Perceptions and Attitudes of Mainstream Primary Teachers Towards the Inclusion of Students with Intellectual Disabilities: An Investigatory Study.

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Disclaimer

This is to certify that all work contained in this thesis is my own unless otherwise cited. This thesis has not been previously submitted in whole or part requirements towards a degree at this or any other University.

Signed _____ Date 26/11/09

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Abstract

Inclusion is now the preferred method of educating children with disabilities in New South Wales public schools. Inclusion gives all students the same rights as their peers to be educated in a mainstream classroom regardless of disability. While this government policy does give all students an equal opportunity, teachers are the ones who need to include these children and their attitude towards inclusion can determine whether inclusion will be successful or unsuccessful. This research project investigates the perceptions and attitudes of a group of mainstream teachers, in NSW public schools, towards the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. Teachers were asked to respond to a questionnaire and in a follow up interview to identify their perceptions of different aspects of inclusion. The research identifies that teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards inclusion were based on experience and their sense of self efficacy. The availability of support contributed towards these perceptions, as teachers felt they needed a supportive environment in order to successfully include a child with an intellectual disability in the mainstream classroom. Inclusion gives students an equal opportunity, but the teacher of the child must be fully supportive of inclusion. Teachers need to have a high self efficacy and be in a supportive environment to successfully include a child with an intellectual disability.

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CHAPTER 1 ~ INTRODUCTION

In New South Wales public schools today, parents have the right to have their child included in the mainstream classroom along side peers of their own age. This concept of inclusion has been sought after by many within the education system to give all students equal opportunities, not only in the classroom, but in life. Inclusion is a topic under frequent examination as researchers consider whether in fact inclusion is the least restrictive environment for children with intellectual disabilities. Inclusion is constantly being debated amongst parents, while educational professionals and community members also discuss whether inclusion is the best approach for children with intellectual disabilities. Research has provided evidence that children benefit in many ways in an inclusive setting amongst other children of their own age, instead of being segregated from their peers. Whether inclusion is successful depends on many factors, one being the implementation of inclusion by the classroom teacher. Teachers need to be prepared to include children with an intellectual disability. Teachers' perceptions of inclusion can impact on the success of the inclusion of a child with an intellectual disability. Whether support and training is available to teachers, and their attitudes towards inclusion, will impact on the success of inclusion. This research examines the concept of inclusion and the perceptions held by mainstream teachers towards inclusion, identifying their needs during the process.

The Problem underlying the study and its significance

Research has been conducted to examine perceptions of inclusion and has indentified that there are two components which motivate a perception. These two components are an acceptance of inclusion and teachers' self efficacy (Avraidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000;

Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; Cornoldi, Terreni, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1998). However there is little current literature that addresses the actual perceptions of mainstream teachers towards the inclusion of students with an intellectual disability in regular primary classrooms in New South Wales. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training has implemented policies and programs to enable inclusion to be successful; however, the perceptions of teachers towards inclusion affect how the teacher implements these inclusion programs and policies. This research will add to the understanding of how teachers perceive inclusion and what is needed to provide essential support to them.

The Aims of the Study

The aim of this study is to identify and examine mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with an intellectual disability in the mainstream primary classroom. It will provide some understanding of mainstream teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the mainstream classroom and provide suggestions of appropriate, in response to teachers' perceptions, support for including students with intellectual disabilities in the regular school classrooms, if needed. By identifying these perceptions appropriate support can be given to teachers when needed.

Research Questions

What are the perceptions of mainstream teachers, towards the inclusion of students with an intellectual disability in a mainstream classroom?

i. What do they perceive teachers' main concerns to be regarding mainstreaming of students with an intellectual disability?

ii. What do they perceive the impediments to inclusion of these students, to be?

iii. What support do they perceive they need in managing students with an intellectual disability in their classrooms?

As inclusion is being accepted into New South Wales Public Schools, the Education Department needs to be aware of any areas of strength, or any areas of concern that need to be addressed, so that teachers can be assisted in the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the regular classroom. Through identifying these areas, support can be given to regular classroom teachers when they are to include a child with an intellectual disability.

Overview of the study

Chapter One, the introduction, provides an understanding of the background, the problem underlying the study, the aims of the study and the research questions. The literature review is addressed in Chapter Two and describes the historical development of inclusion, factors affecting its success or failure and the role of teacher attitudes and perceptions as a critical factor.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the research design, the setting of the study, the participants and the research method. The questionnaire and interviews as well as ethical considerations are examined.

The results are addressed in Chapter Four describing the findings from the initial questionnaires and the subsequent interviews.

Chapter Five examines the results, comparing, contrasting and noticing clear trends in the responses of the participants. The paper concludes with the final summary and recommendations in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER 2 ~ LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Within current literature there are a number of studies that examine the perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, which are deemed to be the least restrictive environment. Information has been provided through research about the causes and/or influences on teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards inclusion. These perceptions and attitudes held by teachers have been found to exert considerable influence on how successful the inclusion of a child with a disability is. In earlier research, teachers' perspectives about the effects of inclusion on the student were examined. However, there is little research on the perceptions of mainstream teachers about their own needs during the inclusion process in reference to students with an intellectual disability in primary school classrooms.

To understand the movement towards inclusion, its historical progression must be examined.

Segregation

When a child with an intellectual disability is to be enrolled in a government school, there is an option of three choices; segregation, integration or inclusion. To determine where a child with an intellectual disability should be educated, the terms: segregation, integration and inclusion, must be defined. Segregation is where the child with a disability is placed in either a special school or in a special classroom with peers with similar disabilities (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Dixon, 2005). Students with disabilities are segregated from

chronological aged peers who are not disabled. The child will have an adapted program delivered to them by a teacher who is trained in the area of special education (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Dixon, 2005). Before the mid 1970s, segregating children with disabilities from non-disabled children was considered the best method in for teaching children with disabilities (Foreman, 2005). During this era schools had the right to deny enrolment to children who were deemed not capable of learning and this denied them an education in the public schools (Itkonen, 2007). Students then had to either attend a special school or stay at home (Itkonen, 2007). Parents did not have the choice as to whether their child could be educated in a regular classroom.

Segregation developed from the theory that students in a separate, special class with specialised teachers and fewer numbers would have a greater opportunity to learn and succeed (Foreman, 2005). Students would attend schools that catered for their specific disability, as segregated schools in that era only catered for one disability. The four disability types that special schools were separated into were: intellectual, physical, hearing or vision and from these four categories they would be further divided; for example, intellectual disabilities would be separated into mild, moderate and severe (Foreman, 2005). Thus there were schools that tended to specialise in each group. Therefore children with disabilities were not only separated from non-disabled children but also separated from children with different types of disabilities to their own.

In the era of segregation, this was not seen as a discriminative practice; but rather as the most beneficial method of education at the time. One claim from the advocates of segregation was that students with a disability needed specialised teachers who were trained in that area and had the knowledge and skills to accommodate them in the

classroom (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Bauer, 1994; Dixon, 2005). Regular classroom teachers were perceived to not possess the skills and resources to support these children (Ashman & Elkins, 2008). Students in a segregated classroom would be able to receive more attention from the teacher as the smaller class sizes would allow this (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Bauer, 1994; Dixon, 2005). Advocates of segregation also believe that placing children with a disability in a regular classroom places unnecessary pressure on them. This is the pressure to maintain the same level as other students in the class and advocates believe it is unethical to do this, as students with disabilities do not have the same overall ability as most children in regular classes (Bauer, 1994; Dixon, 2005).

Integration

Following segregation the concept of integration began to develop. Integration was the next step towards inclusion, and was the first indication of the concept of rights for those with special needs. The move from segregation to integration was on the basis of equity. Giving students the right to have part of their education in a regular school and interacting with others, is based on normalisation (Foreman, 2005). The concept of normalisation was developed from the views and writings of Bank-Mikkelson, Nirje and Wolfensberger (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Foreman, 2005). The idea of normalisation is that people have the right to live a life which is normal; normal is considered to be how the majority of society behaves and acts in the culture that is around it (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Foreman, 2005). Wolfensberger embraced the ideas of Bank-Mikkelson and Nirje's concept of normalisation, and further developed the concept of social role valorisation (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Foreman, 2005). This concept looks at the roles of

society and emphasises the importance of making sure the roles of people with a disability are valued and that they are given valued roles and tasks (Foreman, 2005). The concept of social roles validates the importance in education of providing opportunities for people with disabilities to develop their social role in society.

Integration was a significant step in the progress of acquiring rights for children with disabilities. Integration was the response to discrimination that was taking place towards children with disabilities (Ashman & Elkins, 2008).

Integration can be considered to be a mid point position, philosophically, between segregation and inclusion. Integration, also known as mainstreaming, is where the child is enrolled in a special class (integrated) but spends some of their time in the regular playground with chronologically aged peers or even in a regular classroom for specific lessons (mainstreamed) (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Dixon, 2005; Foreman, 2005). Students, who are integrated or mainstreamed some of the time, have a higher chance of being included in a regular class for the rest of their education (Foreman, 2005). Integration can also be where the student with a disability is placed into a special classroom within a regular school, and during the day they would come into contact with other children (Dixon, 2005; Foreman, 2005). When this is the case, when a child is in a special class within a regular school, it is referred to as an "integrated class" (Foreman, 2005). This allows students to be part of a regular school and socialise amongst their chronological peers.

Integration therefore could provide a more equitable education system. However, integration was limited as all it did was simply place the student into a regular class and

did little more (Ashman & Elkins, 2008). Little was done to accommodate these students in the classroom; teaching practices remained the same and so did the curriculum (Ashman & Elkins, 2008). Pressure was then placed on the government to improve practices in schools that integrated children with disabilities to provide improved resources and adequate training for teachers (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Dixon, 2005). Governments responded to societal and parental pressure with laws such as *The Education of all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (USA)* which was legislated to provide a free, mandatory education for students with disabilities, and within a 'least restrictive environment' (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Bauer, 1994; Konza, 2008). Integration was successful for some as it gave the right for students to be educated in a regular classroom.

The next stage in the movement towards rights for special needs students was inclusion. It gave students with disabilities the right to be educated in a mainstream classroom.

Inclusion

For most children, being included is about belonging and fitting in. Inclusion is when the child with a disability is placed into a regular education classroom and does their entire schooling within the regular class (Cook, 2001; Dixon, 2005; Foreman, 2005). This gives parents and guardians the right to enroll their child with a disability in a class with peers of the same chronological age (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Konza, 2008; Shaddock, Smyth King & Giorcelli, 2007). Inclusion eliminates the separation of special and regular classes which was an earlier approach to education for students with disabilities and provides

education for all children (Konza, 2008). Inclusion gives students the right to be educated in a regular classroom and to be able to do this without being discriminated against due to their disability (Ashman & Elkins, 2008). Inclusion gives all students equal rights in their education.

In New South Wales government schools inclusion is the current approach involving children with a disability. Three main points can be suggested as the basis for inclusion, based on Foreman and Arthur-Kelly's findings (2008). The three reasons for inclusion are: social justice, legislation and research (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008).

Social justice is about giving rights to all; pressures towards inclusion came from several United Nations initiatives such as the 1994 Salamanca Statement which recommended access to mainstream education regardless of disability (United Nations Scientific & Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994). In Salamanca, Spain, the World Conference on Special Needs Education met in 1994, and over 90 countries agreed and were signatories to the Salamanca Statement (Armstrong et al., 2008; Foreman, 2005; Shaddock et al., 2007; United Nations Scientific & Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994). This statement declared that all children should have the right to be educated in a regular class room and this should be the first option for parents deciding where to educate their child (United Nations Scientific & Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994). The Salamanca Statement also declared that inclusion was the best way to counteract negative and discriminatory views of people with a disability held by society (United Nations Scientific & Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994).

From this statement and other supportive legislation such the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992), education systems in Australia have adopted statements on inclusion and have used them to design policies to improve inclusionary practices in schools (Foreman, 2005). No longer do students with disabilities have to be segregated, but now they have the right and choice to be educated in a regular classroom (Foreman, 2005). Parents and guardians now have the right to decide where they want their child educated. Nirje and Wolfensberger, were advocates of social justice for those people with disabilities, and their writings led to policies and legislation becoming more equitable (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Foreman, 2005; Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008). The term "least restrictive environment" is a basis of social justice, as it gives more choices for parents and guardians and allows the child to have a "normalised" life (Foreman, 2005; Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008). Social justice is a significant basis for inclusion which enables all students to be treated fairly and equally.

A second basis for the inclusive movement is that of legislation. Laws have been created to enforce non-discrimination. Examples of these laws are: in the USA, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (2004) and in the UK, *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act* (2001) Legislation such as this reveals that many countries are adopting the concept of inclusion and enforcing it in schools as it gives parents the right to place their child in a regular school and outlines support that is needed (Armstrong et al., 2008; Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008). However in Australia, policies from each state government enforce inclusion, except in rare circumstances, unlike in the USA and UK (Jenkinson, 2001, as cited in Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008). The *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992) makes it illegal for schools in Australia to discriminate against

people with disability, which reinforces inclusionary education policies (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008).

The third contributor to inclusion is research; many researchers have examined different attitudes towards inclusion, the effects of inclusion and which is the least restrictive environment (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008). The information gathered from growing body of research undertaken, has indentified areas of strengths and weaknesses of previous approaches, and these are examined in the following section on factors that influence the success of inclusion either positively or negatively.

Factors that make inclusion successful

Whether inclusion is successful depends on a number of factors. The first factor is teachers being confident in adapting the curriculum (Idol, 2006). Two components which influence teachers' confidence in adapting the curriculum for inclusion are support from administration and having the appropriate skills (Avraidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Idol, 2006; Pitts Santoli, Sachs, Romey & McClurg, 2008). If teachers feel they have the skills to cater for children with disabilities within their classroom then inclusion will most likely be successful (Avraidis et al., 2000). Having adequate support from other teachers and administration is a second factor that affects the success of inclusion (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Idol, 2006; Leatherman, 2007). A teacher will feel more confident if they have that constant support. In Leatherman's (2007) study it was found that all eight educators stated that support from administration was a key in the success of inclusion.

Administrators must be active contributors to inclusion and cannot leave the teacher to simply manage by themselves (Leatherman, 2007). Both components are important, as having support from the administration and having the appropriate skills, can enable a teacher to effectively manage the program and adapt the curriculum; therefore the likelihood of success in inclusion will be higher.

To gain skills to effectively educate children with a disability, teachers must have had some sort of training, whether it is pre-graduation or professional development provided through the school. Adequate training leads to a sense of personal competence, and this is a factor that makes inclusion successful (Avraidis et al., 2000; Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2006; Idol, 2006; Leatherman, 2007). Avraidis et al. (2000) also found that if teachers gain skills from training, they will have the skills to implement successful inclusion programs, and further, this leads to their personal perception of inclusion being positive. Smith & Smith (2000) found that the level of training is a significant factor in deciding whether the inclusion within that classroom is successful or unsuccessful. Teachers need training in all areas to cope with children with disabilities and administration should make training available to their staff (Idol, 2006). Increasing the knowledge about children with disabilities can lead to a more positive attitude (Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2006). If teachers are prepared, supported and have the skills to cater for students then inclusion is more likely to be successful.

The success of inclusion is mainly influenced by the teacher. Another key factor which influences the success of inclusion is an attitude of tolerance and commitment towards inclusion by teachers (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Avraidis et al., 2000; Hammond &

Ingalls, 2003). A positive attitude is needed to ensure that inclusion will be successful. If teachers have a positive experience with inclusion they will feel inclusion is a positive process (Leatherman, 2007; Van Reusen, Shoho & Barker, 2000). With more experience teachers will become more accepting of children with disabilities and their overall tolerance of these children will improve, along with their acceptance of inclusion (Idol, 2006; Leatherman, 2007). Often this factor of experience is over looked and it is not seen as important (Ashman & Elkins, 2008). Schools and programs must be designed to promote healthy and positive attitudes towards inclusion (Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2006). Through addressing the concerns of teachers, their commitment towards inclusion will be encouraged and a positive perception will be more likely (Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2006). Without the acceptance and the commitment of the teacher, inclusion is very unlikely to be successful and the students with a disability are at risk of failing.

Factors affecting inclusion negatively

While inclusion can be successful, there are factors that contribute to make inclusion unsuccessful. If teachers have not had adequate training they are more likely to reject the child thus causing inclusion to be unsuccessful (Cook, 2001; Cornoldi, et al., 1998). Smith & Smith (2000) indentified that inadequate training can be a negative factor. Teachers having a minimum understanding of the different disabilities can lead to a lack of understanding on how to teach these children and meet their needs (Cook, 2001; Cook, et al., 2007; Smith & Smith, 2000). Due to this lack of understanding, teachers may not know how to provide appropriate teaching for these students, and teachers will not spend time using instructional interactions with these students. Throughout some of the

literature a need for more training has been indicated (Leatherman, 2007; Smith & Smith, 2000). This training must come from in-service courses and while at university. If students with disabilities are overlooked, then they will not get the education they need, and inclusion is very likely to be unsuccessful.

Experience is a contributing factor to the success of inclusion. Teachers with little or lack of experience in working with and teaching children with disabilities, can cause inclusion to be unsuccessful due to the teachers being less willing to have these children in their classrooms (Avraidis et al., 2000, Idol, 2006; Van Reusen et al., 2000). Providing experience is difficult but providing professional development in certain areas will provide some experience in this area (Idol, 2006).

Lack of resources, both in support and time, can also lead to inclusion being unsuccessful (Cornoldi et al., 1998; Smith & Smith, 2000). Teachers generally feel they have inadequate time for included students and feel they need a support teacher to help in meeting the included child's needs (Cornoldi et al., 1998; Idol, 2006; Pitts Santoli et al., 2008). Teachers find it difficult to include a child on their own; support is needed (Smith & Smith, 2000). Resources such as time, support and training are important for the success of inclusion (Cornoldi et al., 1998). If those resources are not made available, inclusion is likely to be unsuccessful.

The perception of a teacher about inclusion can be a factor which can cause inclusion to be either successful or unsuccessful. A teacher's prejudice and negative perception of inclusion provides a barrier to the success of inclusion (Ashman & Elkins, 2008). These negative perceptions can hinder the implementation of inclusion for some students. If a

teacher is uncommitted to inclusion this also hinders the success of inclusion (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). The survey results from Hammond and Ingalls (2003), indentified that some teachers were implementing an inclusive program but were not completely committed to inclusion. The success of those teachers' inclusive programs is then at risk of failing. If teachers who are implementing these programs are not committed to inclusion, this then becomes an issue for children with disabilities, within these classrooms (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). If this issue of a lack of commitment towards inclusion by the teacher is not addressed then it could further develop negative perceptions amongst other teachers towards inclusion (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). If teachers have a negative perception towards inclusion, then inclusion is likely to be unsuccessful.

Positive teacher perceptions of inclusion

Teachers can either have a positive or negative perception towards inclusion and this is due to many factors that have been reported in the literature. The major link between the positive perceptions of teachers toward inclusion is their sense of self efficacy (Avraidis et al., 2000). Teachers who feel confident and competent in teaching children with disabilities are more likely to have a positive perception towards inclusion (Avraidis et al., 2000; Leatherman, 2007). If teachers feel that they have the skills to teach children with disabilities then they will feel confident and have positive perceptions of inclusion. Also if teachers have successful inclusion experiences this will form a positive perception towards inclusion (Leatherman, 2007). Teachers, who have had a positive inclusion experience where there was minimal negative impact on the teacher, have a perception

that is positive (Smith & Smith, 2000). In Smith and Smith's (2000) findings, compared to a teacher who felt he/she was unsuccessful, the teacher who said he/she was successful had positive comments regarding the included child. This shows the connection between self efficacy and a positive perception, as the positive attributes of that child can be seen rather than their limitations. To help teachers have a positive experience with inclusion, their self efficacy must be developed through providing the skills needed.

Support is a factor that can help a teacher include a child with a disability in the regular classroom. A basis for a positive perception is often due to the support given from administration and other support teachers (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Idol, 2006; Leatherman, 2007; Van Reusen et al., 2000; Wood, 1998). If the principal in the school with included students becomes an instructional leader this takes some pressures off the teachers and helps share the workload (Idol, 2006). Special education teachers can work along side the mainstream teacher and they can educate the child together through this collaborative support (Daane, Beirne-Smith & Latham, 2000; Lyons, 2005; Wood, 1998). Special education teachers are not the only the ones that can assist; counsellors, specialists and teacher-aides can also assist in including the child with a disability (Lyons, 2005). If the teacher accepts help from support staff it will be more beneficial to child and this is an important factor in the inclusion process (Lyons, 2005; Smith & Smith, 2000; Wood, 1998). Accepting help from others sharing the workload can make the process easier.

For children, who have an intellectual disability, often "fitting in" can be an issue. Teachers felt that inclusion of children with disabilities helps improve the perceptions of

other students towards included students with disabilities (Idol, 2006). In a study by Hodkinson (2007) on the attitudes of children without disabilities towards those children with disability, it was discovered that negative perceptions held by children without a disability hinders the inclusion process. The study concluded that a majority of those children held a negative view towards children with a disability (Hodkinson, 2007). It can be suggested that children in other schools hold this same perception. Training the children without a disability in the class before an included student comes into the class, encourages tolerance and a sense of understanding of that child (Hodkinson, 2007; Lewis & Doorlag, 2006). This preparation will allow an improved chance for included students to be accepted by their chronological peers. Leyser and Kirk's (2004) survey discovered that parents felt inclusion benefited the children who are not disabled as inclusion prepares them for society. Inclusion creates an awareness of the people around them and helps them accept people for who they are regardless of their differences (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). This factor impacts on the perception of inclusion, as teachers are creating tolerance in the community. By educating students on differences and the acceptance of peers with disabilities, they are more likely to be tolerant towards others in society.

Not only is inclusion beneficial for the other students in the class but also for the included student. In a survey conducted with Italian teachers, 75% felt inclusion benefited the included child in many ways (Cornoldi et al., 1998). In Leatherman's (2007) research, an emergent theme that was the best place for a child with a disability is in the mainstream classroom. Socially, for children with a disability, it is important for them to be amongst peers of their own age (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Smith & Smith, 2000). Included children benefit from other children in a regular classroom through learning

communication and language skills, and also gain support from their peers by learning what is acceptable and unacceptable (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Daane et al., 2000; Leatherman, 2007). Parents also feel the same way as teachers; a survey carried out by Leyser and Kirk (2004) showed that parents believed inclusion enabled their child to participate in various activities with their classmates. Through the process of inclusion, the child with a disability will benefit socially, academically and emotionally.

Negative teacher perceptions of inclusion

Not only do many teachers hold a positive perception of inclusion but some teachers have negative perceptions of inclusion. A factor that causes negative perceptions of inclusion is that teachers feel they are inadequately prepared both in experience and knowledge (Avraidis et al., 2000; Cornoldi et al., 1998). If teachers have not had experience in teaching children with a disability, then they are less likely to meet the needs of a child with a disability. Research has shown a possible connection that the more experience a teacher has in an inclusive setting, the more likely they are to develop a positive perception towards inclusion (Cornoldi et al., 1998). It has been discovered that many teachers do not understand children with an intellectual disability, and do not know how to meet the needs of children with an intellectual disability (Cook, 2001; Daane et al., 2000). Unfortunately fear of the unknown can result in the development of negative attitudes and perceptions.

With this lack of experience and knowledge other issues arise. Idol (2006) found that an issue that developed was that teachers also did not feel confident in adapting the

curriculum and lacked the skills to do so (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Idol, 2006). If teachers feel they do not have the skills to adapt the curriculum, this is likely to develop a negative perception if a teacher has a child with a disability in their class. Further, a teacher may generally accept the idea of inclusion, but if they lack the skills to adapt the curriculum this could lead to a negative perception forming and inclusion will be unsuccessful. Support from the principal and other staff in developing a program to include the child can help teachers learn to create the newly adapted curriculum (Idol, 2006). If all staff members get involved in the planning and implementation of the program, then the adaption of the curriculum can be a skill that can be learned easily.

Managing a regular class full of students takes a lot of skill and hard work, with each teacher developing their own style in managing the class. Having a child with a disability who will disrupt and may disadvantage the other children can contribute to a negative perception held towards inclusion (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Avraidis et al., 2000; Cook et al., 2007). This negative belief comes from teachers not knowing or understanding how to set a behavioural management plan to manage difficult students (Avraidis et al., 2000; Cook et al., 2007). If this is a basis for negative perceptions by teachers towards these students and inclusion, then training is a solution (Cook et al., 2007). With appropriate training and a well developed behaviour management approach, which is used by all teachers in the school, negative perceptions of inclusion could be minimised (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Cook et al., 2007). Behavioural management can cause concerns about inclusion, but with the correct support these can be eliminated.

Conclusion

The factors from the literature that motivate a particular perception of children with disabilities in regular schools, suggest two components: the teacher's acceptance of inclusion and their personal self efficacy - whether they believe they have the skills, knowledge and experience to meet the needs of children with a disability. These factors are important to the successful education of children with a disability, but they do not address what the perceptions are of mainstream teachers towards the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities. By examining these attitudes not only will the actual attitudes be identified, but specific difficulties experienced by teachers of children with an intellectual disability in mainstream classrooms will be recognised which can lead to improved strategies for support to these teachers.

CHAPTER 3 ~ RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter examines the research design of the study, the processes used in data collection and the analysis of the data. Ethics approval was obtained from both the Human Research Ethics Committee of Avondale College and from the State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP) no 2008263

Restatement of Research Questions

What are the perceptions of mainstream teachers and special education teachers, towards the inclusion of students with an intellectual disability in mainstream classrooms?

a. What do they perceive teachers' main concerns to be regarding mainstreaming of students with an intellectual disability?

b. What do they perceive the impediments to inclusion of these students, to be?

c. What support do they perceive they need in managing students with an intellectual disability in their classrooms?

This was a double phased study, the first phase included a written questionnaire that allowed teachers to rate how they valued inclusion in the different stages and to rate how they felt about different issues regarding inclusion. Teachers were also able to comment on safety issues when including a child with an intellectual disability and their personal beliefs about inclusion.

Overview of Research Design

Twenty teachers from three New South Wales public schools were given a questionnaire booklet which explained the research project. They were asked to rate how they valued inclusion in the different stages and rate the level of different concerns for children with intellectual disabilities. They were also asked to provide demographic information about themselves and their years of experience and training. The returned questionnaires were then analysed to discover any emerging issues which had not been anticipated by the researcher and additional questions added to the text of the semi-structured interviews which followed.

Setting of the Study

All teachers participating in the research are currently teaching in New South Wales public schools in the Lake Macquarie area. All four stages; early stage 1 (kindergarten), stage 1 (year 1 & 2), stage 2 (year 3 & 4) and stage 3 (year 5 & 6) are represented in the research project. The three schools vary in size, ranging from one school having 100 students to a larger school with 350 students. School A currently has no children included with severe and moderate intellectual disabilities but does have children included with mild intellectual disabilities. Until this year, the school has had a child with a moderate intellectual disability included in the school and that student had an individual educational plan (IEP). School B currently has children with severe intellectual disability included in the mainstream class. Both teachers there have also taught students with moderate and mild intellectual disability at the school. School C currently has children with moderate intellectual disability included in the mainstream classroom. All

participants have had some experience of including children with intellectual disabilities in the mainstream classroom.

Recruitment of Participants

The researcher held separate meetings with the three different principals and asked permission to conduct this research study in their schools. Once approval was given, two of the schools (B & C) allowed me to approach teachers by phone; at school A the researcher gave a small presentation of the proposed research to staff members. A package which consisted of: a letter of explanation, consent form, questionnaire and stamped addressed envelope, was handed out to all teachers who were given the choice to decide whether they wished to take part in the research. They were informed that they may wish to do the questionnaire but were not obligated to do the interview if they did not wish to. Nine teachers chose to complete the questionnaire and 45% of those teachers indicated that they would do a follow up interview.

Research Method

Questionnaire

This research used a phased, qualitative, mixed methods approach. It used two phases, the first was a detailed questionnaire followed by the second phase - a semi-structured interview with self-selected teachers.

The questionnaire was chosen as it could: produce a large amount of useful data; provide the teachers with time for reflection; be undertaken in an environment that was comfortable for participants; and be independent of the researcher's presence. The

researcher was aware of the participants' busy time schedule and allowed them plenty of time to complete the questionnaire. Further the questionnaire was designed to be two pages long to gather an appropriate amount of data but not to be an intrusion into participants' personal life.

The questionnaire was used to gather data on teachers' perceptions about inclusion and how they rated different issues relating to the inclusion of a child with an intellectual disability in the mainstream classroom. The questionnaire allows data to identify if there are any main issues that are a concern for participants. This questionnaire was completed by volunteers, who were aware that their identity would remain confidential and as there were no career or financial gains from completing this questionnaire, it can be understood that participants answered the questionnaire truthfully, professionally and did not write for political correctness. The teachers' responses reflected their own personal beliefs and perceptions of inclusion so that analysis of the data should provide a true picture of those perceptions about inclusion.

Due to the time restraints of the research, it was decided to include all teachers in the schools chosen for the research. Within the group of participants being researched there were variables that need to be considered such as support staff, funding, the size of the school, years of experience and experience in teaching children with intellectual disabilities, which might affect the participants' perceptions of inclusion. Analysis of the data provided by participants would allow comparison and identification of any areas of concern relating to the inclusion of children with an intellectual disability in the mainstream classroom.

A criticism of the questionnaire is that it lists specific issues regarding the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. This could lead participants to believe those particular things are an issue whereas they might not have thought they were an issue before the questionnaire was completed. This effect was reduced by designing the rating scale so that participants could state it was not at all an issue or state they were neutral on the issue. The rating scale catered for a range of opinions on the various issues. Also participants were provided with a space for comments on any additional aspects related to inclusion; they could also give reasons for why they gave a particular answer to a question.

Design of Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was divided into four sections within two pages. The first section addressed demographic information about the participants, such as: years of experience, gender and qualifications. The second section required teachers to rate on a scale from 1 to 5, one being 'do not value' and five being 'strongly value', on how they rated the inclusion of children with an intellectual disability in stage 1, stage 2 and stage 3. There was also room for participants to comment on why they gave that rating. The third section of the questionnaire examined teachers' perceptions of issues raised in previous research regarding behavioural management, educational achievement, social interaction and other class members being disadvantaged due to the inclusion of children with an intellectual disability. Participants had to rate their perceptions of how much of an issue the previous items were on a scale of 1 to 5, one being not a all and five being extreme. The last section of the questionnaire examined further comments and perceptions on inclusion. It asked teachers if they felt there were safety issues when a

child with an intellectual disability was included in the mainstream class and asked the teacher to comment on the particular safety issues. The questionnaire concluded by the teacher giving their personal belief on inclusion and a section was provided for participants to comment on anything else regarding inclusion (see Appendix A).

Administration of Questionnaire

Before the teachers completed the questionnaires, the researcher explained to them about the research project, including why the researcher was studying this particular topic, and also informed them of the various processes the researcher had to go through to obtain approval. The questionnaire booklet which contained the questionnaire, an information sheet on the research, consent form and a self addressed envelope was presented to teachers at the different schools at their afternoon staff meeting. Teachers were given three weeks from the date of the meeting to have it completed and returned to the researcher. The researcher allowed teachers to take the questionnaire home and read through it before they made the decision to participate in the research. This allowed teachers to complete the questionnaire in their own time, as this would ensure they did not feel pressured to complete it while the researcher was present and also to provide some confidentiality, as they may not have wanted others to know they were participating.

Interviews

The second phase in this study was a semi-structured interview (see Appendix B). This was chosen as it provided opportunities for participants to give more of an in-depth answer and to comment on emergent themes found in the data from the questionnaire.

The interview has the capacity to confirm what was found in the questionnaire data. It also allows participants to share more of their values, beliefs and perceptions of inclusion. As participants were located in the locality of the researcher, interviews were able to be conducted in person at the school with the teachers. The advantage of using a semi structured interview is that it allows the interviewer to gather data from the interviewee, but it also allows the freedom to probe the interviewee and have them expand on their answers. It also provides the freedom to follow any leads that might come up during the interview. This enables the interview to be flexible and allows for new information that might arise.

Interviews provide more in-depth information then a questionnaire can, as the interviewer can probe the interviewee and have them expand on comments which cannot be done in a questionnaire. The interview can discover perceptions that are held by the participant and in this case give more personal perceptions on inclusion. The semi-structured approach places no limitations on their answers as they can describe experiences and perceptions in depth without feeling restricted. The interview also allows participants to comment on the different issues regarding the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities and discuss why they believe it is an issue and how it can be addressed. The interviews gave teachers an opportunity to comment on their own experiences regarding the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities, on their strengths of including children or any issues they might have with inclusion. The discussion can confirm the data that was found in the questionnaires.

Interview questions were:

1. Can you share with me a little of your experience in teaching?

2. What do you perceive to be the main concerns for mainstream teachers with included intellectually disabled students in their classes?
    i. Related to academic issues
    ii. Related to social issues
    iii. Related to emotional issues
    iv. Related to behavioural issues
    v. Related to family involvement issues
3. Do you believe mainstream teachers need any particular support to assist them in the process of inclusion with this group of students?
4. Do you have any other comments related to inclusion such as your personal belief on inclusion?

Design and Implementation of Interviews

The researcher contacted the two teachers who were willing to participate in the interviews and a time was arranged that was convenient for them where they could allow up to 30 minutes to be interviewed by the researcher. One interview was held before school and one during lunch time. General conversation was held between the interviewer and the interviewee at the start of the interview to help place the interviewee at ease. The interviewee was asked if they gave permission for the interview to be recorded and it was explained that more information could be collected through the process of recording. The interviewee was reminded they did not have to answer the questions if they did not want to and they could withdraw from the interview at anytime if they felt they needed to. The researcher used a digital recorder to permit easier analysis of the conversations.

The interviewer explained the structure of the interview, outlining that the interview would range from 15 to 30 minutes and they could have extra time to further comment if wished. The interviewee was first asked to explain their experience in training and then relate it to experience with children with intellectual disabilities and the different levels of intellectual disabilities they have taught. The next phase of the interview asked the interviewee to comment on any concerns of mainstream teachers related to inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the mainstream classroom. The interviewer was careful not to lead the interviewee on any particular issue/concern but used probes such "related to academic issues" to see if the participant felt there were any concerns in that area. There was no further probing used in identifying issues to ensure there was no leading towards results found in other literature or in questionnaire data. This small sample however, cannot represent all teachers as not all teachers regard the same areas or issues as areas of concerns. Following discussion on any issues held by teachers, the interviewee was asked if support is needed for mainstream teachers to include children with intellectual disabilities in the classroom and to name the particular support needed.

The interview was concluded by the interviewer asking the interviewee if they had any further comments regarding inclusion, including their personal belief on the inclusion of children with an intellectual disability in the mainstream classroom. The interviewer gave the interviewee affirming feedback on their comments and was able to share some of the research found from the questionnaires and current literature that what they had stated was also shared by other teachers. This affirmed the interviewee that they were not the

only ones who shared the same ideas and beliefs. The interviewer thanked the interviewee for the time and effort to take part in the interview.

Ethical Considerations

The first ethical consideration is that the questionnaires and interviews can be an intrusion for teachers' lives. If the participants choose to complete the questionnaires at home, this can intrude into their personal time. If questionnaires are completed during school time this can interfere with their planning time for classes. The researcher has dealt with this by giving participants ample time to complete the questionnaire so that it interferes with their lives as little as possible. Similarly for interviews, which take longer than questionnaires and participants must find time in their already busy schedule to take the time to talk to the researcher.

The second ethical consideration is that this research involves participants sharing their responses towards inclusion. As the answers given by participants are of a personal belief, this could cause concern for the participant, as they might feel pressured to say what their school principal or the Department of Education and Training would want to hear. This could lead to participants becoming uncomfortable with completing the questionnaire and interview. The researcher made participants aware that their participation would remain confidential and they would be referred to in the final publication with pseudonyms. The researcher also reminded participants they could withdrawal from the research at any time.

CHAPTER 4 ~ RESULTS

This chapter provides information on the results of the data collected from the questionnaire, during phase 1 of the research and data collected from the interviews in phase 2. Results are compared and contrasted in order to understand the perceptions of teachers towards inclusion, if there are any areas of concerns held by teachers towards inclusion and how much they value inclusion. Nine of the teachers (45%) returned the questionnaire booklets and two (22% of questionnaires returned) also agreed to complete an interview of 15-30 minutes with the researcher in order to confirm the data and emergent themes found in the questionnaires. The data was analysed by collating the results from the investigative procedures of questionnaire and interview, and comparing and contrasting the results as displayed in this chapter.

Participants in the Study

All teachers in the study are currently teaching in New South Wales public schools located in the Lake Macquarie region (as displayed in table 1.1). Six teachers (67%) are from school A [1 male, 5 females], two teachers (22%) are from school B [1 male, 1 female], and one teacher (11%) from school C [1 male]. Out of these teachers three (33%) were male and six (67%) were females.

Table 4.1 Teacher distributions across the three schools

Teacher Distribution			
School	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
School A	1	5	**6**
School B	1	1	**2**
School C	1	0	**1**
Total	**3**	**6**	**9**

In relation to experience, three of the group (33%) were in their first five years of teaching [3 females]. One teacher (11%) had been teaching between six to 15 years [1 female]. One teacher (11%) had taught between 16 to 25 years [1 female]. Three teachers (33%) had taught for between 26 and 35 years [2 males, 1 female] and one teacher (11%) had taught for over 36 years [1 male] (See Figure 4.1)

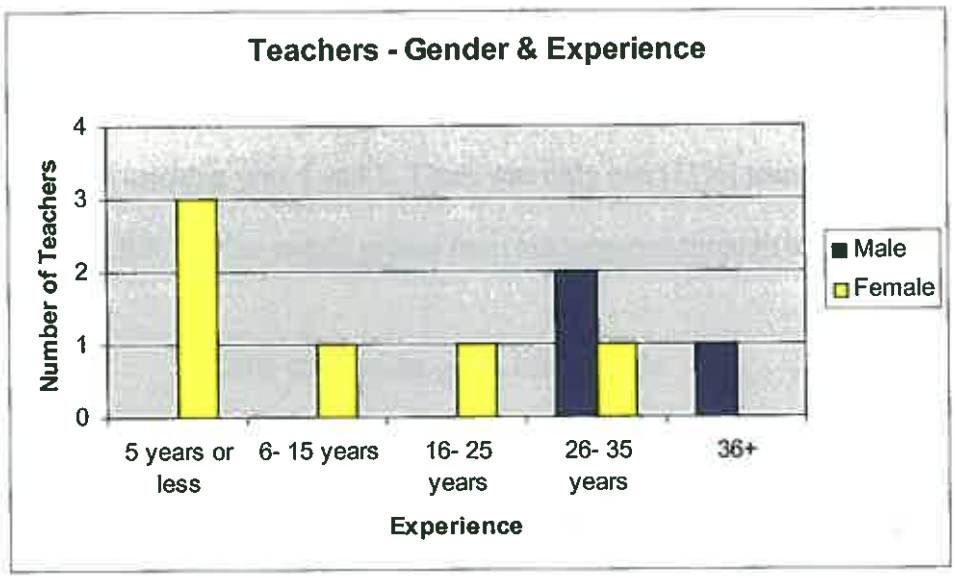


Figure 4.1: Years of experience in teaching and gender.

All teachers were qualified at different levels. Five teachers (56%) held a degree at a Bachelor level [1 male, 4 females]. One teacher (11%) held a teaching certificate [1 female] while three teachers (33%) held a diploma of teaching as their highest tertiary qualification [2 males, 1 female].

In the group of teachers, six (67%) are currently teaching a child with an intellectual disability who is included in the mainstream classroom. Two teachers are currently not teaching a child with an intellectual disability. However, they have had previously taught

a child with an intellectual disability. All teachers (100%) have taught a child with an intellectual disability

Teachers who participated in the study were all teachers of composite grades and there was no participant who taught a single grade. Three teachers (33%) moreover, taught across different stages. The distribution of current grades taught by teachers (as displayed in Table 4.2) showed there was one teacher (11%) who taught kindergarten and year 1. There were two year 1 and year 2 teachers (22%) and there was a similar distribution in the other grades with two (22%) teachers teaching year 3 and 4 and two (22%) teachers teaching year 4 and 5. There was only one (11%) teacher who taught year 5 and 6. The R.F.F. teacher taught grades from kindergarten through to year 6.

Table 4.2 Current grade being taught

Current grade being taught		
Grade	**Number**	**%**
K-1	1	11%
1-2	2	22%
3-4	2	22%
4-5	2	22%
5-6	1	11%
R.F.F	1	11%

Competency

Figure 4.2 indicates the responses given by teachers on how competent they would feel if they had to teach a child with an intellectual disability, where five was the highest and one was the lowest (Questionnaire - question 8).

No teacher in the study felt they were not competent at all to cater for a child with an intellectual disability in the mainstream classroom. Twenty- two percent of teachers felt

that they were not particularly confident in teaching a child with an intellectual disability. By contrast 55% of teachers scored their competency as either a 4 or a 5 on the rating scale. Thirty three percent of teachers gave a neutral rating as they felt they were neither incompetent nor competent in teaching these children. In comments given, 4 teachers (45%) [2 male, 2 female] said that experience has helped them feel very competent, 2 teachers (22%) [2 female] said they have had the experience but still feel they need to learn more, while 1 teacher (11%) [1 male] did not feel particularly competent due to the lack of immediate assistance in the classroom.

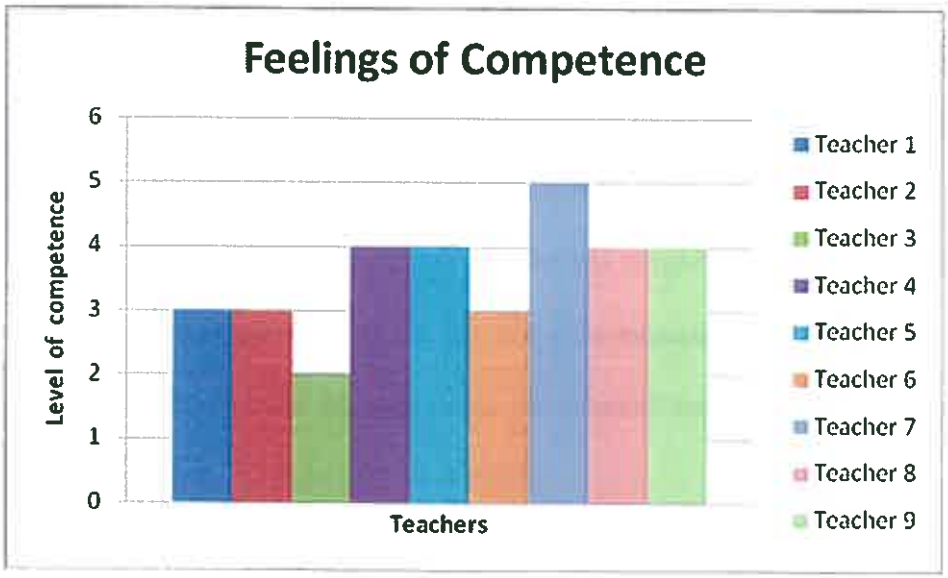


Figure 4.2 Feelings of Competence

Value of Inclusion

Questionnaire – Questions 9, 10 and 11

To see if there was any difference in how teachers valued inclusion, they were asked to rate how they valued inclusion across the three different stages. Comparing figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 there is not a lot of difference as some slightly increased and some decreased.

Teacher six (female) gave a four for the level of value for inclusion in stage 1, but in stage 2 and 3, she rated it a three. A reason for this is that teacher 6 is a stage 1 teacher and believes that at an early age it is important to include children with disabilities at this age, as you can then set them into a structured routine and peers are more likely to accept them though out school.

> *It is important to include them at an early age as it makes their peers more accepting and it is easier to get them into a system at a young age* (teacher 6, female).

The rating of teacher eight (male) changed from a three (neutral) for stage 1, to a four (valued inclusion) for stage 2 & 3. Teacher eight commented that he gave stage 1 a neutral rating due to the fact he has little experience with early stage 1 and stage 1, whereas he gave the older grades a higher rating as he has taught mostly stage 2 and 3 throughout his career. For stage 2 and 3 he felt that it is important for students to be included at this age and be accepted by their peers. He believed they deserve the right to be educated in a mainstream class like any other child.

> *Children regardless of ability or disability deserve the opportunity to work in a mainstream class* (teacher eight, male).

Teachers' comments regarding why they gave a particular rating of value to inclusion in early childhood, were: three teachers (34%) believe that it depends on the severity of the disability and whether the child could be included in their classroom, while 3 teachers (34%) value inclusion in K-2 only if appropriate support is given. This link between inclusion and support is evident as teachers feel that support is crucial to the inclusion

process. Four teachers (45%) believe it is important socially for these children to be included at this age, as children are more accepting at this age.

How teachers ranked their value of inclusion started to change in relation to middle school grades. The comments regarding why inclusion is valued at this stage are similar to those of early childhood. Two teachers (23%) support the inclusion of a child with an intellectual disability in year 3 & 4 with appropriate support given. Similarly again, two teachers (23%) felt inclusion is needed at this age for acceptance. A new idea that developed and is a possible reason for the change in opinion, is that two teachers (23%) believe all children have the right to be included, which supports the concept of equal opportunity as being important in Stage 1. In contrast, no teacher commented on equal opportunity. It can be concluded from this that the teachers perceive that equal opportunity is not as important in the early grades.

Similar comments are given as to why teachers value inclusion in the upper grades to those given for younger grades. Equal opportunity is a concept raised by two teachers (23%). They feel that every child has the right to be educated in a mainstream classroom, regardless of disability. A new theme here is that four teachers (45%) feel that behaviour is becoming more of an issue at this stage.

> *At this stage consideration may need to be given to negative or sexual behaviour which may become a problem as the student approaches puberty* (teacher 2, female)

In regards to social issues one teacher commented:

As they get older their peers are maturing and the child with the disability does not. So socially it is becoming difficult (teacher 4, female).

As behaviour and social issues become apparent at this stage in school, appropriate support must be given, which was noted by two teachers (23%). Support may come from the principal, staff members, funding, resources or a teacher's aide.

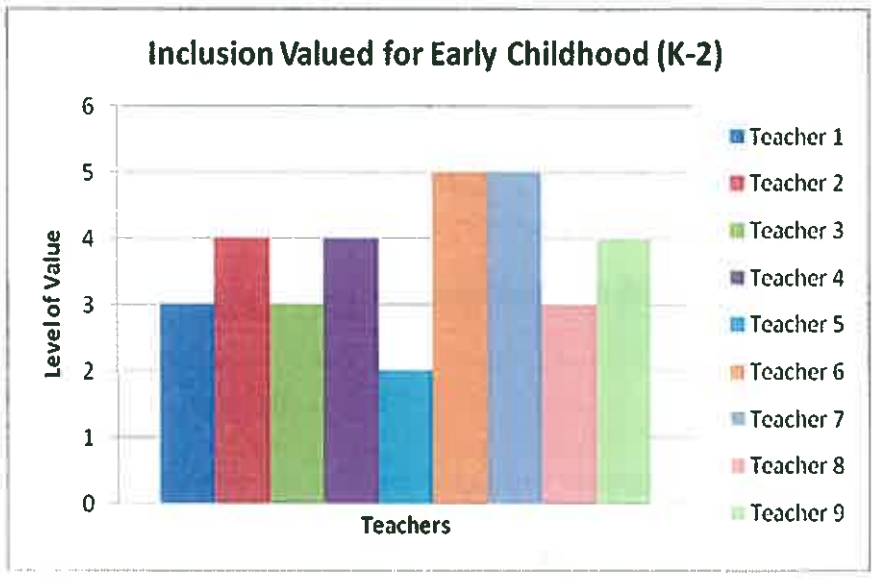


Figure 4.3 Inclusion Valued for Early Childhood (K-2)

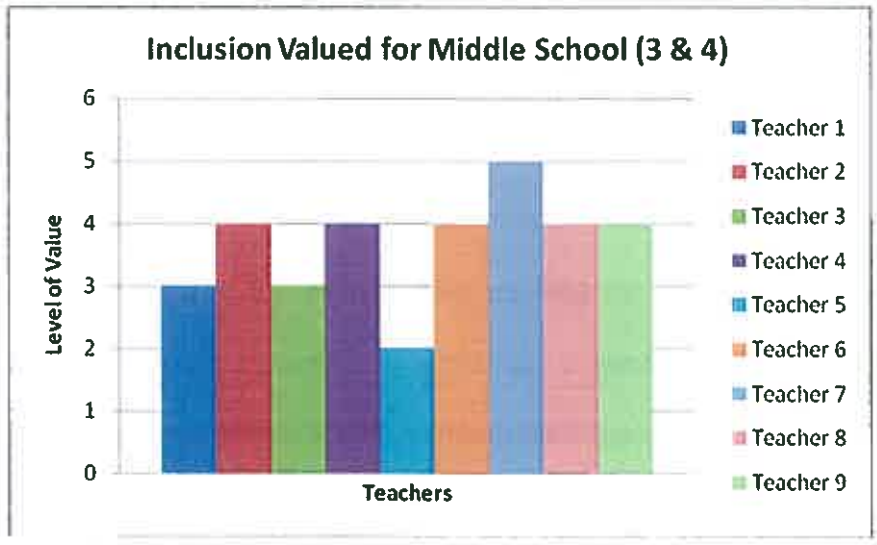


Figure 4.4 Inclusion Valued for Middle School (3 & 4)

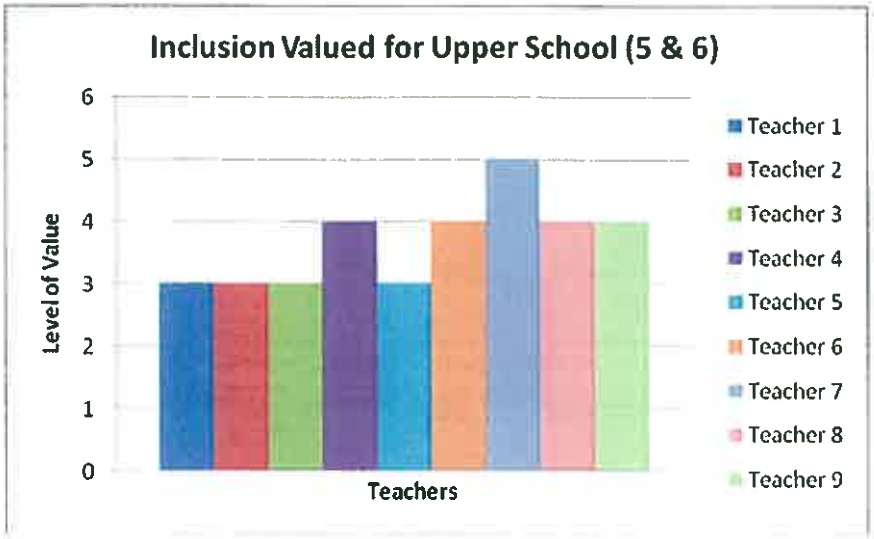


Figure 4.5 Inclusion Valued for Upper School (5 & 6)

Behaviour Management

Participants were asked to rate whether behaviour management was a concern for them when students with intellectual disabilities were included in their mainstream classrooms. They were to rate this on a scale of 1 being not at all and 5 being an extreme concern. Figure 1.6 shows that there was a wide range of responses given on how much behaviour management was an issue for the participants. Fifty-six percent of teachers (3 male, 2 female), rated behaviour management as issue as not at all or very low. These 5 teachers who gave this rating have been teaching for over 20 years. In contrast those teachers (4 female) who gave a 3 or higher have been teaching for less than 8 years. From these results it appears that the more years experience a teacher has, the less of a concern behaviour management of a child with an intellectual disability is for them.

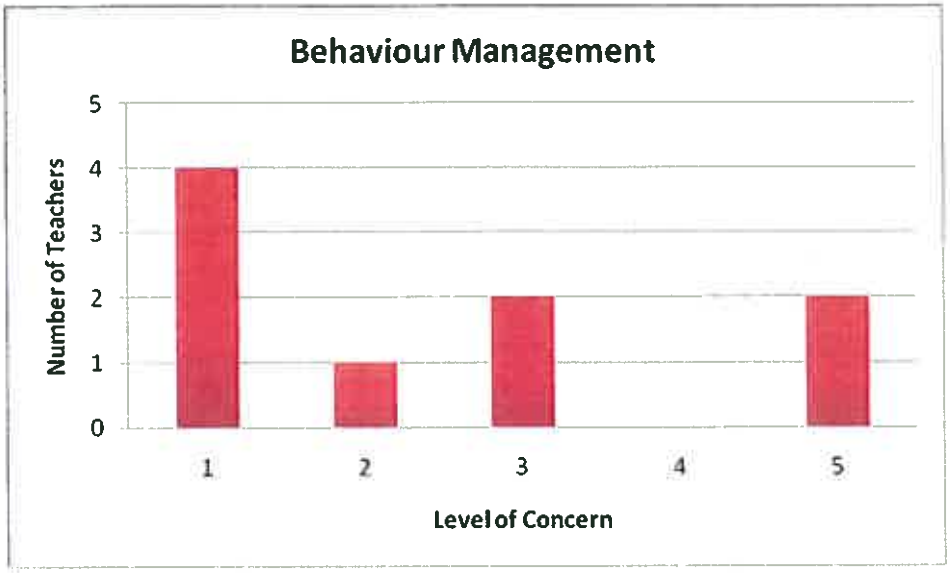


Figure 4.6 Behaviour Management Concerns

Educational Achievement

On the scale of 1 being not at all and 5 being extremely important, participants were asked to rate how important an issue is the educational achievement of a student with an intellectual disability. Seventy-eight percent of teachers (2 males, 5 female) gave a rating of 4 or 5, as they felt the educational achievement of the child was important or extremely important. No teacher believed that the educational achievement was not important at all, however 1 teacher (11%) [1 male] gave a rating of 2 and 1 teacher (11%) [1 female] gave it a rating of 3. Teacher 2 (30 years experience) and Teacher 8 (39 years experience) both have been teaching the longest out of all participants.

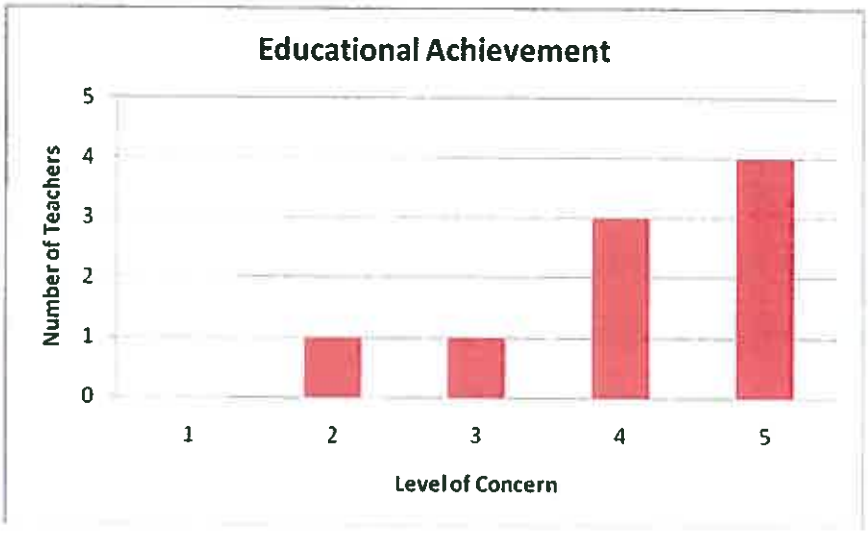


Figure 4.7 Importance of Educational Achievement

Social Interaction

The importance of social interaction for a child with an intellectual disability was seen as important by all teachers (Figure 4.7). Thirty-three percent of teachers (1 male, 2 female) felt that social interaction was very important where as 67% of teachers (2 male, 4 female) felt that it was extremely important. There is not much difference between figures 4.7 and 4.8, but by the slight difference it can be concluded that social interaction is more of an importance to teachers in the study, than the educational achievement of children with intellectual disabilities.

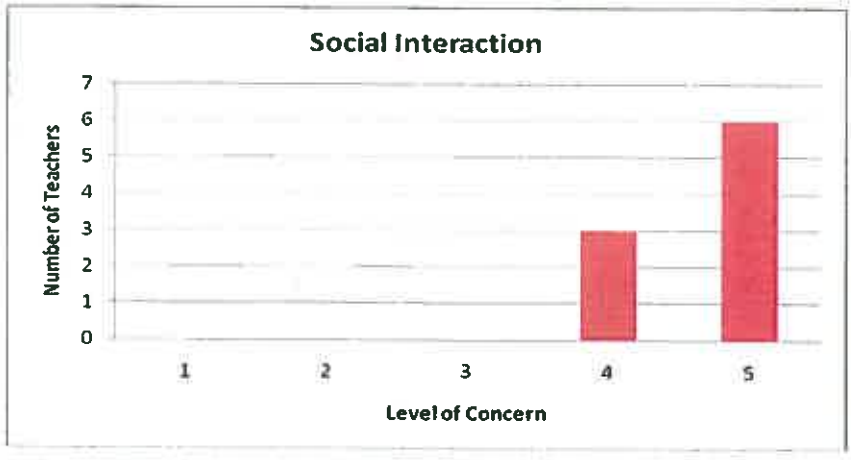


Figure 4.8 Importance of Social Interaction

Disadvantaged in the Classroom

Teachers were asked if they felt any students in their class was disadvantaged by inclusive practices. Figure 4.9 shows that there is a cluster between the rating 3 and 4 with 67% percent (1 male, 5 females) saying they were neutral or the children in their class are disadvantaged to some degree. All these teachers are either a stage 1 or stage 2 teacher. In contrast the three teachers (37%) [2 male, 1 female] who said no child was disadvantaged in the classroom, were all stage 3 teachers. These teachers also have been teaching for over 20 years and there is 87 years experience between all three.

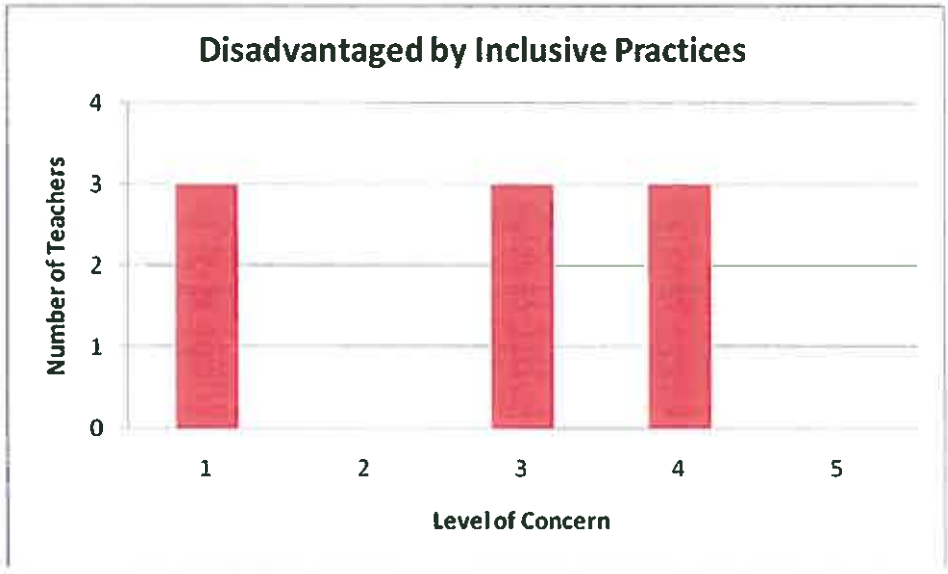


Figure 4.9 Disadvantaged by inclusive practices

Safety Issues

Eighty-nine percent of teachers (3 male, 5 females) stated there were safety issues for the child with an intellectual disability being included in the mainstream classroom (as displayed in Table 4.3). Of these eight teachers, six of them (75%) said that a child with

intellectual disability and behaviour problems could become a safety concern. Comments were made about the possibility of the child having outbursts and becoming a safety issue for not only themselves but others as well.

> *At times (depending on the student) behaviour can affect the safety of the child themselves and others in the class* (teacher 3, female).

> *It could be depending once again on the child with the disability. If they can have aggressive behaviour outbursts or if the mainstream children find it difficult to accept the child then this becomes a safety issue* (teacher 1, male).

By the way if comparison, one teacher (11%) stated that:

> *There is no safety concern for the child with an intellectual disability, as I feel there is no more of a safety concern for a child with an intellectual disability compared to the another children in the class* (teacher 9, female).

The comments given by the majority of the teachers indicate that, they believe that there is only a safety concern if the child shows negative behaviour such as a violent outburst, becoming aggressive or swearing, and that is when a safety issue arises.

Table 4.3 Safety Issues for students in an Inclusive Classroom

	Safety Issues	
	Yes	**No**
Male	3	0
Female	5	1
%	89%	11%

Personal Belief on Inclusion

Teachers were asked to give their personal belief on inclusion (Table 4.4). Five teachers (56%) said yes to the inclusion, whereas three teachers (33%) were undecided and one teacher (11%) said no to inclusion.

Table 4.4: Personal Belief on Inclusion

	Personal Belief about Inclusion		
	Yes	**No**	**Undecided**
Male	2	1	0
Female	3	0	3
%	56%	11%	33%

These results were then compared to the participants' years of experience in teaching (Figure 1.10). Three teachers (33%) [3 females] who had taught for less than 5 years, were undecided on inclusion. One teacher explained she was undecided on inclusion as it depended on the individual child and there were advantages and disadvantages to having them included in the class.

> *I feel that is highly dependent on the individual situation as to whether or not inclusion is beneficial. I think socially that it is important for the child to mix with other children their age. I also think that is very difficult for the class and the teacher to manage when the child requires so much extra time and individual programming.* (Teacher 3, female)

Another teacher felt that her personal belief on being undecided was due to her being a beginning teacher and not having the experience to cater confidently for children with disabilities.

> *I am still a beginning teacher and I'm sure with experience, management including these children will become a lot easier* (teacher 4, female).

Figure 4.10 shows that with more experience, teachers believe that students should be included in the mainstream classroom. This, compared to the three teachers who were undecided shows that with experience, teachers become more accepting of inclusion and are more likely to believe that all students have the right to be included

> *I believe all students should have the right to a mainstream education system* (teacher 8, male).

Similar to those teachers who felt undecided on inclusion due to their lack of experience, teachers who said yes and have over 20 years experience still believe having a child included in their classroom is still a different experience each time, and new things are being learnt.

> *It can be an enriching experience for a teacher to have a child with an intellectual disability included in their class environment* (teacher 7, male)

They usually bring out the best of caring and a more empathic attitude towards each other (teacher 9, female).

The one teacher who did say no to inclusion commented that he only said this because he felt schools do not get enough support and funding to have these children included in the classroom.

*I say this only because the funding and support given to the schools are usually not enough. The schools would have to have more support (*teacher 1, male).

From this comment, it could be concluded that if he felt more support and funding were available he would be fully supportive on inclusion.

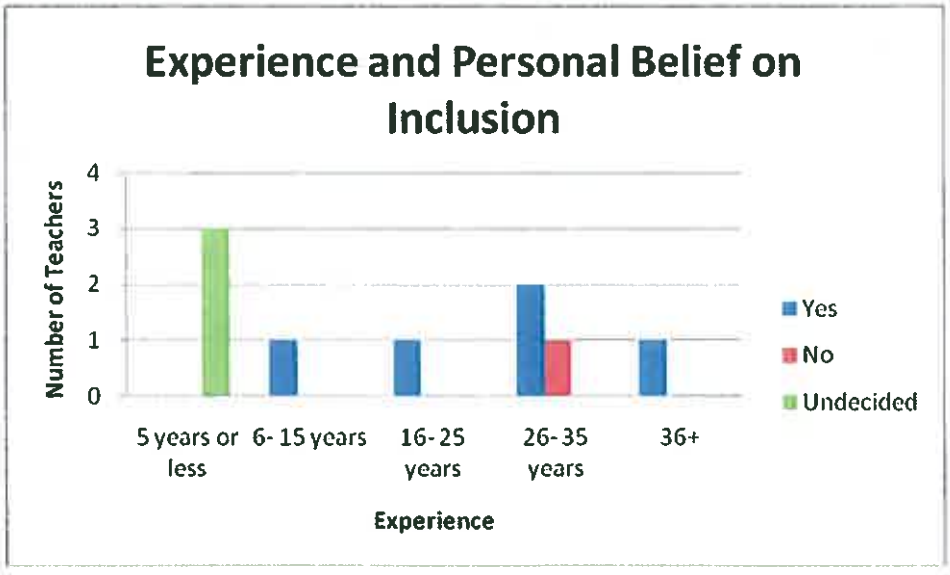


Figure 4.10 Experiences and Personal Belief on Inclusion

CHAPTER 5 ~ DISCUSSION

The research identifies the perceptions of a group of New South Wales public school teachers towards inclusion of children with an intellectual disability in the mainstream classroom. Chapter four outlined these perceptions of important issues held by mainstream teachers towards inclusion. In this chapter these perceptions are grouped under the headings; self efficacy and a positive perception, support and funding and years of experience.

Self Efficacy and Positive Perceptions

Generally teachers had a positive perception towards inclusion and a healthy self efficacy. However when teachers were asked to give a rating of their competence in teaching children with an intellectual disability half said they were neutral or not very confident at all. Those teachers who gave that rating had a significantly fewer years of experience compared to those teachers who felt confident about including a child. An experienced teacher stated that experience had helped them become very competent in including a child with an intellectual disability. From the comments and ratings given by teachers, those with less experience had a lower self efficacy and perception of themselves. New teachers feel they are not equipped and do not have the necessary skills to include these children as they have not had the experience. In the literature (Ashman & Elkins, 2008; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003) there is a clear connection between having a low self efficacy and the risk of inclusion failing due to this low self efficacy. Why inclusion is at a higher risk of failing is due to teachers' lack of belief in themselves.

Furthermore it can also be suggested that they may not be fully committed to inclusion. As stated in the literature teachers need to be committed for inclusion to be successful. This is supported by Avraidis et al. (2000) in their study which stated that teachers who feel confident and competent in teaching children with disabilities are more likely to have a positive perception of inclusion.

Support and Funding

A theme that was emerging throughout teachers' comments related to support and funding. Generally the comments regarding support were used in a negative way, as teachers gave reasons for their lower ratings being due to the lack of support and/or funding they had observed and/or experienced. One teacher did not feel competent in including a child due to the lack of immediate support. The same teacher did not believe in inclusion, due to the lack of support and funding available to schools and teachers. If this teacher felt there was sufficient support and funding available he would support inclusion. While considerable funding is given to NSW public schools for the support of students with disabilities, this one teacher's perception is that there is insufficient funding. At least two teachers (23%) said they valued inclusion in the different stages only if appropriate support was given. It can be inferred from these comments that the appropriate level of support may not always be available to teachers who have a child with an intellectual disability included in the mainstream classroom. This does not reflect a lack of intention on the part of the government to provide support. However, financial constraints cannot be ignored as the number of children with disabilities being included in NSW public schools is increasing. As this funding and support have such a critical

influence on teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities, and thus the success or failure of the process, efforts must be continued to remediate the situation.

In view of the fact that teachers feel that behaviour and social concerns are becoming more of an issue in the older grades, greater support needs to be given. This support may come from the principal, staff members, professional development courses, funding or a teacher's aide. Having support can enable a teacher to successfully include a child with an intellectual disability as their self efficacy will be higher and more positive. This is supported by the literature (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Idol, 2006; Leatherman, 2007; Wood, 1998) as support is a basis for a positive self efficacy. Some teachers commented that including a child takes extra time for individual programming and stated that this is a difficult task. This increases the need for support, as teachers commented that including a child in the mainstream class requires more hard work and it is not easy. Teachers need that support and funding, and it can be concluded that if insufficient support is being given to the teacher; they will not cope and the inclusion will be unsuccessful. Lyons (2005) suggests that support can be given from counselors, specialists, and teacher-aides. This is idealistic and it can take the pressure off including a child with an intellectual disability. However, the funding has to be available for this to happen.

Years of Experience

In all results found on the perceptions of this group of mainstream teachers towards the inclusion of a child with an intellectual disability in their classrooms, experience is the

major emergent theme. In all comments and ratings there is some link towards the years of experience a teacher has. Experience not only affects a teacher's self efficacy but it affects how they are able to deal and/or cope with different issues that arise from inclusion. The teachers who had over 20 years experience felt that behaviour management of these children was no issue whereas the teachers who said behaviour management was an issue for them had fewer years of experience. This suggests that the more years of experience one has of teaching these children, the less of a concern behaviour management is. But this poses the issue of how does a teacher get more experience in order to cater for these children? A teacher needs to have these children included in their class to gain experience. One teacher commented that catering for a child with an intellectual disability is "trial and error". However, trial and error might not be the best method, as the teacher could go throughout the year with no success. So this is then failing the child and inclusion is unsuccessful. This study shows that teacher's self efficacy is linked to experience, which is also supported in studies done by Avraidis et al. (2000) and Leatherman (2007) but not all teachers have the experience. Other ways to help teachers develop their self efficacy must be implemented. To help those teachers with little experience, a supportive environment must be established where they are able to include students with disabilities successfully, as well as teach the rest of the class effectively.

In this study, the teachers who have had more years experience in teaching and including child with intellectual disabilities, compared to those with less experience, have made more positive remarks about inclusion. This could be due to the teachers with more experience having had positive experiences with inclusion and this has led to these

positive perceptions, which was also found in the study by Smith and Smith (2000). These were the teachers (with over 20 year's experience) who felt that these children had the right to be educated in the mainstream classroom and have the same rights as any other child. It would be thought that it would be the opposite as the teachers who have been teaching for much longer would be more resistant to the idea of inclusion as it is a comparatively recent movement. But this, however, links with experience, as teachers feel due to their years of experience, they are better prepared and have the skills to be able to include a child successfully.

CHAPTER 6 ~ CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of the study was to identify the perceptions and attitudes of mainstream teachers towards the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the regular classroom. Through identifying the different perceptions of teachers it would provide a greater understanding of New South Wales public school teachers' perceptions towards inclusion, and if any areas of concerns were raised, suggestions could be made in order to help support teachers in the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in the regular classroom.

The research has identified that in the group of teachers who took part in the study, the main underlying factor that influenced a teacher's perception was their self efficacy and whether they felt confident in including a child with an intellectual disability. This was evident in some teachers' comments regarding how they felt towards inclusion. Two main components that were identified through the research, that influence a teacher's self efficacy, were (a) the support available and (b) the years of experience a teacher has. Experience was a recurring emergent theme that was identified in all teachers' comments. Not only did it influence their personal belief on inclusion but also how they viewed different areas of concerns regarding inclusion. From the data gathered it can be concluded that the more experience individuals have the more confident they are in including a child with an intellectual disability. However, this does not mean teachers who have had years of experience do not need support. Regardless of how many years of experience one has, a supportive network needs to be established for the teacher. Experience does help make the inclusive process less stressful in most cases, but each child is different and every situation will be different. This is why support is vitally

important for teachers who have a child with an intellectual disability included in their class.

Limitations of the study

The first limitation of the study was that the topic under investigation was a sensitive issue within New South public schools. Inclusion is a very sensitive topic about which advocates become very passionate whichy can lead to debates regarding the issue. The government and the Department of Education and Training support this approach (as reflected in their policies and procedures), and due to this large support it is seen as politically incorrect to criticise or oppose inclusion. This may be reflected by many of those teachers, who were asked to participate but were unwilling to answer the questionnaires or be interviewed. It could also be reflected in some teachers' answers to the questionnaire and interview as they may have written what is politically correct and not how they feel towards inclusion.

It must be acknowledged that this study was done with a small group of mainstream teachers, so there is a limited sample of participants who took part in the research. Nine teachers completed the questionnaire but only 2 agreed to a follow up interview. This was taken into account when data analysis was done, as there were no broad conclusions or statements made regarding all teachers' perceptions. Time was also a limitation of the study. The research projected was conducted during the completion of a Bachelor of Education degree. When approval was given to research in schools, it was approved around holiday and reporting time. This also meant that teachers' schedules were a lot

busier and there was less time to complete questionnaires and interviews. This delayed collection of data.

Delimitations of the Study

In this study only mainstream teachers were asked to take part in the research. The research did not include teacher's aides or special education teachers. However the research project originally aimed to include special education teachers. This was changed due to time and financial constraints of the researcher so they could not be included in the project. Another delimitation of the study was that there was no school involved in the research that had a segregated class for children with disabilities. Schools that did have segregated classes were asked to participate in the research but declined. Schools with a segregated class for students with disabilities would have most likely come back with different results. It would be useful to compare the perceptions of teachers from a school where children are segregated due to disability and those of teachers from a school where children with disabilities are included.

Recommendations

From this study, recommendations can be made in order to help assist the success of inclusion. The first recommendation is professional development for teachers, as there are new theories and teaching strategies being developed that can reduce the pressure in the inclusion process. Professional development needs to be continued in the areas of understanding disabilities, teaching techniques and management techniques of children with disabilities. This can be done through in-service training, attending workshops and

conferences and reading current literature to stay up to date. It can be suggested that if teachers feel they have the knowledge and skills to include child with a disability their self efficacy will be higher. Through continued professional growth it is hoped that the teacher will not see a child with a disability in their classroom as limiting but rather as a positive opportunity.

Another recommendation is that teachers need to have support when including students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom, in order for the teacher to gain experience in a manageable situation. This especially applies to for those teachers who are new and have had very little experience in teaching and including children with disabilities. However, this does not mean that teachers who have had many years experience do not need support. As each child with a disability is different, teachers need to feel they have the support of the school administration, colleagues and other support networks to successfully include a child with a disability. It is acknowledged that the Department of Education and Training and the schools try to provide the support for which the teachers are asking. However, the support that teachers need cannot always be given due to lack of resources and financial constraints to provide this for them. Where funding is not available to support students with intellectual disabilities and their teachers, principals must work with and alongside their teachers to try and give these students the best education possible. Teachers cannot be left to include a child by themselves; a supportive environment is needed.

Implications for Further Research

As this is an honours research paper it is limited. However, this research can be continued and investigated further. The research could be enlarged and an invitation extended for a wider range of educators to participate in the research. This would give a broader perspective on teachers' perceptions and provide more realistic perceptions of teachers in NSW public schools towards in the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. Teachers from special schools and teachers of segregated classes within a mainstream school could be invited to participate. Data could be compared between the perceptions of teachers representing the three different education options for children with disabilities; segregation, integration and inclusion.

Another direction that could be taken from this study is examining the support systems for including a child with an intellectual disability in the classroom. Support was an emergent theme in this study that teachers felt was a vital component to the success of inclusion. Different support systems could be examined and researched to determine which support is best suited to help a teacher to include a child with an intellectual disability in the classroom. Suggested support systems and strategies can then be offered to teachers to help them not only cope but to successfully include a child with a disability.

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APPENDIX A Phase 1 – Questionnaire

Avondale COLLEGE

Questionnaire for mainstream teachers

Please complete this form to assist in this research project which is investigating teachers' perceptions about the inclusion of students with an intellectual disability in mainstream classes. Thank you.

Questionnaire for Mainstream Classroom Teachers.

(When you have completed the questionnaire, please place it in the stamped, addressed envelope supplied and mail it to the researcher, to maintain confidentiality)

1. Gender?	
2. Years of teaching experience?	
3. What grade are you currently teaching?	
4. List qualifications	
5. Do you currently have a student with an intellectual disability included in your mainstream class?	
6. Have you ever taught a child with an intellectual disability?	
7. When?	

8. If you had to teach a child with an intellectual disability how competent would you feel? please indicate below:

Not competent at all 1	2	Neutral 3	4	Extremely competent 4

Can you please comment on why you have given this rating?

9. Do you value the inclusion of children with an Intellectual Disability in early childhood education (K-2)

Do not value 1	2	Neutral 3	4	Strongly value 5

Can you please comment on why you have given this rating?

10. Do you value the inclusion of children with an Intellectual Disability in middle school (3 & 4)

Do not value		Neutral		Strongly value
1	2	3	4	5

Can you please comment on why you have given this rating?

11. Do you value the inclusion of children with an Intellectual Disability in upper school (5 & 6)

Do not value		Neutral		Strongly value
1	2	3	4	5

Can you please comment on why you have given this score?

12. Is the behavioural management a concern for you when student with intellectual disabilities are included in your mainstream class?

Not at all		Neutral		Extreme concern
1	2	3	4	5

13. Please indicate how important an issue is the educational achievement of a student with an intellectual disability for you

Not at all		Neutral		Extremely important
1	2	3	4	5

13. Please indicate how important an issue is the social interaction of a student with intellectual disability for you

Not important at all		Neutral		Extremely important
1	2	3	4	5

14. Do you think that any students in your class are disadvantaged by inclusive practices

Not at all		Neutral		Extremely
1	2	3	4	5

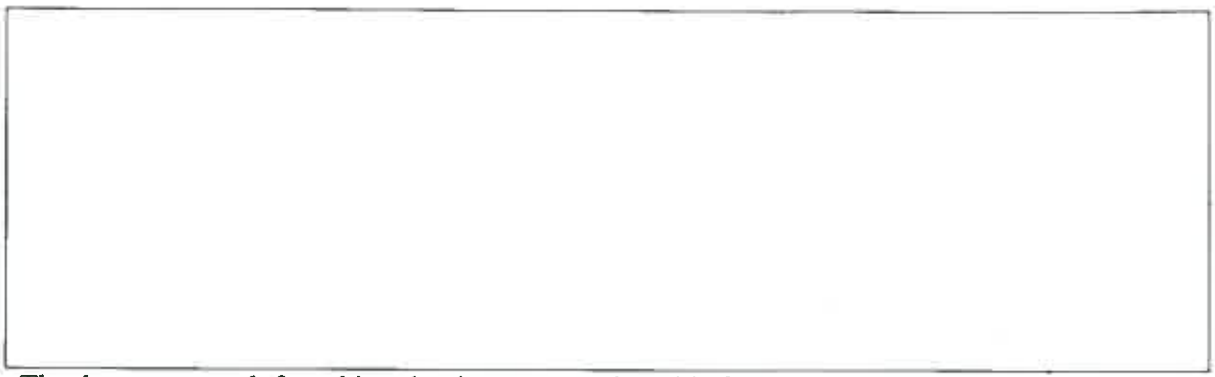
15. Are there safety issues for any students in the inclusive classrooms? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please can you comment on this issue?

16. What is your personal belief on inclusion for these students?

YES ☐ UNDECIDED ☐ NO ☐

17. Do you have any additional comments regarding the inclusion of students with an intellectual disability?



Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this form.
Please feel free to write on the reverse if you need more space.

Please return by:

APPENDIX B - Phase 2 – Interview

Phase two was a follow-up interview to the questionnaires completed teachers. Teachers were chose strategically and were invited to participate in the interview. The purpose of the interview was to confirm the emergent themes found in the questionnaire. The following questions were discussed:

1. Can you share with me a little of your experience in teaching
2. What do you perceive to be the main concerns for mainstream teachers with included intellectually disabled students in their classes?
    i. Related to academic issues
    ii. Related to social issues
    iii. Related to emotional issues
    iv. Related to behavioural issues
    v. Related to family involvement issues
3. Do you believe mainstream teachers need any particular support to assist them in the process of inclusion with this group of students?
4. Do you have any other comments related to inclusion such as your personal belief on inclusion?

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