us" (TI, p. 5). She said that if anyone was having a problem, he or she could go and speak to him and the first thing he said was "how can I help?" (TI, p. 5). Elizabeth reported that Tim asked for input and listened to and valued her opinion and always acted on requests that she made. Elizabeth described how if anyone had something that they wanted to do, he would help. She explained, for example, a recent bussing issue, "if bussing is not working for handicapped kids he personally takes the time to phone and say we need a bus so Kathy can accompany us...he puts on the extra push" (TI, p. 5). Tim also provided support by always giving money to Elizabeth and Sharon for materials they needed for activities they wanted to try with Kathy. Elizabeth explained:

> ...we just give the receipts and Tim approves it, which is amazing because if there is something you can think of he will say yes. 'You are doing your job and I will support you how I can.' So you know that seems common sense but I know that it is not [like this] everywhere. (TI, p. 5)

Tim expressed a similar feeling that if he asked Elizabeth and Sharon for something he was guaranteed a response above and beyond what he had asked. He perceived their

working relationship to be "what it looks like when it works at its best...they just work so well as a team, in my view" (PI, p. 2).

In the interview Tim described how he provided support to teachers and EAs working together at the school to provide inclusive education. Tim demonstrated his support for Elizabeth and Sharon by providing them with resources and money that were available through the school budget. Elizabeth recognized Tim's show of support when he spent money on the students when she contrasted this approach with that of a previous administrator who "thought that a good measure of your school was how much money you had in the bank" (FN, p. 20). Tim also worked to ensure that EAs had opportunities for professional development. Tim stated "there is no budget or policy about sending them [EAs] for training, so I offer that out of the school budget" (PI, p. 1).

Tim worked to get as much EA support as possible. He explained, "I have to fight to get EA support to begin with, so we try to make a case for all students to get as much EA support as we can get and that just means numbers and bodies at that point" (PI, p. 2). Once the EAs were assigned to the school then Tim began to match students, EAs, and teachers. Tim felt that thoughtful matching was crucial to successful working relationships and he described his thinking:

> ...we try to do some matching obviously with personalities, some EAs work better with a certain grade level, with certain students, and some EAs work better with certain teachers, just because of teaching and learning styles. And some take on more responsibilities...they really do have to work well together. (PI, p. 2)

Tim also described how he was cognisant of board directives about not "velcroing" an EA to a student for five years. He devised a plan so that the students were with a different EA

in the morning and in the afternoon. Every year at least one EA stayed with the student so there was some continuity, a familiar face.

Tim was aware that sometimes there might need to be changes or "tweaks" to the way EA support was provided to the students. He explained how he was "constantly fine tuning, we do not like to start over, we try to have some stability and consistency....so we are constantly pulling and rematching...we are still doing that and we will probably do that forever" (PI, p. 1).

Tim provided support to teachers and EAs not by micro-managing every decision that was made but by delegating responsibility and maintaining open lines of communication. The EA and teacher both reported that they could talk to Tim if they needed help. When there was an issue that needed to be resolved, Tim explained:

> My policy is tell someone, don't keep it to yourself and let it fester and get out of control. If there is a problem, tell someone. They [staff] are instructed to first deal with the classroom teacher, and try to solve it at that stage as best they can, if they want me to be involved that's fine. The next step is involving the Special Education Resource Teacher ... because they act as the coordinator for the EAs and teachers and they are really the next step. And they will try and solve the problem. And then I would get involved in a more formal way. They can drop in and see me anytime, but I will always say did you try this, did you try this, before you get to me. (PI, p. 2)

The explanation of the protocol illustrated how Tim was clear in his expectations, which created a sense of security while at the same time he was also flexible so someone could just drop in and see him anytime.

Tim and Melissa were active in creating the context within which the working relationship between Sharon and Elizabeth took place. Tim described the context as a "school culture, we try to offer a very warm, inviting, and positive environment" (PI, p. 5). The next section reports on the school culture as described by all the participants.

Inclusive School Culture

Three themes emerged from the data to describe the school culture: culture pervasive throughout the entire school, equity among staff members, and creating opportunities for students with exceptionalities.

Culture Throughout School

The culture of the school was clear even as you walked through the front door of the school. "Every person, adult and child, that I met greeted me with a smile" (FN, p. 4, dated April 4th). When I first spoke to Tim on the phone he made a connection with me about the fact that we lived near one another (FN, p. 3, dated March 9th). Elizabeth also tried to make a connection with me when she called, commenting on how my last name sounded familiar (FN, p. 4, dated April 6th). In her interview Melissa reported a similar phenomenon: "The culture of the school is very close knit, I am the new person on the block and that is the first thing that I noticed, I felt completely welcomed by everyone, and I would have to say that most parents and students do as well" (SERTI, p. 3). Tim stated "and hopefully you can feel that [positive school culture] when you walk through the doors" (PI, p. 3).

The students at the school also seemed to reflect this positive school culture. Although the students were not observed, every participant commented on how the students without exceptionalities at the school felt the positive impact of the school culture and were receptive to including all students. Tim provided an example:

> We have students with severe physical challenges, they still try to include them, and the kids here because they are cultured, and because they have grown up with these kids, they are very good at including kids. If you are playing basketball then there is no reason that the girl in the wheelchair can't play basketball like the other kids. (PI, p. 3)

There was a pervasive sense that the school was different from other schools. Elizabeth stated: "I think this school is exceptionally good at it [inclusion] because they set high expectations for the students" (T2, p. 3). The students and teaching staff all seemed to have a sense that the school "has a culture of caring" (PI, p. 5).

Equity Among Staff

Another category that contributed to what created the school culture was the sense that there was equity among all staff members at the school. Tim explained:

> ...we don't have a pecking order here or an us and them or you're just an EA attitude. We have more of a team attitude and everybody is the same and we all have different roles maybe but we are all on the same team, whether it be the principal, EA, custodian, whoever it is. And if you are on the yard [supervising students] you are all equal. So you don't get a student saying you are not the teacher you can't tell me what to do. (PI, p. 2)

The sharing of information among all staff members exemplifies the equitable nature of their relationships. Melissa described it this way:

> That is everyone is at staff meetings, everyone is made aware of the needs of students in our Centre and other students in the school. If a student is going through a difficult time, everyone is made sensitive to that as well as medical concerns. Everyone is on top of it. (SERTI, p. 4)

The working relationship between Sharon, the EA, and Elizabeth, the teacher, was also consistent with the idea of equity on the team. Information was shared between the pair and, although their roles were different, each was valued for her contribution. The last category that emerged in the data analysis was the conscious decision making amongst staff to create opportunities for exceptional students to "do the same things as all the other students to the best of their abilities" (PI, p. 3).

Creating Opportunities for All Students to Learn Together

As previously discussed at the classroom level, Elizabeth and Sharon were aware of creating opportunities for the student with exceptionalities to be an active participating class member. Both Tim and Melissa expressed an awareness about the need to create opportunities at the school level. Tim was always looking for activities at the school, like field trips and music presentations, that might also be beneficial for the students with exceptionalities to attend. Melissa described this level of awareness as:

> It is very easy too for everyone to fall into the routine of the student, when the student needs to be changed, needs to be fed or have their OT [occupational therapy] or physio...we need to remind everybody that there is a special event happening in the Grade 6 class so they [the students] will not get their OT today, they will get it tomorrow because we want them to be part of the drumming and by seeing the other students in the class responding to our students because they do not always get to see them in that light, it is a wonderful experience for them all. (SERTI, p. 6)

Melissa also explained that it was not a fully inclusive environment unless the students with exceptionalities invite students to participate in events that the Centre was running as well. Melissa explained it this way:

> ...and any special event that may happen for our students [who are in the Centre], the mainstream kids are invited. For example, the local newspaper was here the other day to take photos of some of our students because we are collecting pop tabs as a school to purchase a new wheel chair, and so we also included some children from other classes because it is not just the centre students who are collecting, it is the entire school community. (SERTI, p. 6)

In conclusion, the culture throughout the school, equity among staff members, and conscious decision making to create opportunities for all students to learn together all appear to contribute to the creation and maintenance of the school culture.

Summary of Findings

The findings presented in this chapter focused on the beliefs and practices of an EA and teacher working together effectively to provide an inclusive education for a student with exceptionalities. The chapter began with a description of the school, classroom, students, logistics of the EA's schedule and a brief description of the student with exceptionalities that the EA was supporting. The description was provided to assist the reader in situating the case as it was presented.

The findings on describing the effective working relationship between the classroom teacher and EA were presented using the themes that emerged from the data as an outline. The first two themes presented, Shared Beliefs About Working Together and With Students in a Caring Manner and Responsive, Student-Centred Practice, Together, but in Distinct Roles, focused on the beliefs and practices of the EA and teacher working together and with students. Both beliefs and practices were included because of the important influence teachers' beliefs have on their practice and also that observing

teaching behaviour, not just describing a predisposition to act in a suspected way, provides a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices.

The categories that emerged for the Shared Beliefs About Working Together and With Students in a Caring Manner theme were: importance of recognizing the demands of job, trusting each other, feeling like partners, caring for students, and being open to alternatives. The shared beliefs held by the teacher and EA were in accordance with the findings for the related theme on Responsive, Student-Centred Practice, Together, but in Distinct Roles. The categories for practice were: role definition, reciprocal assistance, rapport, high level of engagement with students, flexible routine, and creating opportunities for students. The direct support provided by the SERT and by the principal comprised the two categories for the theme of a Supportive Working Environment. The categories of the Inclusive School Culture theme were: culture throughout the school, equity among staff members, and creating opportunities for students.

In conclusion, Sharon and Elizabeth expressed their shared beliefs that enabled them to create and maintain an effective working relationship and those beliefs were congruent with their actions while working together effectively to support students with exceptionalities to have an inclusive education experience. The supportive working environment was created in part by the direct support provided by the SERT and principal. The culture of the school also indirectly nurtured and supported their working relationship and their shared goal of providing an inclusive educational experience.

In the following chapter, Chapter Five, the findings are discussed and analyzed further in relation to the theoretical frameworks used and the specific research questions posed. Chapter Five, the Discussion chapter, also includes: relationship with existing

literature, implications for future research, implications for pre-service and in-service education, limitations to study, and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

There are recommendation and discussion papers in the literature about the importance of effective working relationships between classroom teachers and educational assistants (EAs) working together to provide an inclusive education (Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001). However, to date there are few research studies that describe working relationships between EAs and classroom teachers (Schnell, 2001) and no studies were found that included the role of the principal and SERT in supporting the working relationship. The purpose of this study was to present a case study of the working relationships between a teacher and an EA, and to give an account of how the school principal and SERT provided support to the working relationship.

To begin this chapter, the three specific research questions that were asked are addressed sequentially. The three specific research questions were: (a) How do the educational assistant and classroom teacher describe their roles, beliefs, and practices that enable them to work together effectively, providing inclusive education for exceptional students? (b) How do the educational assistant and classroom teacher describe their beliefs about inclusive educational practice and how are these related to their practice? (c) How do the principal and special education resource teacher (SERT) report they provide direct and indirect support to the working relationship between the teacher and the educational assistant? The research questions were revised during the data collection phase of the research to include the role of the SERT in supporting the working relationship. Recruiting the SERT as a participant in the study was done because all three initial participants reported that her support was important to their work.

Following the discussion of the research questions, I present comparisons to existing literature, suggestions for future research, implications for in-service and pre-service education, and limitations to the present study.

Research Questions

Working Together

The first question the current study asked was: How do educational assistants and classroom teachers describe their roles, beliefs, and practices that enable them to work together effectively, providing inclusive education for exceptional students? The response to the first research question is presented in three parts, roles, shared beliefs, and practices.

Roles. According to role theory (Barter et al., 1997), role ambiguity can create role stress, meaning individuals are investing time and energy in trying to define their role and less time is available for other more productive activities such as collaboration. Role strain can occur when changes in roles are not accompanied by adequate support or when the demands of the role are more than the resources allow (Barter et al., 1997). The findings that emerged from the interviews and observations suggest that there was a clear definition of roles and the participants did not report strain on the expectations of their roles. The absence of role ambiguity or role strain for the EA or the teacher facilitated collaboration.

Sharon, the EA, had a clear role in the classroom and also with the student with exceptionalities whom she supported. She described her role as more supportive in nature than instructional and as being distinct from Elizabeth's role. Sharon demonstrated her confidence in her role in the working relationship with Elizabeth because she freely offered her opinions and suggestions. There was flexibility in Sharon's role. She

contributed to the class as a whole by being a part of the day-to-day running of the class, and she also created special activities for the class on her own initiative. Sharon would direct the students, just as Elizabeth did, for some parts of the morning routine. However, when Elizabeth was teaching the class, Sharon made a conscious choice to wait for Elizabeth to give direction to all the students. For example, Elizabeth chose the student who was Kathy's special helper for the day and spoke to the student and Kathy before Sharon came closer to be with Kathy and the student. Elizabeth described the way Sharon contributed to the activity of the classroom as complementary to her own role.

Elizabeth was very conscious of the distinction of the roles and responsibilities between teachers and EAs, and she clearly stated this understanding during the interview. The most influential part of the role distinction between Sharon and Elizabeth was the actions taken by Elizabeth in what she described as her "ambassador for EAs role." This conscious choice by Elizabeth to recognize the power imbalance between teachers and EAs was influential in setting the tone for the interactions between Elizabeth and Sharon. One partner not valuing the input of the other or having little control in decision-making is sometimes a barrier to collaboration when there is a power imbalance (Reeves & Lewin, 2004). In attempts to address the power imbalance, Elizabeth offered Sharon choice in how she would contribute, valued her input, and shared decision-making responsibilities for some tasks. These three actions by Elizabeth in her ambassador role enabled their working relationship to be effective and collaborative.

In summary, the clearly defined roles allowed Elizabeth and Sharon more time to collaborate because they were not wasting time in trying to define their roles. The role of "ambassador for EAs" assumed by Elizabeth helped to address the power imbalance between the position of teacher and EA and decrease what could potentially be a barrier to

collaboration. The next part of the question to be addressed is about the shared beliefs of the educational assistant and teacher working together effectively to provide inclusive education.

Shared beliefs. The importance of recognizing the demands of job, trusting each other, feeling like partners, caring for students, and being open to alternatives were the six shared beliefs that emerged from the data on what enabled Elizabeth and Sharon to work together effectively. Recognizing the demands of her partner's job and feeling confident that her partner understood the challenges she herself faced enabled Sharon and Elizabeth to work together effectively. Each felt certain that she could depend on the other and knew how her partner would respond. They believed this sense of trust to be important to their working relationship. Sharon and Elizabeth believed in the importance of appreciating feeling like partners. When they spoke about their experiences in the classroom they always used words like "us" and "we." Their effective working relationship was based on beliefs of recognizing the demands of job, trusting each other, and feeling like partners.

Elizabeth and Sharon's shared beliefs about working with students focused on the importance of caring for students and being open to alternatives. Elizabeth believed in the impact of caring for students as she stated in her interview the need to, "teach the whole child" (TI, p. 1). Sharon said one of her goals was to "make sure they [students] are safe and they are loved (EAI, p. 5). Their desire to care for students led Elizabeth and Sharon to believe in finding a variety of ways to understand and communicate with all students. They believed it was important to be open to alternative forms of teaching and learning.

Practices. The practices of Elizabeth and Sharon were responsive and student centred, and these characteristics enabled them to work together effectively to provide

inclusive education for exceptional students. Elizabeth and Sharon's willingness to help each other established a supportive and comfortable rapport between them. They were observant and responsive to the students in the class, which demonstrated their high level of engagement with the students. Their knowledge about students helped them to create an environment that would benefit students. The flexible routine that was established in the classroom was at times manipulated to create as many opportunities as possible for the student with an exceptionality to form a relationship with the other students in the class and vice versa.

Relationship Between Beliefs and Practice

The second question to be investigated was: How do the educational assistant and the classroom teacher describe their beliefs about inclusive educational practice and how are these related to their practice? Before proceeding with discussing the findings, it is important to briefly consider again theory and research on teacher beliefs. Theory and research on teacher beliefs support the concept that teachers' beliefs and practices each have a significant impact on the other (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; Pajares, 1992). There is no clear answer to the question of whether changes in beliefs are followed by changes in action or vice-versa. Richardson (2003) suggested that there is a constant interaction between beliefs and actions. In presenting the findings as beliefs and corresponding actions, it is not meant to suggest that the beliefs caused, or were the sole cause of, those actions. It would be an oversimplification of the complexities of education and of the beliefs of the educators to suggest that there is a causal linear relationship. The relationship between the beliefs and the corresponding actions of the teacher and EA is presented to increase the depth of the description and because the present study involved observation of behaviour not just predisposition.

The beliefs expressed by Sharon and Elizabeth about working with students with exceptionalities to provide an inclusive educational experience were: caring about students and being open to alternative learning and teaching styles. They described the students with whom they worked with much interest and compassion. This care and concern for students and openness were reflected in their high level of engagement with all the students in the class. They used a flexible schedule in the classroom to facilitate opportunities for the student with exceptionalities to develop a relationship with her peers in the classroom and vice versa. Sharon and Elizabeth's beliefs on inclusive education and how their beliefs were reflected in their practice are similar to findings of previous research on teachers' beliefs and practice.

In her qualitative study on EAs' perception of their work, Lewis (2006) wrote that the majority of EAs described a strong 'ethic of caring' as their motivation to work with students with exceptionalities. The participants reported having close relationships with the students they supported. No other studies were found that focused on the relationship between the beliefs of EAs and their practice. The findings found on teachers' beliefs may be generalized to the beliefs and practice of the EA.

Olson (1997) interviewed 10 teachers who were identified by the school principals and SERTs as being effective inclusionists. Shortage of time as a barrier to collaboration was a theme in the findings of the Olson (1997) study but this theme was not found in the present study. Four themes that emerged from the interview data were similar to the categories from the present study. The themes were: the teachers described themselves as tolerant, flexible, and reflective; described positive working relationships; indicated that their primary inclusionary attitude was showing interpersonal warmth and acceptance in

their interactions with students; and reported adjusting expectations for integrated students.

Accepting responsibility for all students was another theme that emerged from the Olson (1997) study. In the present study, the teacher and EA also accepted responsibility for all students. The importance of accepting responsibilities for all students was described as an interventionist belief in a study on inclusion beliefs and effective practice by Stanovich and Jordan (1998). Interventionist beliefs "are characterized by the assumption that the teacher is responsible for all students and that all students can profit from learning and instructional opportunities, irrespective of their individual differences" (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998, p. 31). Interventionist beliefs are effective teaching behaviours for successful inclusive education.

In summary, the beliefs of caring and openness to alternatives held by Sharon and Elizabeth translated into a high level of engagement with students, use of a flexible schedule, and creating opportunities for all students to develop relationships. These findings were similar to findings from previous research on beliefs and practices of teachers who were successful inclusionists.

Principal and SERT Support

The third question posed was: How do the principal and the special education resource teacher (SERT) report they provide both direct and indirect support to the working relationship between the teacher and the educational assistant?

Both the principal and the SERT provided direct support. Sharon, the EA, and Elizabeth, the teacher, said Tim, the principal, was very supportive and approachable. Elizabeth and Sharon gave some examples of tangible support Tim provided; being available to meet, asking for input, always following up on requests, providing resources

that were requested, and establishing protocol to handle possible difficulties. In the interview with Tim, he explained how he worked hard to get as much EA support as possible and that he was thoughtful about the way he matched EAs and teachers. To ensure the best match possible he considered personalities and teaching and learning styles of the teachers and EAs. He wanted to create the conditions for success for everyone involved. Tim also stressed the importance of providing money from the school budget to offer EAs professional development opportunities. All the direct support that Tim provided supported the effective working relationship between Elizabeth and Sharon.

The direct support provided by, Melissa, the SERT, involved being available to meet for both spontaneous meetings and planned meetings with both Elizabeth and Sharon, together and separately. Melissa also provided resources and suggestions on ways to facilitate the inclusion of the student with exceptionalities into the class. Melissa stressed that a major part of her role was to help define the roles of the EA and the teacher. This topic was addressed and revisited at numerous staff meetings. Providing resources, being available to meet, and helping to define the roles and responsibilities of the EA and classroom teacher were all important ways that the SERT supported the working relationship between the EA and classroom teacher.

The indirect support that the principal and SERT provided took the form of creating and maintaining an inclusive school culture within which the working relationship between the teacher and EA could thrive. The culture of inclusion was pervasive throughout the entire school. There was a sense of equity amongst the staff members, and the principal and SERT expressed awareness of the need to make conscious decisions to create opportunities for students with exceptionalities to participate as fully as possible.

Relationship with Existing Literature

To present the relationship with existing literature the organizational framework used in the literature review in Chapter 2 is employed.

Paraeducators' Work

The findings from the present study, using extreme case sampling to present a case of an effective working relationship, are in some ways in sharp contrast to the often negative findings in the extant research literature (e.g., Downing et al., 2000; Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001). Lewis (2006) used narratives to gather descriptions of EAs' experiences working in inclusive education settings. An ethic of caring was found to be a strong motivating factor for the work of the EAs who also reported feeling marginalized in the school and reported that there were no boundaries to their roles. In the present study the ethic of caring was expressed by the EA but she did not express feelings of marginalization or of having an ill defined role. It is interesting to note that Tim, the school principal, was implementing without knowledge of the study, two of the four recommendations made by Lewis to improve paraeducators' status and effectiveness in the school. Tim had redefined the word staff so EAs were included in staff meetings, which is thought to improve communication, and Tim was providing more opportunities for EAs to participate in workshops and conferences. The two recommendations suggested by Lewis not implemented by Tim were increasing local union leaders' representation of EAs and surveying EAs' views. Perhaps, because 13-15 EAs worked at Tim's school, he could survey the EAs as a way of gathering anonymous information on EAs' perspectives on their working conditions.

A recurring criticism of the research on the role of paraeducators in the classroom (Downing et al., 2000; Marks et al., 1999; Riggs, 2001) was the lack of observations to

triangulate the interview data. In the current study the researcher observed the teacher and EA working in the classroom and then asked the teacher and EA to reflect on the observation in the post observation interview. Pajares (1992) argued that recording teaching behaviours and then having the teachers reflect on those behaviours results in coherent information about teaching beliefs and actions. The data found in the observation were consistent with the data in the interviews.

One study in the literature that used both observations and interviews was the large scale study by Giangreco et al. in 1997 on the possible negative effects of close proximity of an EA to a student with exceptionalities. In the current study it was noted in the observation that the EA was not constantly in close proximity to the student during the time that the teacher was instructing the class. The EA was not in close proximity to the student at all times because the classroom teacher demonstrated a high level of engagement with the student with exceptionalities. This finding is also similar to the interview and observation study done by Giangreco, Broer, and Edelman in 2001 that looked at the positive effects of high levels of classroom teacher engagement with students with disabilities. More research is needed to better understand the factors that can increase teacher engagement with students with exceptionalities.

Another issue that was addressed in the literature was the role of the EA as liaison to the home environment of the student (Chopra et al., 2004). In the current study there was discussion of a close relationship between Sharon, the EA, and the student's mother and also a close relationship of Elizabeth, the teacher, and the student's mother. Some studies reported that more communication between parents and EAs than between parents and teachers was problematic because the teachers perceived communicating with parents to be the responsibility of the teacher not the EA. The clear roles in this study might have

helped prevent this "turf war" between teachers and EAs and made both willing to share the responsibility.

Working Relationship between Paraeducators and Teachers

There is a limited amount of research on the working relationship between paraeducators and teachers so parallel research from the medical community was included in that section of the literature review. The barriers to collaboration that were found in both the medical studies and the education studies were ambiguity of roles and shortage of time to collaborate (Hill, 2003; Lockhart-Wood, 2000). The results of the present research differ from the majority of previous research because the participants here did not report ambiguity of roles or shortage of time as barriers to collaboration. The teacher and EA reported finding time to talk during the non-instructional times in the classroom, such as snack time and lunchtime. The EA had planning time every week and this helped her to be prepared to discuss ideas with Elizabeth in the time they made available during class and during breaks.

The results of the present study are similar to the multiple case studies conducted by Schnell (2001) with two pairs of teachers and paraeducators who had good working relationships. She also identified the overall school culture as an important influence on the relationship between paraeducators and teachers. The seven characteristics that emerged from her data that were vital to the effectiveness of teamwork between the teachers and paraeducators were openness, flexibility, acceptance, communication, trust, mutuality, and social issues. The current research is a snapshot of a relationship in comparison to the extensive observations and interviews that Schnell did over her five-month data collection period; however, similar characteristics of effective working

relationships were reported. The present study provided more description of the school culture supporting the relationship, which was discussed only briefly in Schnell (2001).

The presentation of the case in this study adds to the collection of cases of teachers and paraeducators working together. Stake (2000) stated the need for a population of cases to improve the understanding of each single case. Considering each case in the context of others makes each individual case richer. The present case will potentially add to the research literature by also including a description of the role of the principal and SERT in supporting the working relationship between the teacher and the EA.

Role of Principal and Special Education Resource Teacher

The study by Stanovich and Jordan (1998) found that the school principal's beliefs about students with disabilities and about their inclusion in the general education classes was the strongest predictor of effective teaching behaviours (teachers accepting responsibility for teaching exceptional students) for teachers in that school. In the present study the principal held positive beliefs about inclusion and the teacher was committed to instructing and including the student. The obvious limitation of comparing this finding is that only one teacher at the school was studied.

Sundmark (2003) described the impact on the work situations of paraeducators when principals were supportive. Based on the findings of the focus groups, Sundmark defined support as sharing information, administration being involved with the exceptional student, and asking for input from paraeducators. According to Sundmark's definition of support, Tim, the school principal, was providing support. It was interesting to note that one participant in Sundmark (2003) said "Our principal would not tolerate anyone saying, you're just a EA!" (p. 87). In the present study a very similar quotation was recorded but from the principal's perspective. Tim expressed himself in a similar

way, "...we don't have a pecking order here or an us and them or you're just an EA attitude" (PI, p. 2). The present study will add the role of the principal from the principal's perspective to the extant research.

Although the working relationship between the SERT and the classroom teacher was not the focus of this study, there are some similarities here to the interview study done by Levac (2003) on collaborative consultation between teachers and SERTs. Similar to Levac's findings is the finding in the present study that the teacher and SERT reported meeting formally and informally as needed. The SERT's office was also next door to the classroom, which Levac found to be a contributing factor to effective collaborative consultation because of the ease of maintaining regular contact. Levac also identified an awareness of roles as important for the teacher and SERT to grow and develop professionally. Melissa, the SERT in this study, focused on making the teacher aware of the role of the EA in the classroom.

Implications for Future Research

There is evidence to suggest that paraeducator support can have a significant impact, positive or negative, on the inclusive education experience of students with exceptionalities (Giangreco, Broer et al., 2001). The current study added to the research literature by providing an example of effective working relationships; however, this situation is not typical. The use of extreme case sampling makes this a case from which we can learn while acknowledging it is not necessarily representative of the relationships between teachers and EAs. More models of effective working relationships with different specific characteristics than the present study are needed, for example, different levels of student need, different grade levels, different directives from school boards on EAs not being attached to the same student for many years, and different teacher characteristics. I

am not convinced that there is as much value in presenting cases where the working relationships are not effective. Educators need positive models to learn from, not negative depictions that might discourage them from attempting to improve their practice.

More research is needed to address issues related to inclusive education beyond the level of describing effective working relationships in positive school cultures. This study is not meant to present support for policies of the current education system. The intention was to provide a description of a case involving effective working relationships within the current education system.

Implications for Pre-service and In-service Education

The teacher, the SERT, and the principal all reported that they had not received any pre-service training or in-service training on building and maintaining working relationships with EAs or on the role of EAs in the classroom. Similarly, the EA did not receive training about working with other educators. The teacher reported that specific guidelines on defining the job of the EAs would be helpful in building good working relationships with EAs. All the participants stated that they felt training at the school board level would be beneficial.

The working relationship between teachers and EAs can have a significant impact on the inclusive educational experience of students with exceptionalities. There is an obvious need for more education and training about the working relationship between teachers and paraeducators. At the pre-service level, education students need to be prepared to work with EAs when they begin teaching in their own classrooms so their only opportunity to learn about working with EAs may be during their teaching placements and the working relationship between the associate teacher and EA may not serve as a good model. Pre-service education needs to include an examination of available

material on the roles and responsibilities of EAs and classroom teachers as they work together to support students.

An effective method of providing both pre-service and in-service education could be a workshop that provided good models of cases of effective working relationships between a teacher and EA and an account of how the principal and SERT supported the working relationship. These models could be provided by the people in these roles discussing their work or by cases that could be read and discussed. At the pre-service level, education students could develop a better understanding of their role and see the dynamic and complex working relationships at the school level. At the in-service level having EAs, classroom teachers, SERTs, and principals all attend together and discuss their ideas on role definition and collaboration could be a potentially effective method of improving educators' understanding of this complex issue of paraeducators working in inclusive classrooms. It is of interest to note that some of the participants in the study were open to the idea of serving as a model for the proposed training workshop that is described here.

Pre-service and in-service on effective working relationships is required to improve educators' confidence in creating and maintaining collaborative working relationships. I believe that the difficulty that I experienced in recruiting participants for the study, because of a general feeling of not being confident that they were "good enough" to be a model, is reflective of the lack of training and guidelines both at the pre-service and in-service level.

Limitations to Study

There were three major limitations to the present study. One limitation that was raised in response to the Lewis (2006) study was the possibility that some EAs might have

been reluctant to tell their stories to researchers. This was also a concern in the present study, especially because the researcher is a teacher and the EA might have been hesitant to discuss aspects of her job that involved interactions with teachers. More research is needed using a variety of data collection methods, such as questionnaires and surveys, so the voices of more EAs can be heard.

Another possible limitation of this study is the unique characteristics of this particular case, which may make it difficult to transfer the findings to other contexts. For example, the student supported by this EA had extremely high medical needs and limited abilities to express herself and to respond to stimulation. It could be perceived that the student was "easier" to program for because of her limited goals, which could have impacted the working relationship between the teacher and EA. However, it is also possible that the fact that the student did not always appear to be responding to situations could have been used as a justification for not making an effort to have the student a participating member of the class.

Finally, after I had completed my initial observation and interviews one of the participants was unexpectedly away from school for a medical reason. This absence interfered with my opportunity to return to the school and do the second observation as I had planned. The decrease in amount of data collected is a possible limitation of the study. Despite this limitation, I felt that for a single observation, the time of the observation, the morning routine, was the optimal time based on my own teaching experience and discussion in Schnell's (2001) case study.

Conclusion

Given the increase in the number of students with exceptionalities participating in regular education classes with the support of EAs, combined with a general commitment

to the principles of inclusion in school and society, it is critical that we continue to study and learn more about how effective working relationships between classroom teachers and paraeducators can aid in providing a solid educational base for all students. This case study of the effective working relationship between an EA and classroom teacher, like Schnell's (2001) study, provides a starting point for just such a research program. However, this thesis moves beyond Schnell's work in giving an account of the support provided by the SERT and principal through multiple perspectives. This case study demonstrates that an educational assistant and a teacher, when provided with support from a principal and a SERT, can create an environment where students can succeed. As such, it provides one model of what can be present in an inclusive classroom where adults are working together to promote student success.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION – PRINCIPAL, SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCE TEACHER, TEACHER, AND PARAEDUCATOR

[insert date]
Dear Mr., Mrs., or Ms.:

I am writing to request your participation in research aimed at describing effective working relationships amongst elementary principals, teachers and paraeducators who support students with exceptionalities in regular classrooms. I am a Master's of Education student in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University.

The research project will involve an interview with a school principal who has already nominated a paraeducator and a classroom teacher. The pair will be nominated because they are perceived to have an effective collaborative working relationship. In the interview, which will be approximately 30 minutes long, the principal will be asked to describe how he/she supports the working relationship between the pair. The classroom teacher and the paraeducator will be interviewed separately for approximately 30 minutes each. In the interview they will be asked to describe their experiences with and beliefs about inclusive education. The classroom teacher and the paraeducator will also be interviewed together very briefly (10 minutes), observed for 60 minutes while they interact in the classroom and then interviewed for 45 minutes as a follow up to the observation. This cycle of observation and then follow up interview with the teacher and paraeducators will happen twice. It is important to note that the classroom observation will focus on the interaction between the teacher and paraeducator, and information about the students in the class will not be recorded. The aim of this research is to provide a descriptive account of effective working relationships so that other educators can reflect on their own practice and learn from their colleagues.

The interviews will be audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim. The audiotapes and notes will be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed after the data has been analyzed. The transcriptions will be kept in a secure place and there will be no identifying information kept with the interview and observation data. Pseudonyms will be used in place of the names of the participants. The identities of the participants will remain confidential in the publication of the data and their workplace will not be identified.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary and you may withdrawal at any time. You may request the removable of any of the data gathered during the research. You are not obligated in any way to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. If you choose not to participate or if you choose to withdrawal from the research project at any time, there will no effect on your position in the school or on the school's position within the school board. I am an elementary teacher and am therefore comfortable and familiar with the classroom setting. It is my intention that the research project will not be disruptive to the students' routines or learning in the classroom.

If you have any further questions or concerns about this research project please contact my supervisor, Dr. Nancy Hutchinson at (613) 533 -3025 or at hutchinn@educ.queensu.ca.. For questions, complaints or concerns about the research ethics of this study contact the Dean of Faculty of Education, Dr. Rosa Bruno-Jofre, (613) 533-6210, or the Chair of the Queen's University General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, (613) 533-6081, email stevensj@post.queensu.ca.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this research project. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Ramsay

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM - PRINCIPAL, SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCE TEACHER, TEACHERAND PARAEDUCATOR

I agree to participate in the study entitled, A CASE STUDY OF COLLABORATIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS AMONGST A PRINCIPAL, PARAEDUCATOR AND CLASSROOM TEACHER, conducted through the Faculty of Education at Queen's University.

I have read and retained a copy of the Letter of Information and the purpose of the study is explained to my satisfaction.

I am aware that interviews will be recorded by audiotape.

I understand that, upon request, I may have a full description of the results of the study after its completion.

I understand that the researchers intend to publish the findings of the study.

I understand that participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences to the school or myself.

I am aware of the steps that will be used to ensure confidentiality of the information collected.

I am aware that I can contact Dr. Nancy Hutchinson, 533-3025 or hutchinn@educ.queensu.ca if I have any questions about the research project.

I am aware that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, I can contact the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr. Rosa Bruno-Jofré, 533-6210, or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, (613) 533-6081, email stevensj@post.queensu.ca.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Name (Please Print):

Signature:

Date:

Email address: