

PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSIVITY IN THE SEGREGATED
CLASSROOM: Perspectives of Grade 7 & 8 Students
Identified with Behavioural Difficulties

By

Larysa Melody Henry

*A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Education*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perspectives of five grade 7 and 8 boys identified with behaviour difficulties to determine their perceptions regarding whether their schools are meeting their educational needs. Data was collected using small focus groups. All the participants were enrolled in a segregated program, known here by the pseudonym *Opportunities*, during the time of the focus group discussions. Furthermore, the participants were able to reflect back on their previous experiences in their regular classrooms. In order to modify regular classrooms to meet the participants' needs they recommended: reducing class sizes in the higher elementary grades, making additional support personnel available to help them within their classes, and finding teachers who are especially caring and supportive of students identified with special needs.

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CHAPTER ONE

Purpose

Description of Research Study

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream of general education remains one of the most contested topics in public education today (Fitch, 2003). My thesis research investigated the perspectives of students identified with behavioural difficulties to determine their perceptions regarding whether their schools are meeting their educational needs. If regular and segregated classes are to be effective for such students, it is crucial that current practices are examined also through the students' perspectives (Vaughn & Klinger, 1998). In addition, this research addressed children's rights issues relating specifically to students identified with behaviour difficulties who have specific educational needs.

This research involved a qualitative case study investigating the perceptions of five grade 7 and 8 boys identified with behaviour difficulties. Data was collected using small focus groups. The participants were able to choose the method of communication that they preferred (one-to-one interviews or small focus groups) and all five participants chose focus group discussions. Participants had experience in both segregated special needs and regular 'inclusive' classes. All five participants in this study were enrolled in a segregated program, known here by the pseudonym *Opportunities*, during the time of the focus group discussions. This enabled the participants' to provide rich and

descriptive narratives about their experiences in a specific segregated pullout program. Furthermore, the participants were able to reflect back on their previous experiences in their regular classrooms.

This study is unique because it specifically explored the perspectives of students with behavioural difficulties. It has been observed that “too often, well-meaning professionals make decisions for their students without actively involving them” (Erwin & Kipness, 1997, p. 57). Although research exists about students with behavioural difficulties, “an aspect of the issue that is often overlooked is the perspective of special education students themselves” (Fitch, 2003, p. 233). There has been a recent movement towards full inclusion of all students with disabilities, however the inclusion of children with behaviour problems has lagged behind (Heath et. al., 2004). While filling a gap in the research literature, this study also serves as an example of how research concerning inclusion can itself be inclusive. This study was progressive in that it enabled students with behavioural difficulties the opportunity to communicate their perceptions and perspectives regarding their own educational needs. These children’s voices provide valuable additional insight into the types of changes that are needed to better serve children identified with behavioural difficulties.

Background and Rationale

Very little research is available examining student perspectives on special needs education (Fitch, 2003). Martinez (2006) and Fitch (2003) agree that the most appropriate educational environment for students with disabilities has been

an issue of intense public debate for several decades. Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003), continue to argue for the advantages of maintaining segregated special education settings. However, Fitch (2003) found an increasing recognition of the long-term social and academic cost of segregation, in addition to the benefits of full inclusion for all students. An aspect of this issue that is often overlooked is the perspective of the students themselves who are placed in special education classes. There is a very real concern that the foundation of research about segregated special needs classes and inclusive classes was formulated without the consideration of the students perspectives who are directly involved in these classes.

With this research I explored what educational environments – regular, segregated special needs, or a combination of both – students prefer at school. This study: (1) benefits students, teachers, and administrators interested in improving inclusive and segregated environments for students identified with behavioural difficulties; (2) helps policy-makers consider students' perspectives when implementing policy initiatives; and, (3) contributes to the development of knowledge about best practices in inclusive and segregated classes, as well as children's rights issues.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to investigate the perspectives of students identified with significant behaviour difficulties, to determine if schools meet their educational needs. The following questions guided the study:

1. What are students' perspectives of being in a segregated special needs class versus a regular class (having had experience with both)?
2. Are current designated regular classrooms and school environments *perceived* by students as inclusive, or not?
3. Do students feel their special educational needs are currently being adequately accommodated?
4. Do students perceive any children's' rights issues in relation to their current educational experience and placement?

Significance

There seems to be very little in-depth research, which examines the perspectives of students identified with serious behavioural difficulties on the effectiveness of inclusive versus segregated classrooms in meeting their needs.

Fitch's (2003) extensive literature review reveals,

The need for qualitative research in this area has been widely recognized (Good, 1981; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Vaughn & Klingner 1998). There are several recent studies related to how special education students understand segregated and integrated educational placements (Benge, 1996; Graham, 1995; Jenkins & Heinen, 1989; Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1998; Padeliadu & Zigmund, 1996; Pugach & Wesson, 1995; Vaughn & Bos, 1987; Whinnery, 1995) (p. 234).

Unlike the proposed research, however, the aforementioned studies did not use participant observation with in-depth focus group discussions involving students with behavioural difficulties who have experienced both inclusive and segregated special needs classrooms. Previous studies did not consider changes in students' perceptions of their learning environments for students who have experienced both integrated and segregated placements. Furthermore, they did

not enable students the opportunity to choose their preferred form of communication with the researcher (one-to-one interview versus focus group).

If teachers and administrators believe that inclusive classes are necessary for students with behavioural difficulties to succeed, it is crucial that researchers investigate the students' perspectives. This research is intended to assist in creating positive changes in how schools approach education for students identified with behavioural difficulties. It provides an in-depth examination of the perspectives of students with behavioural difficulties concerning the adequacy of their classroom and school environments.

Fitch (2003) "suggests an interpretation that challenges traditionalist thinking about the benefits of segregated special education services" (p. 234). Within my research I explored students' perspectives on the benefits of both segregated special education services and inclusive services. Vaughn and Killinger (1998) find it is important to understand that no one educational model will meet the needs of all students with special learning needs, therefore there is an advantage to providing a range of educational models (p. 86). This research examined what students identified with behavioural difficulties believe are the most appropriate educational practices in meeting their specific needs. Furthermore, students with behavioural difficulties were provided the opportunity to voice whether or not their educational needs are being met.

Limitations

A case study has inherent limitations. I explored the perspectives of students with behavioural difficulties in a particular school, at a particular time. These five participants happened to be enrolled in the same segregated program, known here by the pseudonym *Opportunities*, during the time of the focus group discussions. Thus, the data will not necessarily be generalizable beyond the program, school, board and specific student sample studied. However, the study provides useful insights which may yet resonate with students and teachers, beyond those involved in the study, who are also concerned with providing effective and supportive learning environments for children identified with behavioural difficulties.

The information was collected over a 5-month span with brief individual follow-up discussions. Future studies could also include interviews with teachers, administrators, and parents, however the focus in the current research was on students perspectives given the paucity of information in this regard.

This study had a relatively small sample size, as the focus was on collection of in depth qualitative information. The fact that the sample was all male also constrains the possibility for generalization. The data will not necessarily lend itself to generalizations to other populations of students with special needs though this could be empirically investigated in future research. The issues raised by the participants in this study do, however, provide useful insights on the perspectives of students with behavioural difficulties about issues regarding their educational placement and appropriate accommodations.

Personal Ground / Assumptions

Personally, my past experiences working with the Thunder Bay Therapeutic Riding Association and coaching swimming for the Special Olympics demonstrated the advantages of certain segregated programs aimed at helping children with special needs. It enabled them to acquire specialized skills. However, my past work experiences at inclusive summer camps also confirmed the benefits of inclusion in particular settings for particular children. These experiences, combined with my work as both a teacher and a volunteer in schools, are all factors leading me to my research focus. My position, consistent with a human rights perspective, is that the child should be placed in the least restrictive and most inclusive environment feasible and in the child's best interest. My view is that an inclusive environment or classroom is a safe place, where a diverse group of people are considered equal, and have equal opportunities for success. Furthermore, an inclusive environment enables every individual a reasonable level of freedom of choice, and freedom of voice. Enabling students with specific needs to have a voice about their education is critically important for both educational practice and the area of exceptional learner research.

Fitch (2003) suggests that understanding students' experience of inclusion and exclusion within specific institutional and ideological contexts over time brings to light certain "facts" and questions that might otherwise have remained obscure. By examining student perceptions regarding regular 'inclusive' and segregated classes, this project presents a unique perspective. In this research

the student's perspective was considered in evaluating the effectiveness of these alternate educational settings for children identified as behaviourally difficult. This study listened to what a sample of children identified with behavioural difficulties had to say on the matter of educational placement and strategies. This research will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the educational needs of students identified with behavioural difficulties and the services required to meet those needs.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be utilized throughout my study: Inclusion; Segregation; Regular Classroom; Special Education; Special Educational Needs; Disability; and Behavioural Difficulties. Though these terms are often heard in an educational setting, their meaning can vary. The operational definitions of these key terms, as used in this study, are outlined in what follows:

Inclusion

Inclusion means everyone belongs. An inclusive environment is a safe place, where a diverse group of people is considered equal in human dignity, and has equal opportunities. An inclusive environment enables this diverse group of people to have freedom of choice, and freedom of voice. In this study specific reference is made to the inclusion of students with behavioural difficulties. Inclusive classrooms embrace students of all ability levels.

Segregation

To segregate means to isolate. Often students are categorized and separated into classrooms which are thought to be conducive to their learning needs (Smith, 2001, p. 182). A segregated class refers to a self-contained classroom consisting exclusively of students with special needs. Students in a segregated class are partially, or fully, removed from the “regular” classroom to provide services for the students’ special needs. A segregated classroom may have inclusive elements which ensure that children’s participatory and other rights are respected, including the right to a safe environment (psychological and physical).

Regular Classroom

A regular class consists of a class where students with various ability levels learn together in one room, with one teacher and multiple aids. Under most circumstances these classrooms are students’ community or neighbourhood school and they receive instruction in a regular class setting with peers who are the same age. A regular class may or may not include students with identified special needs.

Special Education

Special education refers to an educational system implemented to support students with special needs.

Special Educational Needs

Students with special educational needs include “those who are physically disabled, those with learning difficulties and those with emotional and behavioural difficulties” (Shearman, 2003, p. 53). Special educational needs vary between students. These needs can range from academic to social, while others are physical and/or environmental, as well as psychological.

Disability

A disability refers to something hindering one's ability. Smith (2001) believes, there are “discrete categorical approaches to disability. These categories are further defined as being of mild, moderate, severe, or profound degree” (p. 182). A learning disability is a cognitive, neurological, or psychological difficulty that impedes the ability to learn. What is perceived as a disability is to some degree influenced by social and cultural factors and the extent of biological and/or environmental contributors to the difficulty may vary depending on the individual affected.

Behaviour Difficulty

Behaviour difficulties consist of serious, persistent, and pervasive problems that may involve relationships, aggression, depression, and fears associated with personal or school matters, as well as other inappropriate socio-emotional characteristics (Santrock, Woloshyn, Gallagher, DiPetta, & Marini, 2004). There is no single definition of a behavioural difficulty and children demonstrate varied characteristics.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

For the purpose of this study the literature reviewed focused on issues related to inclusion and inclusive education, segregated special education, and children's rights issues. Common themes that exist in all three areas were the lack of research concerning the perspective of students with special needs (Fitch, 2003; Martinez, 2006); the variety of learners who have special needs (Fitch, 2003; Martinez, 2006; Landrum, Tankersley & Kauffman, 2006); the barriers to inclusion (Fitch, 2003; Martinez, 2006; Landrum, Tankersley & Kauffman, 2006); as well as, the benefits to inclusion and giving a voice to children (Fitch, 2003; Grover, 2004; Hill, 2006). This literature review also focused on research flaws, inclusive education, students with behaviour difficulties, and the importance of giving a voice to children. All of these areas present important components necessary in building the foundation for this research study. Finally, I will conclude by reflecting on how the literature enabled the current author to arrive at the research agenda used here and its implications for future research.

Inclusion

The literature available on inclusion reveals many interesting benefits and obstacles (Collins, 2003; Erwin & Kipness, 1997; Fitch, 2002; Gutmann, 1995; Sapon-Shevin, 2001). It is first necessary to clarify what inclusion, inclusive education, and inclusive environments mean. Inclusion places value on social,

academic, physical, and psychological skills. Therefore, inclusion is multi-faceted.

Ruef (2003) explains that Strieker and colleagues at the Consortium on Inclusive Practices (CISP) in 2001 defined inclusion to mean that:

Students with disabilities attend school along with their age and grade peers. A truly inclusive schooling environment is one in which students with the full range of abilities and disabilities receive their in-school educational services in the general education classroom with appropriate in-class support. In an inclusive education system, the proportion of students labeled for special education services is relatively uniform for the schools within a particular school district and reflects the proportion of people with disabilities in society at large. Inclusion is based upon the presumption of starting with the norm and then making adaptations as needed, rather than focusing on the abnormal and trying to fix disabilities to make students fit in to a preconceived notion of what is normal. In short, inclusion is not a place or a method of delivering instruction; it is a philosophy of supporting students in their learning that undergirds the entire system. It is of the very culture of a school or school district and defines how students, teachers, and administrators view the potential of students. The inclusive philosophy of education is grounded in the belief that all students can learn and achieve. (p. 1)

The key components of this definition include: (1) all students receive education in their local school, the school they would attend if they did not have a disability; (2) education placements are appropriate to the student's age and grade level; (3) the special education support services exist directly within the general classroom (Ruef, 2003, p. 1).

Inclusion is a process that requires diverse support services available to students with special needs. In an inclusive education system, special services are provided directly within the "regular" classroom. Sapon-Shevin (2001) holds that, "inclusion does not mean abandoning the special help and support that students with disabilities truly need. Rather, it means providing those services

within more normalized settings and without the isolation and stigma often associated with special education services” (p. 30). Inclusion is intended to provide a learning environment that is conducive to all students and that will meet their learning needs. This may involve providing services to students within the regular classroom setting.

A fundamental component of inclusive education is the continuum of support services available within the inclusive classroom. All students within this inclusive model must be completely included in a “regular” classroom. Furthermore, support services are expected to meet the needs of the students with diverse ability levels. Also within this model, support services exist within the inclusive classroom setting, and other placement strategies, which create segregation, are avoided. The continuum of support services in an inclusive education system is consistent with Dewey’s continuum of experience. Dewey (1938) believed that in order to successfully combine experience and education it is imperative to develop a medium between traditionalist and progressive education. Authors such as Fitch (2002), Sapon-Shevin (2001), and Rice (2003) believe it is necessary to find middle ground between special education services and full-inclusion. Fitch (2002) suggests that linking inclusion and critical multiculturalism is essential in an inclusive education system. He explains,

If there is to be any significant movement beyond the politics of exclusion, disability must be reframed in a wider cultural, historical, and political context across educational settings...there must be a much closer alliance between the movements for inclusive and multicultural education...[and] disability studies must become an integral element of teacher preparation programs and infused throughout multicultural curricula. (p. 472)

Inclusion focuses on individuals and groups at the margins of society, the experiences and needs of individuals faced with oppression and marginalization. Thus, the inclusive teacher must seek out individuals, voices, texts, and perspectives that had been previously excluded. Inclusion must not exclude the voices of any marginalized individual or group.

Fitch considers the link between inclusion and support services as essential for the success of inclusive classrooms. He also advocates that a movement towards social revaluing of the concept of disability needs to exist in order for inclusion to take place. Fitch (2002) thinks North American society needs to step away from the traditional understanding of disability as a medical term for impairment. He claims that our society requires a shift towards viewing disability as a “collective noun created from a common experience of social oppression...it calls for a transformation of disability through cultural literacy and a praxis of critical consciousness” (p. 475). Therefore, inclusive classrooms could act as this praxis. It is the teachers’ responsibility to create critical consciousness amongst students about the stereotypes around disability and segregation. This might initiate the transformation towards a more tolerant and inclusive education system.

Mittler (2004) believes, “inclusion in school is at the heart of inclusion in society, not only for disabled children but for all children” (p. 389). Inclusion is imperative, and inclusive education requires the incorporation and inclusion of all people, not specifically students with special needs or disabilities, but everyone. An inclusive education system embraces students with diverse backgrounds:

ability level, race, gender, ethnicity, culture, sexual preference, socio-economic status, etc. It is the responsibility of the education system, the administrators, and the teachers to ensure that inclusive practices take place within the school environment. Peter (1997/98) agrees that educators must “consider learning differences, physical abilities, primary languages, religion, sexual preference, economic status and other factors that contribute to the many cultures within any group” in order to be inclusive (p. 15). Some researchers contend that many educational administrators and teachers must show an enhanced willingness to provide accommodations which more adequately support students with special needs (Mittler, 2004; Peter, 1997/98).

Mittler (2004) discusses a working model of inclusive schools, adapted from the 2001 UNESCO *Open file on inclusive education*. He believes the case for inclusive education can be considered at three levels: (1) Social – changing attitudes to facilitate understanding their individual differences between students, which might include differences related to disability, are part of the normal continuum of difference; (2) Educational – methods of teaching that respond to the whole range of individual differences and benefit all children; and (3) Economic - schools utilizing a cost-effective method of education (Mittler, 2004, p. 390). These three levels of inclusion are necessary for schools to change to meet a much greater range of student needs, and to provide equal opportunities for all students involved.

Short History of Inclusion

Collins (2003), Fitch (2002) and Sapon-Shevin (2001) agree that inclusion was a movement the evolution of which can be traced through changes in language and experience. During the 1980's "efforts were directed towards "mainstreaming" – putting selected students with disabilities into general classrooms" (Sapon-Shevin, 2001, p. 36). This was exclusively dependent upon whether teachers and administrators felt the classroom matched the particular students' "special" needs. Throughout Collins' (2003) research he found that educators refer to mainstreaming and inclusion interchangeably. He feels it is necessary to clarify that the terms are not reciprocal. "Mainstreaming is not simply a watered down version of inclusion, and using these two terms synonymously is not only confusing but fails to highlight the philosophical differences that many educators and disability advocates wish to emphasize" (Collins, 2003, p. 450).

Mainstreaming

Placing children with disabilities into the regular education classroom for some portion of their educational program has generally been identified as mainstreaming. Salend (1994) defines mainstreaming as:

The carefully planned and monitored placement of students into regular education classrooms for their academic and social educational program. In this definition, the primary responsibility for the mainstreamed student's academic program lies with the regular education teacher. (p. 12)

Mainstreaming differs from inclusion because it uses little or no special services or support services for students with special needs placed in the regular education classroom. Teachers have the option to send students outside the regular classroom for assistance. However, the regular education teacher in the classroom is primarily responsible for the student's progress (Collin, 2003, p. 450). Collins (2003) describes mainstreaming as follows:

Mainstreaming is rooted in the concept of the least restrictive environment (LRE), a legal mandate for educating students with disabilities with their peers without disabilities to the maximum extent possible, and the term is traditionally used relative to a continuum of placement options. This continuum extends from what is considered the most restrictive placement, such as an institution or special school, to intermediate placements such as special classes or resource room options, and finally to the least restrictive placement of a regular classroom placement. The goal is to place the student in the least restrictive environment that can still meet his educational needs. (p. 450)

Furthermore, mainstreaming reflects the established educational practice of matching an educational program and classroom placement with an individual's needs and abilities (Collins, 2003). Thus, there is a great difference between the underlying concepts of mainstreaming and inclusion as they relate to placement decisions.

Mainstreaming often does not take into account the voices of students with special needs and their parents. The decision to mainstream was completely dependent on the opinions of teachers and administrators. It was assumed on the mainstreaming model that the "benefits of inclusion" outweighed the "costs of segregation". However, the mainstreaming model does not consider the support students with special needs require in order to succeed in a "regular" classroom.

When these mainstreaming efforts were proven inadequate, the focus moved towards integration.

Integration

As Will (1984) argues, the student placement strategy of inclusion is one that envisions a transformed educational setting where special education and regular education are redefined by emphasizing their common aims. The integration approach focuses on the placement of students in the regular education classroom. However, as Collins (2003) aptly notes, “the primary goal for placement decisions is to improve students’ levels of academic achievement” (p. 450).

The term “integration” describes the placement of special education students into regular education classrooms, where special services follow the student into the classroom (Collins, 2003, p. 450). When Collins (2003) compared integration and mainstreaming he found:

Unlike a mainstreamed environment, here the regular classroom teacher is mostly responsible for the student’s progress, in an integrated environment, or what some call a “blended” classroom environment, students can still receive special services both in the regular education classroom as well as in resource rooms or using other pull-out type modalities. (p. 450)

Inclusion has a more distinct focus on social skills and benefits, whereas integration consists primarily of individual educational objectives and placements in terms of academic achievement. Collins (2003) notes,

Although integration calls for a reorganization of some of the fundamental educational structures in schools, by establishing team teaching models

and a merging of regular and special education settings, the strategy nevertheless continues to recognize the principle that students with disabilities require a range of options for their educational placement and that a student's placement needs to be appropriate to his individual needs and abilities. (p. 450)

Within integration the individual placements of students may vary. This is what distinguishes an educational integration approach from a blanket inclusive educational approach. The integrative approach involves "Changing existing classrooms and structures so that all students can be served well within a unified system" (Sapon-Shevin, 2001, p. 36). This requires a reconceptualization of teaching practices, and a rethinking of special education with a range of placement combinations and alternatives available to suit individual student needs.

Inclusion Reconsidered

Collins (2003) refers to inclusion as "the placement strategy in which all students are placed in the regular education classroom for their entire educational program" (p. 451). Collins holds that the major goal of inclusion is the elimination of the continuum of placement options as all services and support are brought to the student in the regular classroom (Collins, 2003, p. 451). Stainback and Stainback (1990) see an inclusive school as "one that educates all students in the mainstream.... Experience has shown that it is possible to have a mainstream that meets everyone's needs *if* ample support and assistance is provided to both teachers and students in regular education classes" (pp. 6-7). The term "mainstream" used by Stainback and Stainback (1990) refers to the

“regular” classroom. This notion works in conjunction with the corresponding belief that it is possible to train teachers and equip schools to provide an appropriate inclusive education to all students in regular classrooms.

Stainback and Stainback (1990) perspective is that segregating students on any basis is wrong. They suggest that all children, whatever their needs and abilities, have a right to an equal education. They envision equality, where all students are educated in the same environment regardless of any differences between them. Collins (2003) maintains that inclusion is focused almost exclusively on how to achieve equality simply through classroom placement and the process of putting children with special needs into the regular education classroom is the overriding concern (p. 451).

Students with Behavioural Difficulties

Students who are identified as having behaviour disorders (BD) are typically referred for special education services due to multiple difficulties they might experience, such as excessive disruptiveness, frequent noncompliance with rules, aggressiveness toward peers, and inconsistent work completion (DuPaul, Mc Goey & Yugar, 1997). In most cases, students identified as having BD are more likely to be rejected by peers than other students and, as a result, have considerable difficulty making and keeping friends (DuPaul, Mc Goey & Yugar, 1997).

As mentioned above, within the past decade, there have been a variety of national initiatives advocating for greater inclusion of students with disabilities within general education settings. Unfortunately, there has been little increase in the percentage of students with BD being placed in general education classes. Most of these students continue to receive their instruction in separate, self-contained classes (DuPaul, Mc Goey & Yugar, 1997). Surprisingly few investigations have been conducted to address the issue of inclusion of students with BD. DuPaul, McGoey and Yugar (1997) found that two approaches, the self-evaluation procedures and peer-mediated interventions, have potential as methods to promote the successful inclusion of students with BD. Both of these approaches rely less on adult mediation than do others. Gathering the perspectives of students with behaviour difficulties will contribute greatly to this area of research.

Giving Children Power and Voice

Another theme in the developmental and special education literature suggests that giving voice and power to children is needed for facilitating change. Specifically, giving voice to children provides opportunities for new perspectives and possibilities (Grover, 2004; Hill, 2006) and initiates positive self-growth (Fitch, 2003; Martinez, 2006). When children are given the chance to become active participants, expressing their voice and telling their stories in their own way, the experience is often personally meaningful and the data provided is both

rich and complex (Grover, 2004, p. 84). Giving power and voice to children enables the process of creating an inclusive environment. Grover (2004) specifically focuses on the importance of giving power and voice to children participating in social research. Grover (2004) believes that “Unless children are permitted to become active participants in the research process, as discussed, they will continue to be ‘vulnerable to representations that others impose on them’... just as they are in all other domains of life” (p. 92).

Hill (2006) also focuses on the importance of children’s voice. He believes that it is necessary consider children and young people’s perspectives on methods used in research and consultation in order to improve the quality of research and education. Hill (2006) suggests that research methods utilized must allow everyone, in the relevant population, a chance to be involved in order to meet children’s own emphasis on fair representation (p. 85). As the process of research and education become more inclusive, there is room for alternative approaches and perspectives to emerge (Fitch, 2003; Grover, 2004; Hill, 2006; Martinez, 2005). Thus, it is necessary to embrace all participants, including children with special needs, and enable their voices to be heard.

Fitch (2003) and Martinez (2006) highlight the relative absence of the student perspective in much existing research and suggest this has had a negative impact on inclusive education. Martinez (2006) noted also the lack of research clarifying how students with disabilities experience social support from people in their social network. Both theorists focused on the importance of understanding the desires of students with special needs – a perspective that is

often assumed or ignored. Useful insights can be obtained when teachers, parents, administrators and researchers acknowledge students' perspectives (Grover, 2004, p. 81). The aforementioned researchers propose that students with special needs be directly involved with their personal educational plan. Fitch (2003) calls for changes in school structure as well as professional views, and he supports inclusive schooling practices. Specifically, he suggests, "Transformations in discourse and material structures make a positive and powerful difference in the way special education students construct identity and make sense of their experience" (p. 250).

Martinez (2006) also speaks of the importance of shifting norms and the need to focus on clarifying how students with disabilities experience social support and inclusion. She suggests, providing teachers with in-service training and professional development to focus on promoting positive attitudes towards inclusion. She also suggest their teachers could collaborate with school psychologists about effective ways to work together to provide both educational and social support to all students (p. 207). In summary, Improvements in special education practice will require an approach where teachers, parents, administrators and researchers work in collaboration with the students who have special needs.

Conclusion

The literature review on teaching practices in special education reveals a need to explore the extent to which our current system is inclusive, and to assess

its ability to meet the needs of students. It provides a theoretical and conceptual foundation on which this empirical study was constructed. The study that follows builds upon the existing literature by exploring inclusion and the role it plays in the education of students with behavioural difficulties. Specifically, this study concerns students identified with behavioural difficulties who have experienced both segregated and inclusive educational settings. This study will help fill the gap in existing research by directly discussing issues with students that have behavioural difficulties. Currently, the available research fails to ask the students themselves what they think about the effectiveness of their educational experiences. However, there is an emerging consensus that it is vital to ask students directly about issues that concern them. The following chapter outlines the methods and techniques used to conduct the study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Overview of the Research Design

Children's preferences are sometimes ascertained more directly when they are given options about which methods of communication will be used...what children themselves have actually said...has the advantage of conveying directly the views of children, albeit selectively and with interpretation (Hill, 2006, p.74).

This qualitative case study research investigated the perceptions of students identified with behavioural difficulties on their educational experiences in both a regular and segregated classroom setting. This research journey involved students directly and gave the students options about the methods of communication they preferred to use (focus group setting versus individual interview). Thus, it employed a qualitative method that involved children as contributors and active agents (Christensen & James, 2000; Greene & Hill, 2005; Holloway & Valentine, 2000).

It was difficult to predict whether students would prefer segregated special needs services or inclusive services. There was a conscious effort to be open to the diversity of opinions amongst students on this issue. In order to prevent biases, the framework for this research could not follow a model focused specifically on segregation or inclusion. Therefore, the theoretical framework for this study is situated within the critical pedagogy paradigm. Critical pedagogy is a theory and practice, helping students achieve critical consciousness.

Participants were encouraged to reflect on the educational practices of segregation and inclusion and whether the participants' experience of these practices was perceived as oppressive or non-oppressive in their particular case. Further, through my questions, the participants were encouraged to consider how children's rights issues related to their educational experiences. The participants were also encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences about both segregated and inclusive classrooms. Students were queried regarding any suggestions they might have regarding needed changes to current educational practices.

Students' experiences with research are important to consider when selecting a research method. In order to be inclusive and student centered, it was my duty as the researcher to consider students perspectives. Hill (2006) asserts, "there is no one 'best' [research] method from young people's points of view" (p. 76). Lightfoot and Sloper (2002) understand that many young people recognize that different methods suit different people and purposes, so that ideally they should be offered a choice and range of methods. Punch (2002) states: "It has been noted that some children are not forthcoming in a group but open up in an individual interview, while others are nervous on the one-to-one basis and more confident in a group" (Hill, 2006, p. 74). Inclusive methodological practices should enable both preferences, students in small focus groups or one-on-one interactions. Often children's preferences are determined more directly when they are given options about which methods of communication will be used (Hill, 2006, p.74). In this study, the methods utilized to collect information about each

particular student's perspectives (focus group versus individual interview) emerged after consultation with the student about his or her preferred form of communication with the researcher. It was also necessary for the parent/guardian of the participant to consent to the participant's involvement in a focus group because the identity of the child was revealed in this setting. Hence, parental consent for focus group participation was obtained in each case.

This qualitative research design allowed the participants to describe their own experiences in both segregated special needs classes and inclusive settings. The design also provided a rich and multi-layered account of special education issues regarding inclusion within the school. Students expressed their perceptions and experiences using their own vocabulary and unexpected themes presented themselves over the course of data collection. This study thus provided insight into the questions posed and issues being discussed, but also highlighted unexpected themes. As the researcher, I was open to this possibility, while recognizing constraints imposed by time (i.e. the limited time students had for study participation during their school day).

Setting

The junior school from which my sample was derived is located in Northwestern Ontario. All five participants were enrolled in grade 7 or 8. The first phase of data collection provided an introduction to the study. The parent/guardians of students identified with behavioural difficulties received an information letter and consent form in the mail. Both the parents'/guardians' and

child's signatures were required for those wishing to participate. It was sent to their home by the student's teacher in order to ensure the anonymity of the child prior to consent.

The preliminary meeting of those who wished to participate occurred at the participant's school. Participants were asked to complete a personal consent form to ensure their agreement to participate in this study. Students also completed a preliminary survey (see Appendix A) involving questions about their background and preliminary information about their educational experiences, in both segregated and special needs classes, which was collected and compiled immediately after the meeting.

Further, at this initial meeting the students participating in this study also established the method of data collection that they preferred. They were provided with two options, one-on-one interviews or small focus group interviews. The focus group questions follow a simple format (see Appendix B), however the nature of the group setting enabled spontaneous discussions to arise. Although the students had the opportunity to choose whether they prefer to communicate one-on-one or in small groups all five participants chose the focus group discussions. The school provided the room for discussions. It is important to note that no child is identified in any transcript and that all identifying information has been omitted. Thus participant anonymity is fully protected.

The second phase of data collection also took place on site at the participants' school during a 'free-time' period allotted for the participants' (with parental and teacher permission). This provided for a comfortable and

professional atmosphere in which the small focus groups took place.

Furthermore, it provided me with an opportunity to understand the environment in which the participants learn. Not only did my observations of the setting provide direction for questions in the focus group discussions, but it also allowed me to convey a more detailed description of the setting in my final analysis. I believe that such experiences helped with descriptions by putting me “in a good position to reflect and remark on the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2005, p. 251). According to Creswell, detailed descriptions “can transport the reader to a research site or help the reader visualize a person” (2005, p. 241). By visiting the schools at which the participants learn, I was well equipped to convey my findings in a rich and descriptive narrative. With permission from the parent/guardian and participant the focus group discussions were also audio taped and transcribed.

The third phase occurred after the information was collected. This consisted of a follow-up meeting with all of the participants. The findings and discussion were discussed directly with the students. This provided further insight, as well as enabled participants to make changes to any information pertaining to their individual comments in the small group discussion which they feel better reflect their intended communication. Some comments were removed entirely at their request. All the data was presented as grouped data, except the particular quotes (without names attached). This phase was necessary prior to the formal written report.

Selection of the Participants

This qualitative study used a purposeful sampling strategy to collect participants (Creswell, 2005). Students participating in this study were all enrolled in grade 7 or 8 classes from the same school board. Due to difficulties, finding schools, principals, and teachers willing to consent to allowing their students to participate, only five students participated. Furthermore, the participants were students identified with behavioural difficulties, and this also added a dimension to the difficulty of finding participants. Each participant did have previous experiences in both inclusive and segregated special needs classrooms, they wished to participate in this research study and they had their parents/guardians consent.

In order to work with the participants the researcher required the following signatures of approval in this order: (1) Education Officer of the specific school board; (2) Principal of each specific school; (3) Teacher of the specific students; (4) Parent/Guardian of the specific participant; and most importantly (5) the Participant. Searching for all these parties that would agree to participate proved quite difficult. It was a challenging barrier in the data collection process. There was some reluctance to have student perspectives on inclusive and segregated placements highlighted and this placed severe constraints on the available sample. However, fortunately the students who did participate were available for in depth interview and provided their perceptions of both “regular” and “segregated” placements, their having experienced both.

I was successful in finding a very passionate teacher, dedicated to helping children and giving them a voice where they are often unheard. This teacher mailed out letters and consent forms (see Appendix D) to the parents/guardians of children with behavioural difficulties, without the researcher knowing the children's identity. The material was mailed to the parents/guardians, and in some instances the teacher contacted the parents/guardian directly. This was a privacy measure taken in case the parents/guardians did not want their children in the study and did not want the child to read something that refers to their behavioural difficulties. The form did include a place for both the parents'/guardians' and child's signature.

The researcher did not know who the children were until the teacher handed back the consent forms with the parent/guardian and children's written consent of approval. The teacher destroyed the other consent forms to protect the anonymity of the children who did not wish to participate. Once the written consent forms were received, the initial information sessions began with the children to explain the purpose of study. Due to the circumstances of the segregated class environment in which all the participants took part, the information sessions occurred on a small group basis. All the parent/guardians permitted their child's participation in the study, and they also provided written consent to the following options: (a) to either have their child participate in only the individual interview session; (b) only the focus group; or (c) the parent would enable the student to choose the method the participant prefers. All participants and parents/guardians consented to the focus groups. The participants included

just those children identified with behavioural difficulties with written personal consent and not the whole class. The sessions were held at school during a time their teacher allotted for their research participation.

After the initial information session the children were asked if they still wanted to participate. When they agreed they signed a written consent form (see Appendix E) that was similar to the one they signed with their parent/guardian, except this one was specifically for the children and it indicated that it was the post-oral presentation information consent form. This provided the student participants with another opportunity to agree or disagree to participate after the oral information presentation session has taken place at the school.

The abovementioned steps were necessary to protect the parents'/guardians' and children's confidentiality about their diagnosis. This also allowed the children the responsibility, as separate human beings, to choose independently about whether they wished to participate, or not, providing their parents had given prior written approval for their participation.

Description of the Participants

The selection requirements for inclusion of each participant were that: (a) they had been identified with behavioural difficulties; (b) they had experiences in both a segregated special needs classroom and a regular classroom; and (c) the student was enrolled in either grade 7 or 8. Furthermore, participants were required to provide parental/guardian consent in order to participate. This study included five students ranging from age twelve to fifteen. During the time of the

focus group discussions two students were enrolled in grade eight, and the other three students were in grade seven. All five students were actively participating in a segregated program, here referred to by the pseudonym *Opportunities*, during the time of focus groups. In addition, the participants had experiences with other segregated programs, such as resource classes and special education pullout programs. However, the five participants' primary educational experiences had taken place in a regular classroom. Each participant was at a different stage of *Opportunities* and had been enrolled from two to eight weeks during the time of the discussion groups.

All of the participants were male. An effort was made to find female participants. However, the majority of students identified with behavioural difficulties in this particular school board happened to be male. Froese-Germain (2002) aptly notes "that males account for nearly two-thirds of elementary special needs students (i.e., needs associated with learning disability, emotional/behavioural problems, problems at home)" (p. 3). The following provides a brief profile of each study participant (see Table 1).

Table 1: Description of the Participants

Pseudonym Age & Grade	Description
<p>Bob</p> <p>Age: 14</p> <p>Grade: 8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bob was an articulate student. He was very excited to be participating in the focus group discussion. He had an answer for every question and it seemed as though he had a critical perspective on his educational experiences. • Bob felt he was in <i>Opportunities</i> because he has difficulties getting his thoughts on paper. He also thinks it has to do with the fact that he has "ADD and ADHD". • Bob made reference to current government policies and teacher agendas. He was well versed on educational issues and very passionate

	about what he felt was important (hands-on experiences and teachers having a caring attitude).
<p>Dee</p> <p>Age: 15</p> <p>Grade: 8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dee was more of a soft-spoken participant. However, he made some important contributions to the focus group discussions. Dee had a unique perspective because as he explains it "I was kicked out of high school, so they made me come here." He continued to explain; "I was taken out of school from the cops and came straight here." Dee felt that <i>Opportunities</i> was a program available to support him and provide him with the skills necessary to return back to his high school. This involved learning how to control his behaviour and learning how to read.
<p>Jerry</p> <p>Age: 13</p> <p>Grade: 7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jerry was a little quiet throughout the focus group discussion. He provided insight into his educational experiences with only saying a few words. Jerry explained that he was in the program <i>Opportunities</i> because he was kicked out of his regular school a few months prior to our discussion. He explained; "I got kicked out." Jerry's saw <i>Opportunities</i> as a place where he could learn to control his behaviour. Something he needed to do before he would be allowed to go back to his regular school.
<p>Jhony</p> <p>Age: 12</p> <p>Grade: 7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jhony had a strong personality. He had me laughing from the moment I walked through the classroom door. Jhony seemed quite aware of why he was in the <i>Opportunities</i> program. It is "because of my behaviour...impolite, not nice, and rude." When he was asked if he can control these behaviours he had a striking response, "I bet I could control them, but I don't want to." At that time I wondered if Jhony's responses to some of the questions were what he truly felt or if they were what he thought I wanted to hear. He seemed to be holding back. At one point in the discussion he even said, "There are a lot of things I would like to say, but I don't want to say it." Although I reminded him on numerous occasions, he demonstrated difficulty distinguishing my position as a researcher, not a teacher or principal. I attributed his hesitancy to speak out, to his fear of getting in trouble.
<p>Topher</p> <p>Age: 12</p> <p>Grade: 7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topher had talent for conversation. He was very well aware of his educational experiences, and engaged me in dialogue concerning how these have affected his learning/lifestyle. Topher was in the process of finding out the results of some diagnostic tests that occurred earlier in the year to see if he actually had Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). He explained himself as, "I am all over the place. Most of the time the only place I am not is doing my work." It was obvious that Topher has questioned his educational experiences and recognizes what he feels is important. He values teachers that care and stressed that was something he needed in order to succeed. According to Topher good teachers, "listen to you. They are supportive."

Qualitative Interview/Focus Group Method

One-on-one interviews and small focus groups were to provide the basis for this qualitative data collection. The participants were given the power to choose the method they preferred and all five participants chose to participate in focus group discussions only. The questions pertained specifically to participants' perspectives of their past and present educational experiences. Students were also invited to add any further comments they wished regarding their school experiences or the research process at the end of the interview questions and these were all recorded. All discussions were conducted face-to-face. Two discussions took place; the first was approximately one hour in duration and the second was approximately 40 minutes. Each focus group was audio-recorded and later transcribed with the knowledge and written consent of the student(s) and their parents/guardians. The transcripts, audio recordings and notes taken at each interview/focus group are held confidential and will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years. These notes recorded the date, time, and locations of the interviews, as well as the information being discussed. Some excerpts from these notes are used throughout the final write-up without any identifying names attached. Furthermore, notes were made on my observations of the school and classroom environments, particularly those elements of the environment that pertain to including and segregating the students with behavioural difficulties.

Data Collection

Two forms of data collection were employed. To record the researchers thoughts and reflections throughout the process of the study, a research journal that incorporated text was used. The research journal acts as a place to jot down important reflections that were considered and expanded on. It also helped to ensure that important ideas and thoughts were not lost or forgotten.

An initial meeting was organized with each student participating in the study. As mentioned above, the students were offered two communication options, to see whether they preferred to participate in one-on-one interviews or small focus groups. Once this was established, two small focus groups were held.

To record the information students discussed, with the permission of the parent/guardian and the student, I used audio recording and printed records. The audio recording occurred using a digital voice recording system that was transcribed shortly after the focus group discussions had taken place. The printed records were written in my research journal. The use of these varied collection methods helped to ensure richer data.

Children as Collaborators

The research process directly engaged the student participants in choosing their own self-reporting method. Thus the participants were collaborators in the research effort. Choosing an alternative path has challenges, yet it also provides opportunities for authenticity. Increasingly, researchers are

consulting children about the materials they use for data gathering (Alderson, 2001; Thomas, Beckford, Lowe, & Murch, 1999). Hill (2006) found that young people generally respond better to questions they think their peers have helped formulate (p. 80). Extensive research regarding young people's input into research design lead Hill (2006) to conclude that:

The use of young people as researchers is growing and some voluntary organizations engage young people throughout the process (Alderson, 1995; Clark et al., 2001b; Howland and Bethell, 2002; Kellett et al., 2004). Some evidence indicates that this does encourage other young people to be more open to those they see as being more similar in terms of age and experience. (p. 80)

Working together with the students participating in this research also enabled the students to become researchers in this process. The students were investigating whether schools are meeting their educational needs. In the past, children's perspectives and experiences were generally overlooked. Their capacity to influence and respond to adult actions was limited by the discretion of the adults in their lives. The current research provided the children a degree of choice and a sphere of involvement. Hill (2006) effectively reminds researchers:

There is a need both to ask children and young people much more often what they think about methods used in actual and potential research and...build up a record of their perspectives. This will help improve the quality and ultimately outcomes of individual studies and of the community of research and consultation activities. More importantly, perhaps, it will enable the adult-child relationships entailed in research and consultation to be more explicitly and fully located within the theory and actuality of intergenerational relations, as well as within the context of empowerment, partnership and citizenship. (p. 85)

Providing a choice of research methods for students improves accountability, authenticity, and inclusivity of the research methodology. There is a need to

include children and young people directly in the research and to build upon their perspectives. The inclusion of students with behavioural difficulties is a challenging topic in public education. Quite often the perspectives of the students themselves are excluded from research and decision making processes that directly involve their educational experiences. This research examined current practices through the view of students with behavioural difficulties in order to understand if regular and segregated classes are effective in the eyes of these students.

Ethics

An application to conduct this research was provided to the Lakehead University Research Ethics Committee. Data collection did not commence, nor were any participants contacted until the Ethics Committee had approved my application. Permission was gained from all pertinent parties prior to commencement of the study and all Tri-Council ethical procedures were followed. Every effort was made to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

Informed consent was obtained from all student participants and their parents/guardians prior to the commencement of data collection. This enabled participants the freedom to choose if they would like to participate. To obtain consent, cover letters (see Appendix C) and consent forms (see Appendix D) were distributed and discussed with each participant prior to the interview. The

consent form and cover letter outlined the purpose of the project, the voluntary nature of participants' involvement, and the issue of confidentiality.

Students participated in all phases of the research on a strictly voluntary basis and were informed in writing that they could withdraw at any time from the study without adverse consequence. The students were able to choose not to answer any question asked as part of the research. Parents/guardians were also made aware that it was their choice to have their child participate and no adverse consequences would flow from their choice not to have the child participate.

Participants' identities remained confidential at all times, as well as that of their school and school board. Participants were not identified by name, or by any means that would compromise their anonymity. Participants also selected their own pseudonym for use in reporting the findings.

This study did not pose a threat to the health or well being of any of the participants. Respect and care was accorded to all of the participants, at all times.

The integrity of the data was a high priority throughout the study. The researcher demonstrated caution and care to ensure that all information was represented accurately and authentically while completing the data transcription. To ensure the accuracy of the data, all participants also reviewed the information. When needed, participants redacted portions of their transcribed interview, or comments from the focus group. Furthermore when participants so wished, information was withdrawn from the database. As mentioned previously, all findings were reported as grouped data but particular quotes with no name

attached were used to illustrate recurrent themes that arose in the student comments.

All data collected from this research study will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. Then it will be destroyed appropriately.

This study was conducted only after the school board, principal, administrators, teachers, as well as parents and children had granted permission.

Data Analysis

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, an inductive approach to data analysis was utilized (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Data analysis began within the school setting, commencing with the first piece of data collected, and continued throughout the data collection phases. This initial analysis informed and refined the following data collection.

Focus group discussion transcripts, written documents, and a short information survey (see Appendix A) were analyzed using a constant-comparative method: qualitatively “comparing and contrasting each topic and category to determine the distinctive characteristics of each” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 468). In examining the data, certain patterns emerged; the constant-comparative method helped to distinguish these patterns. They were then classified under certain thematic headings and codes. In turn, the thematic codes were sorted into broader themes, encompassing several similar codes. Finally, these themes were considered, analyzed, and interpreted (Bogdan and Biklin, 1998).

Conclusion

This research was intended to be an inclusive process. This study provided the opportunity for the participants to learn about children's rights issues, and relate these issues to their personal experiences. The study provided students with behavioural difficulties the opportunity to discuss their education. They voiced their opinions about segregated special needs classes and regular class/school environments. The methodology employed by this study provided an avenue by which participants could convey their concerns about the quality of education they receive (i.e. whether their special needs are being adequately accommodated). Furthermore, the study gave voice to students whose perspectives are often not sufficiently addressed. Thus, as much as possible, the methodology was designed such that it would reflect the values of inclusion. The hope is that the findings will facilitate further positive changes in our school environment to better meet the needs of this population of students and encourage further studies that take into account student perspectives.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

In this chapter, the findings from the research are presented. To ensure that members of their community or school board cannot identify individual participants, a description of each individual is provided using a pseudonym selected by each participant. This serves to differentiate between participant profiles and their educational backgrounds.

Furthermore, the participants from this study were all enrolled in the same segregated program. A description of this specific segregated special education program is provided below. In order to guarantee the anonymity of the program a pseudonym is used throughout the next four chapters. To 'set the stage' an interpretation of the segregated classroom environment is also described.

Following the explanation of the program, the data is presented in a thematic format. Creswell (2005) refers to themes as the "core element in qualitative data analysis" (p. 243). The main purpose of this study was to explore students identified with behavioural difficulties perspectives' of their educational experiences in both segregated programs and their regular classroom. The data collected in both focus group discussions was transcribed and then coded. Developing the coding system utilized for this research study involved the following steps recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2007): searching through the data for regularities and patterns, noting topics emerging from the data and writing down words and phrase to represent these topics (themes) and patterns; these words and phrases then became the coding categorizes. The data was

sorted into these codes, which are referred to as themes. Hence, the findings are presented categorized according to the following themes: (1) benefits and barriers of the students' segregated program experiences; (2) benefits and barriers of the regular classroom experiences; and (3) students' perceptions of their rights as school children. Each main theme was also divided into sub-themes to further clarify the qualitative data presented.

Given the sensitive nature of the data gathered in this study, confidentiality was critical also in reporting the findings. The information discussed in the findings came directly from students themselves and is of a very serious and personal nature (see Appendix K for complete transcripts along with researcher comments). Thus, the actual names of the segregated program, school board, community, educators, and students have been omitted. Wherever necessary for confidentiality pseudonyms have been employed as a means of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The segregated program is referred to as *Opportunities* throughout this thesis (see below for an explanation of the reason for choosing this pseudonym). As means of enabling students some power over this experience the researcher permitted each student to choose their own pseudonym. For this study the gathering and presentation of lived experiences of the participants, and the enabling of the participants to have a voice, are essential features of this child friendly, respectful research methodology.

Observations Regarding the 'Opportunities' Program

'*Opportunities*' is the pseudonym used to describe the specific segregated program the participants were enrolled in during the time of this study. The name was chosen by the researcher, in consultation with the students, because the participants referred to the program as their "second chance" in school. Referring to the segregated program as *Opportunities* not only allows for the identity of the program to remain anonymous, but also serves as a reminder to the reader of how the participants felt about their educational placement.

The specific segregated special education program utilized for this study is considered an alternative school based program. The teacher of *Opportunities* provided documentation explaining the details of the program. This documentation forms the basis of the following explanation. However, in the interest of confidentiality, the wording has been modified. Utmost care has been taken to ensure the following explanation accurately depicts the program in question.

This program is intended to be short term. '*Opportunities*' focuses on skills and specifically addresses the needs of students who are experiencing problems interfering with their success at school such as: chronic suspension, truancy, victimization or withdrawal.

Opportunities has a dual purpose, to focus on academic learning, such as literacy and numeracy, while concentrating on the development of civic skills, such as effective work habits and skills necessary for success in life and at school. Areas such as social development and behavioural competences are

examined and students develop strategies to positively enhance these areas.

Opportunities emphasizes attendance, punctuality, attitude, and effort.

Additionally it focuses on building academic proficiency, organizational and social skills.

This program targets students ages twelve and older who are not experiencing success in their regular schools. *Opportunities* works on a voluntary basis and requires parents/guardians to voluntarily agree to their child's full participation in the program. The participants must also demonstrate behavioural difficulties severe enough to necessitate suspension. They are withdrawn from their regular school (for up to 8 weeks) to participate in *Opportunities*.

This program follows a strict routine and structure where each day is the same as the next. Students are given time outs if they are unable to comply with the rules and regulations of the class. There is a focus on literacy and numeracy, rather than all subject areas enabling students to concentrate their academic attention on these essential skill areas. *Opportunities* attempts to avoid unstructured time. Therefore, lunches are shortened; students receive separate recesses, as well as an early dismissal.

Observations of the Classroom Environments

There were two segregated classroom environments observed throughout the duration of the study. The first focus group discussion took place in June 2007 at one school. This environment was more segregated and the students had minimal opportunities to interact with students outside the program. Then the

program switched schools over the summer. At the new location various improvements were made to the classroom and the structure of the program. Students within *Opportunities* now have the chance to interact with some of the other students in the school. Students with physical disabilities come to the *Opportunities* class to visit. The two groups of students work together on community projects and even spend time cooking for one another. The focus group that took place in September was at this new location.

Overall, the two classrooms were very similar in appearance and atmosphere. The same teacher, who is also a certified social worker, runs the program. She also has the support of an educational assistant who is specifically designated to the *Opportunities* program. In my opinion, this educational assistant was both kind and helpful. Although the focus group discussions took place at two different locations it was essentially the same program with some improvements made at the new location.

Opportunities currently takes place in a designated classroom within a regular school. Upon entering the *Opportunities* classrooms for the first time I felt at ease. There were three round tables in the center of the rooms and small rectangular desks along the perimeter of the classes. Three computers were available at these desks. Also, there was a couch along the back wall of the classes. The teacher's desk was off to one side. The rooms were decorated with students' art. However, in the new location the classroom was also equipped with a stove, which the students used to learn how to cook. This new location also

had beanbag chairs where the students could choose to sit during specific times of the day.

Generally, the classroom atmosphere can be described as inviting and relaxing. Although there were strict rules in place that the participants needed to follow in regards to respect, the participants had freedom and power over day-to-day decisions like where in the class they wanted to do their work. They also had the choice to participate and if they needed a break from specific activities, they were allowed to sit out and observe. These decisions would warrant explanation; however, the ability to determine certain decisions did exist within this program.

Students in the Opportunities program always need to display classroom etiquette (respect themselves, respect others, and respect the environment). They are expected to follow the structure of the class and need to stay on task. This program does enable students to have a choice. For example, when conversing with the program's teacher, she explained that the students can choose to do math or language work. However, they must be doing work. They can also choose where they want to work, but they must remain in the classroom. Furthermore, the students can move around the classroom freely during specific times, but they do need to sit still and listen respectfully when someone is talking. One might argue that these are options that occur in a regular classroom. However, the participants emphasized throughout this study that these options were not as readily available to them in their regular classroom.

Students' Perspectives Regarding their Specific Needs

A person's past experiences may impact their knowledge about a subject area. As part of the introduction to my focus group discussion, the participants were asked about their perspectives of their behavioural difficulty. Their responses varied. Most of them were unaware of the specifics of their difficulties and provided more general responses. Bob, an articulate young man of the age of 14, said: "I am hyper...I am ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder] and ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder]" (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 3). When I asked him if he knew what these meant he said, "I know ADD is attention deficit disorder" (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 3). However, when I inquired about a description of their needs, Topher responded by saying "I am going to find out if I have [ADD] in August...I already went for the test, we are going to get the results" (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 3). ADD and ADHA are these two participants' explanations why they have behavioural difficulties. Bob was more specific and described his difficulties by saying "my teacher like said I had trouble in like science and stuff. Like, doing it on paper, I didn't do a very good job" (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 3). Right at the beginning of the discussion I became aware that these students have a variety of difficulties affecting their educational experiences.

Jhony was a dramatic young male who had a response to every question whether he was joking or serious. When he was asked why he thought he was in *Opportunities* his response was strikingly honest: "Because of my behaviour" (Jhony, Transcript #2, p.23). He described his behaviour as "impolite, not nice, rude" (Jhony, Transcript #2, p.23). Although he displayed kind and heartfelt

gestures throughout the focus group, he revealed that he does have a problem with his behaviour at school. He believes that he could control his behaviour but has made a conscious decision not to: "I bet I could control them but I don't want to" (Jhony, Transcript #2, p.23). Two participants felt forced into *Opportunities* and felt it was their last place to go. "I was kicked out of school, so they made me come here" (Dee, Transcript #2, p.23). Overall, the students seemed unaware of the specifics of their behavioural difficulties and special needs. However, they knew these behavioural and attention difficulties were complex in their origins and they needed help to learn to control them.

The participants were asked if their needs ever bothered them in school. This question focused on an area they were very comfortable talking about and their responses were much more detailed. One participant responded, "Yeah it does. It bothers my learning. I always get sidetracked or I have a lot of trouble focusing...I get all frustrated" (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 4). While another added, "I am all over the place. Most of the time the only place I am not, is doing my work" (Topher, Transcript, p. 4). Although the participants did not necessarily know about their diagnosis of behavioural difficulties, it was apparent that they were aware of how these difficulties affected their learning experiences.

Students' Perspectives of their Experience with 'Opportunities'

The participants engaged with the researcher and other focus group participants in a rich dialogue about their experiences in the segregated *Opportunities* program. They emphasized the realistic goals set within this

program and how accomplished they felt when they were able to attain these goals. The students' perspectives of their segregated experiences are categorized into two main themes: benefits and barriers. Furthermore, these main themes are organized into sub themes. The benefits are ordered into: (1) students needs being met; (2) an ethic of care; and (3) focus on civic skills. Due to the minimal amount of barriers within the segregated program the only sub-theme is social networks. This organizational process, also known as "layering the analysis," enables the researcher to represent the data using interconnected levels of themes (Creswell, 2005, p. 244). In addition, it enables the reader to compare the students' reflections on both their segregated and regular class experiences.

I. Students' Perspectives Regarding the Benefits of 'Opportunities'

Overall, the participants described the segregated program as a beneficial and rewarding experience. They enjoyed the smaller more intimate environment because it enabled their needs to be better met. In their view often there was a two to one ratio of students to teacher/support workers. The participants seemed to crave attention and the structure of *Opportunities* enabled them to receive the attention they required. Furthermore, they felt the attention they received was positive and encouraging. The participants made multiple references to how important it was for them to know their teachers/support workers/principals cares about them. *Opportunities* focus on civic skills was also perceived by the students as beneficial. The skills they were learning were, in their view, helping to

improve their behaviours as well their ability to interact with school and community members. Overall, the participants found their experiences in this segregated program to be valuable.

Theme 1: Students' Needs Being Met

All five participants came to *Opportunities* because of truancy issues at their regular schools and severe behavioural difficulties. In addition, two of the participants felt they were kicked out of their regular school (due to frequent suspension or violent outbursts). At *Opportunities*, there was a more focused academic workload and an emphasis on social/behavioural skills. The attractiveness of *Opportunities* became apparent once the participants began discussing their experiences. Students were not satisfied with their past schooling experiences and were willing to take this special needs placement as an opportunity to learn and even a chance to regain the respect they felt they deserve.

The program *Opportunities* focuses on areas such as work habits, conflict resolution strategies, social skills, choices and consequences, personal goal setting, reflection and self-evolution. The participants felt that one of the most rewarding achievements of this program is its ability to meet the specific needs of its student participants. The students felt that learning in this segregated environment enabled their diverse needs to be met. As the researcher, I was able to observe this within the *Opportunities* classroom. One participant described *Opportunities* as a "get away" he continued "and the teachers are

more like what I am looking for” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 5). Another participant discussed the specific workload within *Opportunities*. He sounded so proud when he said, “Yeah and you get all your work done. They give you enough time and they don’t just pile it on you at once” (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 5). Students appear to perceive the program as setting realistic goals according to their specific student needs, and supporting them to achieve their academic goals. The participants felt proficient when they were able to accomplish these realistic goals.

When the participants were asked to provide some negative aspects of *Opportunities* they began by explaining, “We will argue or...swear, swear, swear” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 6). Instantly the students re-directed the conversation to the positive aspects of the program. They discussed how *Opportunities* focused on behavioural improvements rather than dwelling on their negative behaviours. I questioned whether the participants felt as though *Opportunities* was more lenient to regarding their mistakes and one participant responded: “Well you can get away with a lot more in this class. Like, if I would have done what I did in this class in my regular school I would have gotten suspended at my other school” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 6).

In addition, the participants felt effectively supported in the segregated program. They believed that the high ratio of teachers/aids to students (approximately 3 teacher/social worker/aid to 3 or 4 students) was valuable in helping these participants reach their full potential. One participant informed me that they often have “a teacher, one aid, and three social workers” in their class

of only three or four students (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 18). This ratio was mentioned on a variety of occasions. With the positive encouragement from all the helpful personnel within the *Opportunities* program the participants communicated that they felt supported, which empowered them to want to succeed.

Theme 2: Experiencing an Ethic of Care

Most of the participants stated that the demeanor of the teachers, aids, and support workers had in dealing with the individual students enhanced their confidence and abilities. Many of the participants were satisfied with the quality of these role models. The participants felt as though they were cared for and that student success in *Opportunities* was of utmost importance to their teachers/aids. Bob and Topher engaged in an interesting dialogue on the teachers and staff at the school where *Opportunities* took place.

It is great to get away from our school, to get away from that school. To come here and the teachers are more like what I am looking for. Different, not different like being messed up, different like...

They are nicer.

Yeah and they are more fun.

They are more fun, and it is just you get a lot more help.

They don't get all worked up over stuff.

(Topher and Bob, Transcript #1, p. 5)

These two participants valued the compassion and care their teachers and support workers provided. They are looking for pleasant, energetic, fun, and easygoing individuals to help them succeed in school. One participant admitted,

“if they would have more teachers like our [*Opportunities*] teacher it would all be a lot better” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 6).

One participant was struggling to feel cared for in his regular classroom. Topher felt as though his needs were not being met and his teachers did not have the time or make the effort to help him. However, in *Opportunities* he found the extra time the teacher spent with him, working out his problems, was the extra effort and attention he needed.

Here they will get up, they will show us how, and if they can't they will keep trying until you get it. They will find a way. They will keep working and working until you figure it out. (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 16)

Another way the teacher and support workers in *Opportunities* were successful at meeting the participants' needs was by listening to what the students had to say. They listened, respected the students' responses, and were patient with their actions.

Here they listen to you 24/7. Sometimes if you are just annoyed or something or frustrated. Here they ask you “what is up” and ask you if you need a break. They are so patient. (Topher, Transcript #1, p.18)

In the segregated program the participants were treated with care and they could sense it. They want to succeed for themselves, and they feel the staff involved in *Opportunities* support their success. For the participants these were the things they felt were enabling them to flourish. It was the care and support that these students felt within *Opportunities* that made it possible for them to succeed.

They listen to you. They are supportive. At the regular school some teachers don't seem to care. They don't care if you graduate. But here, they are helping you to graduate. We want to, but they are helping us make it happen. (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 18)

Another participant complimented this remark by saying "You just have to care" (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 19). The ethic of care demonstrated by the staff involved with the *Opportunities* program was quaintly put by another one of the participants as follows:

These teachers are helping us. They are nice, they are kind, they don't boss you around, and they don't tell you what to do. They make us do our math but they don't say "get your math book out right now or else I am going to send you home!" (Jhony, Transcript #2, p. 28)

The students involved in this specific program believe that being cared for is of utmost importance in regards to their possibility for educational success.

Theme 3: The Value of Learning Civic Skills

Opportunities' focus on civic skills was an important component within the program. To be successful, the students would have to learn how to improve their social skills and learn some behaviour programming such as: anger management, problem solving, conflict resolution, and self-talk. The civic skills they learned from this program were also important factors that contributed to the benefits of this segregated experience.

Civic skills are the skills that relate to citizenship, and that characterize responsible citizenship. The participants found that they enjoyed *Opportunities* because it provided more hands-on work. This was particularly evident in the experiences of one student, who proclaimed enthusiastically, "Hands-on stuff is what I like" (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 12). He went on to talk specifically about the kind of activities he meant, "We made pouches, Indian pouches. We made

ring sticks. I want to be able to do more of that kind of stuff in my regular class” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 13). The participants were aware of their needs and knew that learning-by-doing was an effective method for some of them.

Yeah, they should have lots of hands-on experiences in the other school. Not always paperwork and crap like that. You know stuff actually doing stuff. Some kids don't learn with that kind of stuff, they have to learn by hands-on experiences. Some kids find it a lot harder to write things down. Usually when I have to write stuff down I just write it, I don't ever have enough time to read it over after. (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 12)

As the researcher, I informed them of a more 'technical term' about what they were talking about; it was their multiple intelligences. As a recent graduate from the teacher education program, I told them, this is an area that researchers and educators have been studying for years. The multiple intelligences reflect diverse skills and learning styles. Some people learn with their bodies and by actively doing things, these people are known as kinesthetic learners. One of the participants added, “Like building things and constructing things” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 12). The participants were aware that their multiple intelligences were being stimulated throughout the *Opportunities* program.

It was intriguing how students responded to the effectiveness of their classroom setting while in the segregated program. They were specifically questioned about their reading, learning, and understanding. One participant responded instantly with “I feel like I am learning how to control my behaviour”(Topher, Transcript #1, p. 14). Another added:

I am learning how to be more social and stuff. I don't like reading a book and in the normal class I never get my work done. Most of the time here we can get our work done. (Bob, Transcript #1, p.14).

Jerry responded, "I feel like I am learning a lot...like math and stuff [but] I think more social and behavioural stuff" (Transcript #1, p. 14). The participants believe that this focus on behavioural control and social skills is helping them as students and community members. They know these are skills are important will help them to succeed.

Another factor that acted as a benefit to the participants' educational experience was the more focused academic agenda. According to the participants the specific educational focus seemed to enhance their learning. "I am learning math and English. The basic skills I will need in life" (Jhony, Transcript #2, p. 26). The participants felt that math and English are the essential subjects. Focusing on these two academic subjects in addition to social and behavioural skills made the program stress free and practical for the participants.

I just love how they have the two things, they have math/language and then they have the social/behavioural stuff. They teach us about social skills which cuts out a lot of stress because it is easier. I always get stressed out in school and this program makes me feel less stressed out. (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 14)

By focusing on the civic skills needed in our society the participants felt they were better prepared for their future success in school and in life.

II. Students' Perspectives Regarding Barriers of 'Opportunities'

Theme 1: Lack of Occasions to Socialize

Due to the segregated nature of *Opportunities*, the participants spent their entire day strictly socializing only with the people involved with the program. Most

of the participants found few barriers to the segregated program. Nevertheless, they all agreed that the lack of social interactions with students in other classes was something they missed. Bob noted that “Actually, at my regular you get to talk to your friends more” (Bob, Transcript #1, p.11). Nodding his head in agreement, Topher added “Yeah, that is the one thing with this program” (Topher, Transcript #1, p.11).

The students were asked specifically about recess, which is purposefully segregated from the other classes to avoid unstructured time. One participant responded, “Yeah, you don’t really get recess here” (Jared, Transcript #1, p. 13). Another participant added, “I don’t really like it” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 13). Generally, these participants craved the social interaction with other students outside the *Opportunities* program. One participant explained that when he was told he was leaving his regular class to come to *Opportunities* he was very upset. “I was so mad, I was furious. I was so mad. I haven’t seen any of my friends. Except this guy (referring to one of the other participants)” (Jhony, Transcript #2, p. 24). The participants explained that they did not want to be taken away from their friends and social circles. Although *Opportunities* has a number of benefits, the lack of social interactions during school time with outsiders to the program was something they expressed they missed and was a barrier to an inclusive educational experience.

Students' Perspectives of their Experience in the Regular Classroom

III. Students' Perspectives Regarding Benefits of the Regular Classroom

Theme 1: Participation in Recess

Many of the participants explained that their regular classroom was not always a positive experience, however benefits did exist within this setting. The social interactions provided within the class, at recess, and other times of the day was something the participants felt was an important aspect of their educational experiences and something that was not provided within the segregated program. One participant was anticipating his graduation from *Opportunities* so he could join his friends at a new school

Yeah, I am excited. I am going to [a new school]. It is only a few streets away. I am excited because two of my friends go there. And, one kid I know use to go there as well. (Jerry, Transcript #1, p. 9)

He was excited to finish *Opportunities* so he could interact with his old friends.

Another benefit to the regular classroom was that the participants were able to take part in recess. They enjoyed running and playing games at recess and that was something they felt they were not able to do with *Opportunities*. When they were asked what they would love to be doing at recess they responded with "Sports – football, hockey, ball hockey" (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 13). The participants started to get excited at the thought of these activities. They were sitting at the edge of their seats and dove into an animated discussion about recess.

At my school we would play capture the flag and that was fun. Yeah you take the flag and hide it in the forest and then you run around and stuff. Now that was fun. (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 13)

Capture the flag, yeah it is great when the field is big. One team is on one side and the other team is on the other side. And you have to protect your flag. (Jerry, Transcript #1, p. 13)

I like playing in the forest because it is not all open and you cannot see everybody, so you can hide out and stuff. What we do is have the teacher stand in the middle and look out for both sides. It would be great if we could play a game like that at recess. Maybe not the little kids cuz they might fall and get scratched and stuff. But for us big kids it would be great. (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 13)

By the enthusiasm in their voices it was obvious that recess was something they longed for. Therefore, a benefit to the regular classroom is that students with behavioural difficulties have access to recess with various students from their school community.

IV. Students' Perspectives Regarding the Barriers of the Regular Classroom

According to the participants' perceptions about their educational experiences, there are numerous barriers to their success in their regular classrooms. "One thing I know is that being in a normal class is hard" (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 15). These barriers have been divided into the following three sub-themes: (1) power struggle; (2) workload and lack of aids; and (3) needs not being met.

Theme 1: Existing Power Struggles

The participants were aware of the power hierarchies that exist within educational institutions. One component that they found acted as a barrier to their educational success was the power struggle that can sometimes arise between teachers and students, as well as principals and students. Often the participants felt powerless in their regular classroom. In one focus group the participants agreed that they felt their principals disliked them.

Yeah I didn't like my other school. The principal was really mean.
 Yeah my principal hates me so much.
 My principal hates me too.
 I find my teacher likes me but my principal doesn't.
 (Jerry, Topher, and Bob, Transcript #1, p. 7)

One participant was so upset by his principal; he thought he had overheard her say, "you are not going to succeed in life" (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 20). It was apparent by the tone of the student's voice and his physical gestures that he was crushed by these words he rightly or wrongly attributed to his former principal.

In addition, the participants felt that at their regular school they were treated unfairly and no explanation was provided for this mistreatment. "In my [regular] class you get made fun of. And, if you do the wrong thing, sometimes you will get suspended" (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 11). One participant spoke of a power struggle between teachers and students that occurs at recess. He explained that often teachers make what seem to him to be irrational decisions that negatively affect the students' experiences. For example:

Like when we play soccer, the ball will go out of the school area and then the teacher will make one of us to go and get it. But, as we are coming back with the ball she will say, "Give me the ball" and then we will have to give her the ball and we can't play anymore. (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 13)

These seem like unjustifiable incidents to the participants and often cause them to feel confused and upset.

Furthermore, the participants felt as though they were trapped in their past and that they would never be forgiven and able to overcome the mistakes they once made.

Yeah, well my principal every little thing I do she has a problem with me. When I was younger I was more of a badder, um not making really good choices, kind of kid. Now they are holding it against me. Every little thing I do I get in trouble for it. (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 7)

This participant was even worrying about going back to his regular school once *Opportunities* was complete. His main concern was that his teachers and principal would not understand that he had changed. "I think all of the teachers are going to be watching me. They will probably think that I haven't changed" (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 10). When I asked Topher what he would look like when the teachers were watching him he responded, "I am not going to get in trouble" (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 10). The participants were quite self-aware and wanted to develop positive relationships with the teachers and principals at their regular school. They felt that this special education program was their opportunity to fix the mistakes they made in the past.

Theme 2: Overwhelming Workload

The academic workload of the regular classroom proved to be a problem for many of the participants. When referring to *Opportunities* one participant said, "you don't have as much work as the [regular] school" (Topher, Transcript #1, p.

5). The workload at the regular school was overwhelming for the participants and this often acted as a trigger for their behavioural difficulties.

When the teacher gives me something to do I get up and walk around, and pace. I don't know, I keep moving around, I can't sit down, and I keep fidgeting. (Bob, Transcript #1, p 5)

This participant kept suggesting various ways to change the regular class so that it would be better for him.

I think they should try to make it less stressful at my [regular] school. They should take out the stuff that we will never really use in our lives and focus more on the important things. Like social skills that will help you in your social life or maybe in your bonding with people or even just talking. (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 14)

I found this comment intriguing and responded by asking the participants what subjects they would cut out of the regular curriculum in order to put more of a social spin on their learning. One participant added:

None of them, all of them are important things you need to use in life. They need to find a balance. Maybe cutting every subject down by 5 minutes and then adding a social component. (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 15)

The students were aware of their needs and had opinions on how to manage changes within the system without removing valuable requirements. Bob added, "Or maybe cutting them by 10 minutes – that would be so cool" (Transcript #1, p. 15). This was said with such excitement and joy that it was obvious these participants were critically considering the barriers to their regular classes and how they would go about changing them.

Theme 3: Students' Needs Not Being Met

Another major barrier to the participants' experiences in their regular classrooms is that they feel their needs are not being met. They would often make references to this as a problem. The perception that the regular classroom did not meet the participants' needs was based on a variety of things. First, and most often mentioned was the lack of teacher aids available to these students in their regular classroom. Specifically, the students felt that educational assistants were available for them when they were younger, however, when they matured into the later grades these assistants were taken away.

I had [a counselor] too and I use to have EA's [educational assistants] as well, but then one day they just cut them right off....I use to have an EA full time. They would watch me and help me. But, as soon as I [changed schools] – boom – they took them away and just cut it right off...They said we rely on them too much so they took them away. (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 8)

It was obvious by these comments that he was very upset about the fact that these educational assistants were no longer available to assist him.

Another barrier perceived by these participants as a barrier to their needs being met in the regular classroom was the size of classes. When the participants were asked what it was going to be like to return to their regular class after *Opportunities* one participant responded, "It is going to be hell" (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 9). Another participant added, "Yeah, the class I am going into has something like 40 kids in it" (Jerry, Transcript #1, p. 9). The idea of all these students in one class, after spending eight weeks in a class with 3-5 students was not going to be an easy transition for the participants. One participant even questioned the Ontario Government's promise to reduce class sizes. He said,

“Yeah. They said they are going to make the younger grades with less kids in them, but in the older grades there are so many kids in the classes” (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 9). As the researcher, I responded by reminding the students that the Ontario Government’s promise was only to reduce class sizes in the primary/junior grades. It has not been initiated for the intermediate/senior grades yet. Then Bob added, “There are more issues in the older grades. It just isn’t fair” (Transcript #1, p. 9). The participants felt that the size of classes is a factor impeding their success in the regular classroom.

The participants expressed their need to be actively involved in their educational experiences by participating in “hands-on” activities. This was another need they felt was not being adequately met in their regular class.

Yeah, they should have lots of hands-on experiences in the [regular] school. Not always paperwork and crap like that. You know, actually doing stuff. Some kids don’t learn with that kind of stuff, they have to learn by hands-on experiences. Some kids find it a lot harder to write things down. Usually when I have to write stuff down I just write it. I don’t ever have enough time to read it over after. (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 12)

It was obvious that this participant was talking about himself. He finds it difficult to write things down and he learns by doing hands-on activities. It was very important, to this participant, that these needs be met in the regular school. “Like at our original school, you don’t really have hands-on experiences” (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 12). Topher added, “No you don’t, you don’t get anything” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 12). The participants seemed disheartened recalling their regular class experiences. It was obvious their needs were not being met sufficiently.

When the participants were asked directly if they felt as though their needs were being met at their regular school they provided the following responses.

Not in the normal school though. I don't know, like, the only thing that they supply in normal classrooms isn't enough. Not the thing, but the stuff they do, how they interact with you. It makes you feel like you are not good enough. (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 16)

Another participant added that he felt as though his needs are "not really" being met at his regular school (Jerry, Transcript #1, p. 11). One participant was very straightforward with his response and simply stated, "I need more help" (Dee, Transcript #2, p. 27). Overall, the fact that these participants felt their needs were not being adequately accommodated in their regular school largely determined their perception of poor educational experiences in the regular classroom.

V. Students' Perceptions of their Rights

All study participants demonstrated a high sense of self-awareness throughout the focus group discussions. They had rich perceptions of their educational experiences and were happy that they were being asked directly what they thought about those experiences. While most of the participants had heard the expression 'children's human rights', their knowledge of what these rights actually were, varied. Nevertheless, the participants had an understanding of the principals underlying the concept of children's human rights.

Theme 1: Students' Self-Awareness

Throughout the focus group discussions, the participants displayed a high level of self-awareness, especially when it came to their individual needs. One participant explained how his teachers helped him. At first it seemed as though he was talking about how his teachers needed to repeatedly explain things to him to ensure he knew what to do. However, he clarified the point thus stating, "No! It is not re-explaining it. It is understanding HOW to DO the problem. The foundation" (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 17). He emphasized the importance of the "foundation" needing to be in place in order to learn. Another participant provided an additional example of the students' self-awareness. I specifically asked them if they have needs and he responded, "I need more assistance and more focus. Maybe like a bright coloured room or a bright chalk board" (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 20). Topher commented, "Some people are really attracted to bright colours and when they see them they really want to touch them and get involved" (Transcript #1, p. 20). These participants knew what it would take to stimulate them and support their learning.

Theme 2: Children's Human Rights

Initially, when the participants were asked specifically what they think about their human rights as children they seemed to be unaware and confused. One participant honestly replied, "I have never really had time or wanted to think about it" (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 19). Another participant added, "I have the right to take a shower and be clean" (Jhony, Transcript #2, p. 29). When asked about

their rights as students with behavioural difficulties the same participant responded, "We have right to bud in front of people in line to go to a hockey game" (Jhony, Transcript #2, p. 29). This response caught me off guard, but I wondered if there was some underlying message. Perhaps this participant felt he was treated (or should have been treated) differently at a hockey game. He did confirm in our follow-up meeting that this had happened to him, but he knew it should not have. Unfortunately, he did not want to further explain his comment.

After a few quiet moments the participants made some insightful comments. Jhony said, "I have a right to eat food" (Transcript #2, p. 25). Dee added, "Umm...I have the right to have clothes" (Transcript #2, p. 29). I felt that these were very practical responses that spoke to their most basic needs. To one participant children's rights mean to "do you work, finish school, stay out of trouble" (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 19). Although these are not direct rights, the underlying principles do exist. Within the focus group discussions the participants were expecting some sort of clarification, and although I was hesitant to explain their rights to them (because I did not want to influence their responses) I did provide a brief description. Children's human rights are things they had mentioned throughout the focus group discussions – to listen, communicate, to play. One of the participants looked at me with excitement and said, "to have fun" (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 19) while Bob added, "yeah, to have fun, and to not be annoying other people" (Transcript #1, p. 19). As the observer, I think the participants had an understanding of their rights. However they had trouble communicating their rights, and often confused them with expectations and

responsibilities. Throughout the discussion the participants expressed the importance of being fair, voicing their opinion, being heard, and being treated respectfully. The latter are consistent with children's participation rights as articulated in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Conclusion

While the above findings are based on a small number of participants the focus group discussions provided rich and qualitative data. Further, the participants could offer opinions on both segregated and regular classroom education experiences having been in both types of placement. The participants expressed the view that their educational needs were not being met in the regular classroom. Their experiences of being in a segregated class versus a regular class vary. One thing is clear the participants feel as though the segregated program's environment is **more inclusive** than is their regular classroom environment. The participants expressed the view that in their segregated program their educational needs are being accommodated effectively. However, in the regular school their needs in their view were not being accommodated adequately due to a variety of factors. Overall, the participants focused on issues of fairness, respect, communication, and power as critical factors impacting their quality of educational experience and possibility for success. These are all children's human right issues that affect the participants' educational experiences in their school environments.

CHAPTER FIVE

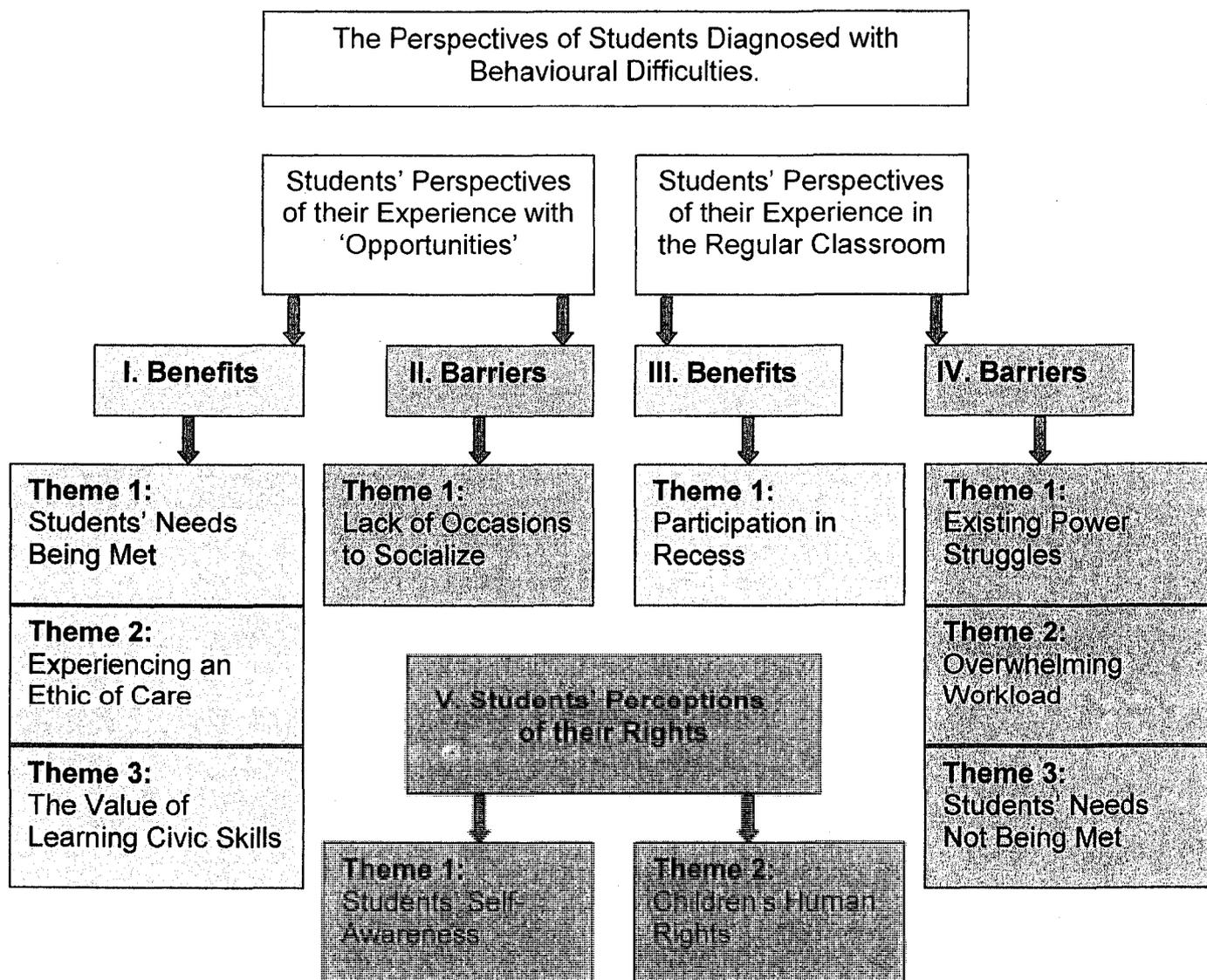
Discussion and Interpretation

In this chapter, the findings of this study are interpreted. “Data interpretation refers to developing ideas about your findings and relating them to the literature and to broader concerns and concepts” (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, p. 159). Initially, a summary of the central findings of the study is presented. Then, the overall findings are interpreted. This interpretation involved explaining and framing ideas in relation to theory, other scholarship, and action, as well as showing why the findings are important (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The intention of this chapter is to: first frame the findings and relate them to current research in this specific area; then emphasize their importance and make suggestions for future best practices for children identified with behaviour difficulties; and finally to ensure the participant’s voices are heard and their experiences are lucid and accessible to the reader.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perspectives of students identified with behavioural difficulties, and to determine their perceptions regarding whether their schools are meeting their educational needs. The research also addressed children’s rights issues relating specifically to the participants. All study participants were enrolled in a segregated program during the time of the focus group discussions. This enabled the participants’ to provide rich and descriptive information about their experiences in a segregated pullout program. Furthermore, the participants were able to reflect back on their previous experiences in their regular classroom.

As in the previous chapter, the themes presented in this chapter are organized into the following categories: (1) benefits and barriers of their segregated program experiences; (2) benefits and barriers of their regular classroom experiences; and (3) students' perceptions of their rights as children. Each main theme was also divided into sub-themes to further clarify the information portrayed. The following Figure 1: *Coding Flowchart for Data Collection*, provides an organizational depiction of these themes.

Figure 1. Coding Flowchart for Data Collection



What are the students' perspectives of being in a segregated special needs class versus a regular class, having had experience with both? According to the participants', who were all students formally identified as having significant behavioural difficulties, there were benefits and barriers to being in both the segregated program and the regular classroom. However the benefits outweighed the barriers in the segregated program, whereas the barriers outweighed the benefits in the regular classroom. Overall these students perceived significant elements of inclusion within the segregated *Opportunities* program. The participants felt as though they belonged to a community in the *Opportunities* class because it was a safe place where everyone was considered equal and had equal opportunities. Within this segregated program, the participants felt they had a little freedom of choice or freedom of voice. The segregated program provided an intimate close environment for the participants where their individual needs could be met. **Although the participants were taken from their regular classroom and school and brought to the *Opportunities* classroom (within a different school), which would be considered an act of segregation, they felt the environment within this program was warm and inviting, making it seem inclusive.** The regular classrooms which the participants were coming from were considered by the school board to be "inclusive" because they had students in the classrooms of all ability levels. In contrast, the participants perceived that their regular school environment was not inclusive for them. Rather, they felt stressed and uncomfortable in the regular classroom setting. In addition to being overwhelmed

by the workload, the participants felt as though their needs were not being met in their regular classrooms. The participants expressed how they felt they were unfairly treated at their regular schools. They were not given the opportunity to explain themselves, or voice their opinions. Although the participants thought they did not have knowledge of their rights as children (they were not able to list their rights), they did have a fundamental understanding of what these rights were.

It appears that the *Opportunities* program was very successful in the view of the study participants. Although it is a segregated environment, and the students were taken out of their regular classroom, the atmosphere within the *Opportunities* program itself has inclusive elements. While in the segregated program the participants felt their educational needs were being accommodated.

Perhaps the segregated *Opportunities* environment can model some positive key inclusive elements that can be utilized within regular classrooms. When the participants were in the regular classroom, they often felt like their needs were overlooked, or not enough time or effort was made to meet their needs. The current data provides suggestive evidence that student perceptions of “inclusiveness” – whether it occurs in the context of a regular classroom or a segregated classroom for students with special needs – is a key factor conducive to the educational success of students identified with behavioural difficulties. According to the students in the current study, those inclusive elements are fostered by being treated fairly, respectfully, having some say in decisions making, and being part of a community.

Students' Perspectives of their Experience with 'Opportunities'

Children with emotional and behavioural disorders (E/BD) demonstrate behavioural problems or social withdrawal and isolation difficulties (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986). According to Heath et al. (2004), children with emotional and behavioural difficulties are at risk for a variety of negative outcomes including “poor academic performance, school dropout, unemployment and social maladjustment in adolescence” (p. 241). Within the past decade there has been a movement towards the full inclusion of all students (Bradley et al., 1997). “However, the inclusion of children with behaviour problems in general education classrooms have lagged behind this general movement” (Heath et al., 2004, p. 242). Cessna and Skiba (1996) affirm that services for children with E/BD have remained in treatment centers, hospitals or segregated schools and classes. MacMillan et al. (1996) and Schwean et al. (1996) suggest that the existing lag in the inclusion of children with E/BD has occurred for good reason, namely that these children are best served by a more traditional range of services approach.

Indeed the participants in this study described express many positive aspects of their segregated program experience. For example, one participant explained what he was learning in the *Opportunities* program. He said:

I am learning how to be more social and stuff. I don't like reading a book and in the normal class I never get my work done. Most of the time [in *Opportunities*] we can get our work done. In the other class I don't feel like I have enough time to get my work done and then I have to stay in at recess. (Transcript #1, Bob, p. 14)

While some continue to argue for the advantages of self-contained segregated special education settings, there is increasing recognition of the long-term social

and academic cost of segregation as well as the benefits of full inclusion for all students (Freeman & Alkin, 2000). However, an “aspect of this issue that is often overlooked is the perspective of special education students themselves” (Fitch, 2003, p. 233). This study did not overlook the student perspective; but rather made student perceptions the central focus. The participants of this study provide a perspective that challenges the popular notion of the regular classroom as necessarily inclusive. The participants felt there were many benefits to the segregated special education services they received and perceived their segregated classroom as being more inclusive in their case than was the regular classroom.

I. Students' Perspectives Regarding the Benefits of 'Opportunities'

This study provides evidence of the benefits of the segregated classroom which creates an inclusive environment. The participants enjoyed the intimate and supportive environment that the segregated *Opportunities* classroom provided. The class had a maximum of eight students in the program at one time, and usually averaged four students. This segregated environment was a place where the participants felt: (1) their needs were being met; (2) their teachers cared for them; (3) and that the focus on civic skills was meaningful and something they could relate to their lives. The participants in this study shared similar views to the participants in a study conducted by Fitch (2003). In Fitch's study, the segregated environment was found to be “a relatively safe refuge and as a caring, easy, and effective learning environment that offered a second

chance at earning one's way back into the mainstream" (p. 242). Similarly, the present study revealed the participants thought the *Opportunities* program was their 'second-chance' in school. One participant explained that he was going to try his hardest to stay out of trouble. When I reviewed the data with him, Topher emphasized how *Opportunities* enabled him to get his behaviour under control in order to return to his regular classroom and to succeed in school.

Theme 1: Students' Needs Being Met

Do students feel their special educational needs are being adequately accommodated? According to the participants who were involved in this study, their needs were effectively accommodated while they were in the segregated *Opportunities* program. "Yeah, I feel like my needs are being met" (Transcript #1, Jerry, p. 16). The participants felt they needed extra time to do specific academic tasks and *Opportunities* provided them with that time. Also, the participants need extra help and attention and *Opportunities* attended to these needs. At *Opportunities* "they will get up, they will show us how, and if they can't they will keep trying until you get it. They will find a way. They will keep working and working and working until you figure it out" (Transcript #1, Topher, p. 16). The participants emphasized the character of their *Opportunities* teacher and how they felt they were being cared for and their needs were being taken into consideration. This undoubtedly was beneficial for the children's self-esteem.

Perhaps *Opportunities* is successful at meeting these participants' individual needs because the teacher uses effective intervention specifically for

students with behavioural difficulties. Some intervention strategies include the following recommended by Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003).

Intervention for inappropriate behaviour:

- Reinforcement (positive, differential, negative)
- Precision requests
- Behaviour momentum
- Time-out
- Response cost
- Group-oriented contingencies (e.g., the Good Behaviour Game)
- Continuous monitoring of student performance (E.g., single-subject research evaluation methods)

Intervention for academic learning problems:

- Direct instruction
- Self-monitoring
- Class Wide Peer Tutoring
- Continuous monitoring of student performance (e.g., curriculum based measurement, single-subject research evaluation methods)

Intervention for unsatisfactory personal relationships:

- Direct instruction of individually targeted behaviours
- Modifying antecedents and consequences
- Opportunities to practice in natural settings

Many of these strategies require a significant investment of teacher time, effort, and skill to ensure intervention integrity. These are generally effective teaching practices. Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003) believe that:

Any teacher specializing in the education of students with EBD [Emotional and Behavioural Disorders] should be knowledgeable about and competent in implementing, at minimum, the [above] procedures – and implementing them with a very high degree of precision (p. 153).

It is vital to recognize that students with behavioural difficulties will probably need support throughout their school careers (Wolf, Braukmann & Ramp, 1987).

I believe the success of *Opportunities*, for the participants, was mainly due to the positive teacher/educational assistant role models who had the time for these students and made an effort to ensure their needs were being met. The program was designed to meet the needs of students with behavioural difficulties. Dewey (1944) believed that education should be tailored to meet each child's unique abilities, and that children should be provided with necessary tools and skills to promote their individual growth and development. The study participants expressed the view that their needs were accommodated in the segregated class. Moreover, Dewey (1944) advocated that children must be active participants in an environment that fosters imagination, exploration, and interpersonal interactions. The study participants felt powerful when they were active participants in their environment. This study enabled them to have a voice about the effectiveness of their educational placement. It was obvious by the participants' energy levels and their body language that they enjoyed discussing their lives. This was their chance to articulate their experiences which enhanced their self-confidence and social skill. The focus groups provided them with the experience of working together as a group, taking turns, and listening. Every member of the group had an important contribution to make and a unique voice to share.

Theme 2: Experiencing an Ethic of Care

One of the most successful components of the *Opportunities* program was the relationship the participants developed with their teachers. The participants

expressed that within their regular school experiences they had some negative experiences with their teachers and principals. This left them feeling they were not cared for: “the only thing that they supply in normal classrooms it isn’t enough. Not the thing, but the stuff they do, how they interact with you. It makes you feel like you are not good enough” (Transcript #1, Bob, p. 16).

Noddings is well known for her work on ethics of care, she supports radical change in the current educational setup, and holds that schools should be organized around themes of caring (Smith, 2004). She argues that:

It is not enough to hear the teacher’s claim to care. Does the student recognize that he or she is cared for? Is the teacher thought by the student to be a caring teacher? When we adopt the relational sense of caring, we cannot look only at the teacher. This is a mistake that many researchers are making today. They devise instruments that measure to what degree teachers exhibit certain observable behaviors. A high score on such an instrument is taken to mean that the teacher cares. But the students may not agree. (Noddings, 2005)

For each of the participants in this study they felt as though their *Opportunities* teacher really cared for them. When asked what their teachers are doing ‘right’, one participant responded: “They listen to you. They are supportive...they are helping you to graduate. We want to, but they are helping us make it happen” (Transcript #1, Bob, p. 18). Another participant added, “You just have to care” (Transcript #1, Topher, p. 18).

The participants needed to be cared for, and this need was adequately accommodated in the segregated *Opportunities* classroom. The fact that the teacher had a social work background may have been helpful also in her ability to better meet the children’s emotional needs in the classroom setting.

Noddings (2005) discusses care in relation to motivational displacement.

She explains:

When I care, my motive energy begins to flow toward the needs and wants of the cared-for. This does not mean that I will always approve of what the other wants, nor does it mean that I will never try to lead him or her to a better set of values, but I must take into account the feelings and desires that are actually there and respond as positively as my values and capacities allow.

As mentioned by Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003) positive reinforcement is a successful intervention for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Noddings' (2005) contends that: "Caring relations also provide the best foundation for moral education. Teachers show students how to care, engage them in dialogue about moral life, supervise their practice in caring, and confirm them in developing their best selves" (p. 4). One of the goals of the Opportunities program is to provide it's participants with life skills and caring is clearly a value and skill that will benefit students.

Barrow asks the following: "When it comes to the inclusive classroom, does it seem plausible to assume that this average teacher is likely to do a better or even as good a job as s/he would focusing on one style of teaching appropriate to one group, when trying to cope with different groups needing different approaches?" (Barrow, 2001, p. 239)

Barrow (2001) believes that research cannot show that the teacher is likely to do a better job teaching all students together versus a segregated class. Thus, he has concluded that: " the arguments for inclusion is not empirical, but ethical" (Barrow, 2001, p. 239). This ethical dispute "is a question of treating

[students] with respect, of refusing to make them feel different or marginalized. This line of reasoning, with its failure to distinguish between morally appropriate and morally inappropriate differential treatment, is lamentable” (Barrow, 2001, p. 239). All classes, whether they are considered segregated or regular, need inclusive teachers. Often teachers in segregated classes have the necessary skills to teach a diverse class and to make the experience inclusive. This appears to have been the case with the *Opportunities* program involved in the current study. Hence, key inclusive elements may occur across varied educational contexts (i.e. regular, integrated versus segregated classrooms).

Theme 3: The Value of Learning Civic Skills

Civic skills mean the skills necessary to practice good citizenship.

According to Erwin and Kipness (1997):

In a democratic society people are given the power to make a variety of meaningful choices pertaining to their daily lives. The freedom to make these choices is what gives people a strong sense of empowerment. This freedom is extremely important in the role of education.

The goal of democracy within the *Opportunities* program is parallel to that of our democratic society. This is to say that *Opportunities* aims to empower students with the ability to actively and meaningfully participate in their environment. The freedom to make meaningful choices regarding their daily lives and future helps to improve children’s self-esteem by naturally fostering a feeling of competence and independence (Erwin, 1994). Hendrick (1992) recommends three ways to enable children to feel empowered: (1) the power to make decisions; (2) the

power to try; and (3) the power to do. Hendrick's recommendations resonated clearly in the findings of this study, as the participants expressed that they were empowered by *Opportunities* for these same reasons.

First, the participants felt as though they had some power in the decisions being made in *Opportunities*. For one participant the *Opportunities* class provided him with some freedom of choice in ways he would not always have experienced in the regular classroom. He aptly expressed:

Yeah, if you don't want to say something, or do something, like if you don't want to be part of a group, you can just sit at your desk. You don't always have to be a part of it. In the regular class we have to. (Transcript #1, Topher, p. 11)

Hendrick (1992) advocates that the power for children to make decisions occurs throughout the day when teachers present choices and honor their decisions.

The participants in this study confirmed that they felt the power to make decisions in the *Opportunities* class.

Second, the participants expressed the opinion that the *Opportunities* class provided them with the power to try. The power to try means allowing children to be independent by supporting their attempts to try to do things independently (Hendrick, 1992). This power was evident when the participants discussed the support they received in *Opportunities* class. One participant explained that the *Opportunities* teachers provided him the support he needed to try to solve some difficult math problems. "Here they will get up, they will show us how, and if they can't they will keep trying until you get it" (Transcript #1, Topher, p. 16). Not only do the participants have the power to try, but the *Opportunities* teachers also have this power. As Erwin and Kipness (1997) note:

Because children learn so much by example, teachers need to be aware of their own behaviour, particularly their interactions with others. Benefits of a democratic approach are abundant, thus, practitioners need to integrate systematically the principles of democracy into naturally occurring routines and activities. (p. 58)

The teachers within the *Opportunities* program were modeling democratic attitudes and the students responded positively to this.

Third, the power to do was something the participants valued. They felt *Opportunities* provided many hands-on experiences and these experiences enhanced their learning. "I like it here because it is more hands-on work. Hands-on stuff is what I like" (Transcript #1, Topher, p. 11). According to Hendrick (1992), the power to do includes skill acquisition and mastery by encouraging children to feel good about their accomplishments. "Yeah and you get all your work done. They give you enough time and they don't just pile it on you at once" (Transcript #1, Bob, p. 5). *Opportunities* provided a curriculum for the participants that was both hands-on and engaging. Furthermore, the goals the teachers set for the participants were attainable. The participants felt competent in what they could do and this provided them with a sense of accomplishment.

Overall, the *Opportunities* classroom is a place where the participants felt the skills they were learning were relevant. There were things the participants needed to know and lessons that would help them in their future. One participant articulated it as: "The basic skills I will need in life" (Transcript# 2, Jhony, p. 26). The *Opportunities* teacher reiterated that the program stresses the importance of attendance, punctuality, positive attitude and effort in addition to building academic, organizational and social skills. These are all qualities of a good

citizen, a strong community member, and a respectful student.

II. Students' Perspectives Regarding the Barriers of 'Opportunities'

Theme 1: Lack of Occasions to Socialize

Generally, the participants did not describe numerous barriers associated with the segregated *Opportunities* program. They did, however, have one standard concern regarding the lack of occasions to socialize with students outside of their program. The *Opportunities* class was isolated in the sense that the participants went to school with others in the program, they ate lunch with these students, they had indoor recess (similar to break-time) with these people, and they were dismissed with these classmates. This did not provide the participants with the opportunity to socialize with the students outside of their class. As Jahnukainen and Jarvinen (2005) explain exclusion is often a theme for those who experience school difficulty:

According to numerous studies, one's social background and the life conditions of one's early childhood are strongly connected with adaptation to the school environment and success in school, as well with selection into the different educational trajectories (e.g., Mehan, 1992; Kivinen & Rinne, 1995; Jarvinen & Vanttaja, 2001). Thus the problems experienced in one's home environment often lead to a second stage of exclusion, which means failure at school or even dropping out of the educational system after compulsory schooling or even earlier. Dropping out of education, i.e. educational exclusion... (see Benz et al., 1997; Suikkanen et al., 1999; Gangl, 2003).

For the participants in this study the segregated environment made it difficult for them to socialize with students outside the *Opportunities* program. In order to prevent social exclusion, the *Opportunities* program has introduced social

meetings with other students in their school. For example, the program teacher informed me that they have begun to visit with another class within their school. This class also comes to the *Opportunities* classroom to do some cooking together with the students. The program is continuously changing, and attempting to make improvements for the individual participants. It is relevant to note that:

School is where community happens for children and youth. When schools are inclusive, communities become inclusive too. Schools help young people develop their knowledge, promote citizenship, and build relationships. Educating our children is not only a basic human right; it is also a vehicle of social inclusion and social change. (The Roeher Institue, 2001)

Although *Opportunities* is considered a segregated intervention program, the participants believe that it does encompass important inclusive elements. However, the participants voiced that one area of difficulty is the lack of social engagement with other students outside the classroom.

Students' Perspectives of their Experience in the Regular Classroom

During the focus group discussions the participants also had the opportunity to voice their opinions about their regular classroom experiences. Each one of the participants had left their regular classroom to go to the segregated *Opportunities* program. While reflecting on their regular classes three themes emerged as barriers to these experiences: (1) the power struggle that students perceived; (2) the overwhelming workload; and (3) the fact that their needs were not being met. Furthermore, a consensus emerged with all the

participants that the regular classroom provided recess and enabled the participants to develop social networks with students throughout the school, which they felt was essential but lacking in the segregated program.

III. Students' Perspectives Regarding the Barriers of the Regular Classroom

Study participants had experience in a regular classroom environment. These experiences took place at a variety of schools. The participants' experiences varied and thus, so did their responses. Nevertheless they all expressed concern about the power struggles they perceived were occurring in their regular schools with teachers and the overwhelming workload. Overall, the participants felt their individual needs were not being met in their regular classrooms.

Theme 1: Existing Power Struggles

Throughout both focus group discussions the participants expressed feelings of frustration with their perception of not having a voice was a problem in the regular classroom. This perception is reminiscent of Frazee's statement:

Young people are always supposed to listen to adults, we are seldom taken seriously. We are the ones who have to go through school; we are the ones who will have to deal with conflict when we are adults. We have to try out our ideas and practice ways of resolving conflicts. We want to make friends in our own way. We have to do that if we are going to learn about how to relate to each other. We want help from adults but on our terms. I think that all young people need things to change, not just disabled kids. (Frazee, 2003, p. 1)

Often the participants felt powerless in their regular classroom. According to Kenworthy and Whittaker (2002):

All schools have the power to subject all children to a wide range of petty rules and restrictions, which direct many aspects of their lives (Franklin, 1995). Moreover, these oppressive practices are fostered in a climate where the voice of children is generally unheard (Whittaker et al., 1998).

The study participants felt that on numerous occasions they would get into trouble for what they felt were unjustifiable reasons. One participant explained:

“My teacher, he doesn’t let me go to gym, he doesn’t let me play on the computer, he suspended me one day for coming to school with out a backpack”

(Transcript #2, Jhony, p. 25). Kenworthy and Whittaker (2002) aptly note that:

In relation to children with ‘special needs’, these petty regulations are compounded by the existing legislation which not only refuses to hear their voice, but assumes that it is the child’s behaviour or impairment which is ‘the problem’ or ‘the difficulty’ preventing their participation in mainstream education.

The participants in this study felt that teachers and principals should refocus energy away from regulating students in ways they do not understand, to helping students with behavioural difficulties work through their problems. A program like *Opportunities* does just that; it provides behaviour intervention and lessons on social/behavioural control. Barrow believes that:

The trick is to make sure that acknowledging difference is not confused with patronizing and that it is not regarded as marginalizing. The mistake is to confuse acknowledging difference with lack of respect...It is not fair (or just or equitable) to base one’s treatment of people on irrelevant criteria, and it is not fair or just, or even sensible, to refuse to recognize differences that may constitute relevant differences in relation to important matters. (p. 240)

The participants believe that in the regular classroom so many important issues are overlooked. They felt that even their individual needs could not be met

because there were too many other concerns to take into consideration. One participant explained: "The only thing that they supply in normal classrooms it isn't enough. Not the think, but the stuff they do, how they interact with you. It makes you feel like you are not good enough" (Transcript #1, Bob, p. 16). All the participants agreed that they could use more help in their regular classrooms.

The frequent struggle between teachers/principals and students with behavioural issues that often exist at the regular schools was something that really irritated the participants. One participant was so hurt by what his principal said to him that he was almost in tears when he was explaining the story. He gloomily commented that "well my principal, every little thing I do she has a problem with me" (Transcript #1, Topher, p. 7). Perhaps the principals and teachers were frustrated with the participants because it took them more time to learn social and behavioural skills. Kenworthy and Whittaker (2002) explain that:

Children are seen as less acceptable when they struggle to learn basic rules of behaviour, laugh, shout or fail to control their bodies. When they lack concentration, and need significant levels of support or understanding...An inability to conform to rules, learn from instruction or appear to be different, tests the patience of adults and it is the intolerance of adults for others, including children, which is, historically, the root of social and political practices which lead to categorization, segregation, isolation and ultimately rejection. (p. 222)

The participants struggled within their regular school curriculum and social demands. The study participants felt that their relationship with their principal and teachers at their regular school was often negative. They felt that at the regular school there were many pessimistic attitudes expressed by teachers and principals about their potential for success. Hastings and Oakford (2003) conducted a study on teacher attitudes towards the inclusion of children with

special needs. They illustrated that “children with intellectual disabilities or emotional and behavioural problems are typically rated less positively by samples of teachers and student teachers” (Hastings and Oakford, 2003, p. 88). In order for the participants to feel included in their regular schools, the participants believed their principals and teachers attitudes needed to be more positive towards them.

Theme 2: Overwhelming Workload

The participants in this study felt that the workload in their regular classrooms was overwhelming for them. They were continuously falling behind and even when they worked their hardest to try to get ahead, they were just able to catch up. For example, one participant proclaimed: “Usually when I have to write stuff down I just write it. I don’t ever have enough time to read it over after” (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 12). The heavy workload within the regular classroom was something the participants felt acted as a significant barrier to their educational success.

Sapon-Shevin (1998) believes:

Attempting to integrate students with significant education and behavioral challenges tells us a lot about the ways in which our schools are unimaginative, under-resourced, unresponsive, and simply inadequate. Full inclusion did not create these problems, but it shows us where the problems are. Children who stretch the limits of the system make it painfully clear how constricting and narrow those limits are. (p. 35)

The participants in this study had significant behavioural difficulties. This meant that not only did they have to follow the routine within their regular classrooms,

they also needed to learn to control their behaviour while doing so, in addition to completing the regular academic tasks. The participants felt the sheer number of things they had to accomplish in one day impeded their abilities to finish tasks. One participant said, "At my [regular] school I could use some more help" (Jhony, Transcript #2, p. 27). Additional support and help is something all the study participants voiced would have been beneficial in their regular schools. Time and aid were also major factors contributing to the participants' feelings of being overwhelmed in their regular classes. It would appear that further accommodations are needed in the regular classroom: "We will need to change the curriculum if we want to include students with disabilities" (Sapon-Shevin, 1998, p. 35). In order to help these students with behavioural difficulties more support and services need to be available for the students directly in the regular classroom setting.

Perhaps another reason for the participants' feeling the workload was overwhelming was due to the teachers' style of instruction. Teachers need to explore more interactive, engaging ways of teaching students with behavioural difficulties. Having students with behavioural difficulties in a regular class without committing the necessary resources and support is ineffective and not consistent with all children's education entitlements. "We must make huge improvements in the kinds and quality of support we provide" (Sapon-Shevin, 1998, p. 38). Sapon-Shevin (1998) believes many changes need to occur to ensure the success of students with special needs, including: planning and collaboration time with other teachers, modified curriculum and resources, administrative support, and

ongoing emotional support. The curriculum needs also to be better individualized, the classroom structure needs to be sufficient malleable, and everyone (teachers and students included) need to work together to create a caring, supportive, and inclusive regular classroom environment.

Theme 3: Students' Needs Not Being Met

The participants voiced concerns about their educational experiences in the regular classroom. Their most prominent concern was the fact that they felt as though their needs were not being met in the regular classroom. "To be truly inclusive, a community must be designed to meet the needs of all its participants" (Lewis, 2006). Lack of educational assistants, large class sizes, instructional methods that were not engaging, and lack of time were all factors that the participants expressed contributed to the problem. In Ruef's (2003) study on moving forward to include students with disabilities he states, "Time, training, personnel, materials, class size, and severity of disability were variables perceived as impacting the viabilities of inclusion by teacher participants" (p. 2). The participants felt they were simply lost or forgotten in the hustle and bustle of the regular classroom environment. It appeared that the only time the participants felt like they were being recognized (and given the attention that they craved) in the regular classroom environment, was generally when they were acting inappropriately.

It is vital to recognize the necessity of improving our understanding of what works for students with behavioural difficulties. Greater resources must be

employed to support this population of students, and doing so at the earliest possible age is essential, ensuring that procedures are implemented with integrity and precisions, and sustaining intervention efforts over time – in many instances, over school careers (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003).

Positive interventions need to occur for students with behavioural difficulties. In addition, schools need to take full advantage of the currently available strategies for behavioural and instructional intervention.

A powerful comment made by one of the participants when he was referring to his needs not being met in the regular classroom was as follows:

Not in the normal school though. I don't know, like, the only thing that they supply in normal classrooms it isn't enough. Not the thing, but the stuff they do, how they interact with you. **It makes you feel like you are not good enough.** (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 15)

He sounded wounded by this feeling of “not good enough.” Students with special needs have to be encouraged to feel good about their accomplishments.

Teachers need to organize the curriculum in regular classrooms so that students are participating in meaningful, individualized, and active tasks. Erwin and Kipness (1997) note, “When children feel competent in what they can do, they do not have to rely on others to build their confidence or to realize a sense of accomplishment” (p. 57). Building these skills is essential in life. Regular classroom teachers need to help students with behavioural difficulties set realistic goals and provide the necessary support to ensure the students can reach their goals. This will help students to feel competent and accomplished.

In order to meet the needs of students with behavioural difficulties in regular classrooms the teachers' approach must be sensitive to children's

individual styles, as well as responsive to and encourages their diversity.

Teachers must also be trained to identify and use best practices that have some empirical validity:

We must insist that our teachers receive the instruction necessary for them to both choose and employ educational practices that have received at least some empirical attention. Our teachers must also be given the tools to be successful consumers of research, and the critical ability to identify spurious claims and practices. (Sasso, 2001)

Education for all children must be constantly adapting if it is to be successful.

Often teachers are overwhelmed with the amount of content they are required to cover and important aspects of the classroom community are forgotten. The participants in this study felt as though the lack of time, large class sizes, and the minimal amount of aids available within the regular classrooms were factors that blocked needs not being met. Turner (2003) recommends, "new staff induction and staff in-service training...must take place to ensure that all staff are working consistently, and towards a child-centered approach" (p. 16).

Overall, the participants voiced the opinion that their regular classroom experiences had barriers, however they enjoyed the experience. Although they often felt a power struggle existed between them and their teachers, that there was an overwhelming workload, and that their needs were not being adequately accommodated, there were yet positive elements to the regular classroom in their view. Most importantly, it was an environment where they were able to socialize with diverse students. Furthermore, they were able to participate in outdoor recess with other students from regular classes, a component to their

educational experience that the participants felt was of utmost importance but missing in the segregated placement.

IV. Students' Perspectives Regarding the Benefits of the Regular Classroom

Theme 1: Participation in Recess

The participants expressed that one of the most valuable components of their regular schools was recess. Being in the segregated *Opportunities* program they felt as though they were missing out on their recess time, which was something all of the participants longed for. Activities that expose children to natural outdoor environments as opposed to enclosed classroom spaces have also been shown previously to be widely effective in reducing negative behaviour symptoms, this time within a population of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Kuo & Taylor, 2004). Fox and Avramidis (2003) add that an outdoor education program has shown to represent a powerful, although underused, tool for reducing disaffection, and promoting inclusive practices for a vulnerable group of pupils. One participant in this study exclaimed "you don't really get recess here" while referring to the *Opportunities* program (Jerry, Transcript #1, p. 13). Another participant added, "I don't really like it" (Topher, Transcript #1, p 13).

The importance of physical education within the national curriculum is compounded further for those with [emotional and behavioural difficulties], primarily because of the subject's ability to act as a cathartic function from the confined environment of the stereotypical classroom. Physical Education can foster a rich and highly complex environment in which children of all physical and academic abilities have the potential to become active and engaged. A pupil with [emotional and behavioural difficulties] may, through a 'moving to learn' strategy and the teacher effective behaviour management, remain on task and be motivated to

keep trying to raise their physical ass well as work towards the other learning outcomes. (Capel, 2004)

The regular classroom provided both the physical education component, as well as a physical recess component, which the participants enjoyed. Medcalf, Marshall, and Rhoden (2006) investigated the relationship between physical education and enhancing behaviour in pupils with emotional behavioural difficulties and they found that “physical education had a positive effect on the reduction of ‘off-task’ behaviours” (p. 173). Furthermore, recess provided an opportunity for the participants to communicate with students outside of their regular classroom and served as a social networking time. Overall, the participants were looking forward to returning to their regular classrooms to enjoy their time at recess and to reunite with their old friends. They did, however, have concerns about how their new teachers would treat them.

V. Students' Perceptions of Rights as Children

The participants in this study did express some perspective of their rights as children. Although they were not necessarily conscious of their rights as children they did have an understanding of the underlying principles these rights represent. The participants felt as though they were often treated unfairly in their regular classroom. One participant explicitly said, “I don't like my principals. They are unfair” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 21). The participants knew how they needed to be treated. One participant's response to the changes he would like to see in his regular class was “More respect from teachers...they should give you

respect” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 20). The participants demanded respect, which is their right as persons. Perhaps this perception (correct or not) of not being respected in the regular class, contributed to the exacerbation of behaviour problems.

Student voice was an aspect of their rights as children that the participants did understand. They were intrigued by the invitation to participate in this research study. At the end of the study one participant asked, “Why did you want to talk to us and about *Opportunities?*” (Jhony, Transcript #2, p. 30). My response was to give a voice to students with behavioural difficulties. Student voice is understood as subjects actively involved in their own and others’ education – classroom learning, participate in school governance and active citizenship in the school and community (Gunter and Thomson, 2007). Gunter and Thomson (2007) refer to inclusion where students take part in making decisions about choices and strategies in their education as instructive regarding political process.

Education in Ontario for students with special needs has evolved due to the social movement advocating the closure of segregated institutions which had served to help people with special needs. The goal now is for the inclusion of people with special needs within the community and appropriate support services being made available. According to the *Education for All Report* (2005):

In 1962, the Government of Ontario repealed most of its human rights laws in order to make way for the Ontario Human Rights Code, the first comprehensive human rights code in Canada. The Code affirmed the right to equal access to services, including education. However, it was not until 1982 that the Code was amended to prohibit discrimination on the basis of handicap....It was not until 1980 that Ontario’s Education Amendment Act,

also known as Bill 82, required Ontario school boards to provide special education programs and services for all students with special education needs.

The participants in this study all have special education needs and these needs were first to be met in their regular classroom.

Regulation 181, enacted in 1998, legislated the requirement that the first consideration regarding placement for an “exceptional pupil” be placement in a regular class with appropriate supports, when such placement meets the student’s needs and is in accordance with parents’ wishes. (Education for All, 2005)

Due to the participants consistent problems within the regular classroom an educational alternative was made available to meet these students’ needs. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education “Ministry policy requires that a range of options continue to be available for students whose needs cannot be met within the regular classroom” (Education for All, 2005). Therefore, the *Opportunities* program was made available to these students with behavioural difficulties whose needs could not be met within the regular classroom as currently constituted.

The inclusion of students with behavioural difficulties in regular classrooms is a work in progress. Lowenhoff (2004) has suggested that the prevalence of emotional and behavioural problems in children is escalating. The participants in this study enjoyed their experience in the segregated program environment. They believe it provided a more intimate setting where their personal needs were being more adequately met. The participants felt that the regular classroom setting was overwhelming at times and it was difficult for their teachers to meet their individual needs. The Ontario Ministry of Education states

“that a range of options continue to be available for students whose needs cannot be met within the regular classroom” (Education for All, 2005). The *Opportunities* program was one option that worked to engage these participants and led to their perceiving they were in an inclusive setting. However, there is no reason why certain of the inclusive elements these students in this study favored in the segregated placement could not also be implemented in the regular classroom (though regular classrooms are likely to be considerably larger in terms of students members than are segregated classrooms).

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Recommendations for Best Practice

As educators of children and youth with disabilities, most of us spend our time trying to puzzle out the specific interventions, programs, school structures, and legal issues that have a positive effect on or impede the progress of the children we serve. (Sasso, 2001, p. 178)

The following recommendations are based on the advice of the study participants plus inferences drawn by the research from the data. The hope is to provide suggestions for “best practices” which will facilitate improved integration of children with behavioural difficulties into the regular classroom where possible.

Despite all the research on inclusive education and the desirability of students being integrated into the regular classroom, these study participants felt they benefited educationally and behaviourally from being in the segregated *Opportunities* classroom. Close to the beginning of our first focus group discussion, one participant proclaimed: “if they would have more teachers like our *Opportunities* teacher, [regular classrooms] would all be a lot better” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 6). Thus, it appears that at times the segregated placement can be perceived by students as more inclusive than the regular placement. This participant emphasized the important role a teacher plays, and how the student/teacher relationship was very important to him. Turner (2003) believes that all staff in schools must work consistently towards a child-centered approach. There are many issues surrounding the training of general education teachers in meeting the needs of students with special needs. Inclusion may

seem to be an overwhelming objective, particularly to regular classroom teachers, who, in general, view their workload as already at a barely manageable limit. In order to meet the challenge of education for children with special needs, regular classroom teachers need to adapt, change and develop strategies that will help meet the needs of not just individuals with difficulties, but all individuals. The problem is being able to take the time to develop these strategies without compromising the other responsibilities teachers have to run a successful learning environment. Although many teachers are willing to adapt homework, tests, and grading practices and find such adaptations helpful, many do not have the training necessary to make those adaptations.

When examining the work of teachers of students with serious emotional and behavioural disturbances (EBD) Blake and Monahan (2007) found teachers recognized that “much of the practical knowledge needed for EBD work was gained solely through direct classroom experience or in specialist inservice or induction workshops” (p. 62).

Blake and Monahan (2007) state:

The way in which teachers are prepared for teaching EBD students, and the necessary growth that should accompany the years they spend with such students, is an uncertainty that sits uncomfortably in our managerial, data-driven culture. (p. 65)

In Hastings and Oakford's (2003) study on teachers' attitudes they founds that “Children with emotional and behavioural problems were rated as likely to have a more negative impact on other children, the teacher, and the school and classroom environment” (p. 92). The researcher would agree with Barrow (2001) that:

It is *not* fair (or just or equitable) to base one's treatment of people on irrelevant criteria, and it is not fair or just, or even sensible, to refuse to recognize differences that may constitute relevant differences in relation to important matters. (p. 240)

If teachers have a negative preconceived notion about students with behavioural difficulties, it will make it more difficult for these students to feel included and to have their needs met. Teachers need to understand that students with emotional and behavioural issues need additional supports and a teacher who is especially caring.

Modifying the Regular Class to Meet Participants' Needs

The participants in this study provided detailed descriptions of the modifications they would like to see occur in their regular classrooms. One participant made a recommendation to minimize the workload to include only the subjects necessary in life and to focus more on social skills. He noted:

I think they should try to make it less stressful at my other school. They should take out the stuff that we will never really use in our lives and focus more on the important things. Like social skills that will help you in your social life or maybe in your bonding with people or even just talking. (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 14)

Making social connections was something this participant struggled with and it affected his relationships at school. He believed social engagement and learning how to socialize were important components in school. Incorporating a social component into the regular class curriculum was something this participant felt would benefit him and other students in his regular class.

Another participant discussed the importance of finding a balance within the curriculum to include all the academic subjects, as well as an essential social component. He began by stating that all academic subjects are “important things you need to use in life” then he continued to say, “they need to find a balance. Maybe cutting every subject down by five minutes and then adding a social component” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 15). Having this social component, which both participants felt was vital, within a regular classroom would be beneficial within regular classes.

The ratio of students to teacher was mentioned a number of times throughout the focus group discussions. One participant emphasized the teacher/student ratio by saying, “I would like 20 teachers, 20 students, and 20 assistants” (Jhony, Transcript #2, p. 29). The participants enjoyed the intimacy of the *Opportunities* class because at times there was “a teacher, one aid, and three social workers” (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 18). The participants felt that the individual attention they received within the *Opportunities* classroom enabled their specific personal needs to be met. They suggested that smaller class sizes in their regular classroom would help.

One participant suggested “more [Educational Assistants] EA’s” would help make their regular classroom a better place (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 19). Another participant added that this assistant could be a “university student” he continued by asking “don’t the university students need volunteer hours?” (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 19) Overall, the participants felt they needed more help, and

more support in their regular classrooms. Furthermore, the help they required needed to be from caring and encouraging individuals.

When the participants were asked what their teachers were doing to help them, they all responded that the teacher in the *Opportunities* programs was doing everything right. One participant said, "These teachers are helping us. They are nice, they are kind, they don't boss you around, and they don't tell you what to do" (Jhony, Transcript #2, p. 28). Another participant said, "They listen to you. They are supportive. At the regular school some teachers don't seem to care..." (Topher, Transcript #1, p. 18). A third participant added, "You just have to care" (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 18). Caring teachers was something these participants felt was an essential requirement for student success.

Dynamic classrooms with dynamic teachers, was another component these participants would like to see in their regular schools. One participant began by describing that he needed more assistance and more focus. He believes that bright colours and decorations within the school environment would help him to focus. He explained that the changes he would like to see were as follows:

Maybe like a bright coloured room or a bright chalkboard...some people are really attracted to bright colours and when they see them they really want to touch them and get involved. Picture neon lights or signs in the classrooms...in a classroom you could have a traffic light...they should paint classrooms bright and make everything much more colourful... maybe they could put designs on the wall. Maybe they could paint an ocean scene. They could paint it blue...with a big wave. Make it so in inspires your imagination. (Bob, Transcript #1, p. 20-21)

Classrooms should inspire students to learn. Another participant described the changes he would like to see in his classroom in a more abstract vision. He articulately stated:

I would get all the science stuff I see on TV with tubes and stuff. With green stuff and blue stuff and orange stuff and it would be all bubbly. Then I would throw a rock at it and it would go poooooffffeee. My hair would be spiked and my face would be black. (Jhony, Transcript #2, p. 28)

This participant wanted his teacher to make more effort to ensure the lessons he was teacher were more creative and student focused.

In order to modify regular classrooms to meet the participants' needs they recommended reducing class sizes in the higher elementary grades, additional support personnel made available to help these students within their classes, and teachers who care about their students. Participants complained that additional resources were removed in the later grades though students with special needs were in great need of them. The participants felt the *Opportunities* classroom had many inclusive elements that enhanced their experience in the segregated program. These elements helped to create a climate where the students felt comfortable learning, and the material being learned was relevant to their lives as children with behavioural difficulties. They felt respected in the *Opportunities* classroom, they felt they received the individual attention they needed, and they were give a voice on decisions that directly affected their learning. There is every possibility that same quality of instruction can be offered in an integrated regular classroom. This is, of course, an empirical question. However, more individualized attention must be provided for students with behavioural difficulties in the regular classroom to ensure their needs are being met. Life skills must be

incorporated into the curriculum and more hands-on experiences must be made available to these particular students. Recess and physical activities should be incorporated into day-to-day activities and even utilized as one aspect of behaviour intervention. Teachers must above all respect their students and visa versa. Certainly the teachers in this particular *Opportunities* program cared greatly for these participants and it had great positive effects on the perceived quality of their educational experience. "Learning is just one theoretical way of constructing life. The hands, the heart and the head (must all be addressed) – but the heart cannot be forgotten" (Soan, 2006, p. 210). By listening to the voices of students with behavioural difficulties in this study, the researcher intended to heed that advice. It is hoped that sophisticated and complex perspectives conveyed by the participants offer a valuable contribution to future discourse on this topic.

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Appendix A

Participant Information Survey

What is your name?

What pseudonym (false name) would you like to use for the protection of your privacy?

What grade are you in right now?

Have you ever been in a segregated special needs class?

Have you ever been in a "regular" class?

For the data collection procedure you have the option to choose a one-on-one interview or a small focus group. In the one-on-one interview you can answer the research questions in private with only the researcher audio-recording your response. In the small focus group, you can answer the research questions with some of the other student participants. Those sessions will also be audio taped.

Which method of communication do you prefer (a one-on-one interview or a small focus group)?

Appendix B

Student Interview and Focus Group Guide

Background Questions:

- What grade are you in?
- How old are you?

What are students' perspectives regarding their special needs?

1. Have you been told that you have a special need or difficulty that teachers need to consider so they can help you effectively? If yes, what is this special need or difficulty?
2. If yes, does this special need or difficulty bother you in any way when you are at school?

What are the students' perspectives on being in a segregated special needs versus an inclusive class?

[Researcher provides definition of segregated classroom in child friendly language as follows: Segregated class means that students with special needs are taught separately in a different class than students who do not have those needs.]

3. Have you ever been in a segregated special needs class?
4. Did you enjoy this experience?
5. Were there many children in this class?
6. How did it make you feel having to leave the "regular" classroom to go to your "special needs" classroom?

Or

How did it make you feel having to leave the "special needs" classroom to go to the "regular" classroom?

* Researcher will ask whichever question is appropriate to that specific child depending on their current educational placement.

[Researcher provides definition of inclusion in child friendly language as follows: Inclusion means everyone belongs. An inclusive environment is a safe place, where everyone is considered equal, and has equal opportunities. An inclusive environment enables this group of people to have freedom of choice, and freedom to express their views or opinions. (Compare Henry, 2006)]

7. Have you ever been in an inclusive classroom?
8. Did you enjoy this experience?
9. Which do you think was more inclusive your segregated classroom experience or the regular classroom experience? Why?

Is their current classroom environment inclusive in their opinion?

10. Do you think your current classroom is inclusive?
11. Why or why not?

Is their current school environment perceived inclusive?

12. Do you think the school is inclusive?
13. Is recess inclusive?

In what ways is the classroom setting impacting students learning, reading, performance, and enjoyment in the view of the students?

14. Do you learn in your classroom?
15. Do you feel comfortable enough to read in front of the class?
16. Do you like to perform or present in front of the class?
17. Are you enjoying being in your class?

Do students feel their needs are being adequately accommodated?

18. Do teachers/assistants help you with your special needs?
19. Do you receive enough help, so that you feel comfortable with all subjects?
20. How do teachers/assistants help you?

Do students perceive they are being supported effectively?

21. In your opinion, does your teacher/assistant help you enough?
22. What are they doing right?
23. What could they improve upon?

How would students like to see their classroom changed, if at all?

24. If you could change your classroom, what would you do?

What student rights issues, if any, do the students perceive in relation to their special needs?

25. Explain some of the rights you have as a child?
26. Explain some of your rights as a student with a special need?
27. Are you satisfied with the way you are treated as a student with a special need or would you like to see any changes? (If you would like changes, please explain)

Do students have any additional comments on the educational setting or research process?

28. Do you have any further comments on your class, or school?
29. Do you have any comments on this research study and your participation in it?

Appendix C

Cover Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian & Participant,

My name is Larysa Henry and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. I am conducting a study to investigate the perspectives of students with special needs on their educational placement. The sample of students in my study will all have been designated by the Ministry as having a special need due to behavioural issues. To collect this information, students will be invited to participate in three sessions: an introductory meeting about the study; a one-half hour long interview or focus group discussion; and a follow-up meeting to make sure the information I collect is correct. Both the parent/guardian and participant must agree to participate in a focus group because this group will know one another's identity. Consent is required from the parent/guardian to permit the child to participate in only an interview, only a focus group, or either. All focus groups and interviews will be held at your child's school either during lunch or after school with the teacher and parent's permission. I will use the information from this study to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and I may report results in professional journals or at professional conferences as group results with all identifying information regarding the children's identity and school board kept confidential.

This case study, though limited in generalizability due to the small number of participants is intended to provide useful insights into the perspectives and educational needs for those students designated by the Ministry as having behavioural difficulties. Further, hopefully the research will simulate other such studies that take student perspectives into account. The ultimate objective is that this line of research will contribute to further enhancements in educational practice that meets the needs of children identified with behavioural difficulties.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Lakehead University Ethics Board in terms of its intent and design features. To make sure that participants and the school remain anonymous and confidential, pseudonyms (false names) will be used and no other identifying information will be included in any summary of the findings.

Your child's participation is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your child from the study at any time without you or your child suffering any negative consequences of any sort. Furthermore, the child may refuse to answer any question asked as part of the research. Only with written consent from both the parent/guardian and the child will the study be audio taped. The child may refuse to have their interview audio taped either on the consent form or verbally on the day of the interview. The audio files will be transcribed and used

as raw data for the study. This information is confidential and therefore will not have the child's name attached. All audio tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence and locked in storage at Lakehead University for seven years.

You will also have the opportunity to review the transcript portions that might be included in a write-up. You may request that any sections of the transcripts or the whole transcript relating to your child's individual interview or participation in the focus group removed from the database. All findings will be reported as grouped data but particular quotes with no name attached will be used to illustrate recurrent themes that arose in the student comments. There are no known risks associated with participating in this research. Data will remain confidential and will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years and then destroyed appropriately.

After the study is completed, a summary of the findings will be available, if you are interested in receiving it, please indicate on the bottom of the attached consent form.

Please complete and sign the attached consent form. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Sonja Grover or myself. Furthermore if you have any problems in relation to the ethics of this study please feel free to contact the Research Office at Lakehead University.

Sincerely,

Larysa Henry

<p>Larysa Henry, MEd Student</p> <p>Thunder Bay, ON P7B3J8</p> <p>Email: lmhenry@lakeheadu.ca</p>	<p>Dr. Sonja Grover, Supervisor Faculty of Education,</p> <p>Lakehead University 955 Oliver Road Thunder Bay, ON P7B5E1</p> <p>Phone: 807-343-8714 Email: sonja.grover@lakeheadu.ca</p>	<p>Lisa Norton, Research Ethics and Administrative Officer Research Office</p> <p>Lakehead University 955 Oliver Road Thunder Bay, ON P7B5E1</p> <p>Phone: 807-343-8283 Email: lisa.Norton@lakeheadu.ca</p>
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Appendix D

*Participant and Parent/Guardian Consent Form*The Perspectives of Students with Behavioural Difficulties
On the Efficacy of their Educational Placement

I, _____ have read and understood the cover information letter. I am aware and understand that:

1. The participant will not be identified in any way.
2. All of the data that is collected will be confidential.
3. The interview/focus group will be audio taped only with permission from the participant.
4. The data will be presented as grouped data except for quotes with no names attached to illustrate recurrent themes in student comments
5. There is no known risk to participants involved in this research.
6. The participant is a volunteer and may withdraw at any time from the study.
7. The participant may choose not to answer any question asked as part of the research.
8. If the participant chooses not to participate, my lack of participation in the study will have no negative academic or other consequences.
9. The participant will receive a summary of the study, upon request, following its completion and may remove any or all of my comments from the database.
10. The raw data from this study (audio tapes and written notes from interviews/focus groups and transcriptions of these notes) will be held at Lakehead University in a locked cabinet for seven years and will not be shared with anyone except in the unlikely circumstance if required by law after which it will be destroyed.
11. The grouped data, without the students' identities revealed, may be used to publish articles in academic journals or for presentation at academic conferences.

The child can participate in either a focus group discussion or an interview. If you do consent to your child's participation in the study, do you consent to your child's participation a) in a focus group discussion, which will enable the participants to know the other children's identity, or b) a one-to-one interview to protect the anonymity of the child or c) both an individual interview and the focus group? **Please circle the methodology in which you permit the child to participate.**

a) Focus Group

b) One-to-one Interview

c) Both

 Signature of Participant

 Date

 Name of Guardian

 Signature of Guardian

 Date

if you would like to learn the results of this study, please provide your address below:

Appendix E

Post-Oral Presentation Information Student Consent Form

The Perspectives of Students with Behavioural Difficulties
On the Efficacy of their Educational Placement:

Now that you have participated in the initial information session you must provide personal consent that you wish to continue to participate in this research study. This is the post-oral presentation information consent form. It provides you with the opportunity agree or disagree to participate now that you know more about the study.

I, _____ have read and understood the cover information letter. I am aware and understand that:

1. I will not be identified in any way.
2. All of the data that is collected will be confidential.
3. The interview/focus group will be audio taped only with my permission.
4. The data will be presented as grouped data except for quotes with no names attached to illustrate recurrent themes in student comments
5. There is no known risk to participants involved in this research.
6. I am a volunteer and may withdraw at any time from the study.
7. I may choose not to answer any question asked as part of the research.
8. If I choose not to participate, my lack of participation in the study will have no negative academic or other consequences.
9. I will receive a summary of the study, upon request, following its completion and may remove any or all of my comments from the database.
10. The raw data from this study (audio tapes and written notes from interviews/focus groups and transcriptions of these notes) will be held at Lakehead University in a locked cabinet for seven years and will not be shared with anyone except in the unlikely circumstance if required by law after which it will be destroyed.
11. The grouped data, without the students' identities revealed, may be used to publish articles in academic journals or for presentation at academic conferences.

Signature of Participant

Date

You can participate in either a focus group discussion or an interview. If you do consent to your participation in the study, do you consent to participation **a)** in only focus group discussion, which will enable you to know the other children's identity, or **b)** only a one-to-one interview to protect your anonymity. **Please circle the methodology in which you consent to participate.**

a) Focus Group

b) One-to-one Interview

If you would like to learn the results of this study, please provide your address below:

Appendix F

Focus Group Consent Form

The Perspectives of Students with Behavioural Difficulties
On the Efficacy of their Educational Placement

I _____ (participant name) understand that the information discussed throughout this focus group is confidential. Therefore, by signing below, I agree that I will not disclose the information discussed throughout the focus group with any other individuals.

I recognize that I may refuse to answer any questions asked as part of the research and this will not affect me in any way. I understand that my permission is needed in order to audiotape the discussion and will indicate my decision below. I am aware that the audio tapes and transcripts will be held confidential and will be held in locked storage for seven years. Any excerpts used in a write up will not have my name attached. Furthermore, I will be given the opportunity to review the transcript portions that might be included in a write-up and asked for permission to use those excerpts without my name attached. I also understand that I may participate in the study without the use of an audio recording device. In this situation the researcher will use detailed notes to collect the information being discussed.

Please circle your answer for the following questions:

Do you agree to **continue to participate** in this study? YES NO

Do you agree to have this discussion **audio taped**? YES NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix G

Interview Consent Form

The Perspectives of Students with Behavioural Difficulties
On the Efficacy of their Educational Placement

I _____ (participant name) understand that the information discussed throughout this interview is confidential. Therefore, by signing below, I agree that I will not disclose the information discussed throughout the interview with any other individuals.

I recognize that I may refuse to answer any questions asked as part of the research and this will not affect me in any way. I understand that my permission is needed in order to audiotape the discussion and will indicate my decision below. I am aware that the audiotapes and transcripts will be held confidential and will be held in locked storage for seven years. Any excerpts used in a write up will not have my name attached. Furthermore, I will be given the opportunity to review the transcript portions that might be included in a write-up and asked for permission to use those excerpts without my name attached. I also understand that I may participate in the study without the use of an audio recording device. In this situation the researcher will use detailed notes to collect the information being discussed.

Please circle your answer for the following questions:

Do you agree to **continue to participate** in this study? YES NO

Do you agree to have this discussion **audio taped**? YES NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix H

Teacher Cover Letter

Dear Teacher,

My name is Larysa Henry and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. I am conducting a study to investigate the perspectives of special needs students on their educational placement. The sample of students in my study will all have been designated by the Ministry as having a special need due to behavioural issues. To collect this information, students will be invited to participate in three sessions: an introductory meeting about the study; a one-half hour long individual interview or focus group discussion; and a follow-up meeting to make sure the information I collect is correct. Both the parent/guardian and participant must agree to participate in a focus group because this group will know one another's identity. Consent is required from the parent/guardian to permit the child to participate in only an interview, only a focus group, or either. All focus groups and interviews will be held at the child's school either during lunch or after school with the teacher and parent's permission. I will use the information from this study to prepare a Masters of Education thesis. I may also report findings in professional journals or at professional conferences as group results with all identifying information regarding the children's identity and school board kept confidential.

This case study though limited in generalizability due to the small number of participants is intended to provide useful insights into the perspectives of students designated by the Ministry as having behavioural difficulties. Further, the study will hopefully stimulate other such studies that take special needs student perspectives into account. The ultimate objective is that this line of research will contribute to further enhancements in educational practice that meets the needs of children identified with behavioural difficulties.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Lakehead University Ethics Board. and your school board. In addition, the principal of your school has given written consent for my inquiring as to whether or not you would like to participate in this study by contacting the parents of potential child study participants (details explained later in this information letter).

The child's participation is completely voluntary and they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without suffering any negative consequences of any sort. Furthermore, the child may refuse to answer any question asked as part of the research. Only with written consent from both the parent/guardian and the child will the study be audio taped. The child may refuse to have their interview audio taped either on the consent form or verbally on the day of the interview. The audio files will be transcribed and used as raw data for the study. This information is confidential and therefore will not have the child's name attached. All audio tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence and locked in storage at Lakehead University for seven years.

You will also have the opportunity to review the transcript portions that might be included in a write-up. All findings will be reported as grouped data but particular quotes

with pseudonyms attached will be used to illustrate recurrent themes that arose in the student comments. This study will benefit the participants by providing them with the unique learning experience of participating in an empirical study. It will also allow students to voice their opinions about educational issues that directly affect them and children who share similar experiences. There are no known risks associated with participating in this research. The school board and the school will not be identified or named in any of the write-up. Data will remain confidential and will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years and then destroyed appropriately as per Lakehead University regulations. After the study is completed, a summary of the findings will be available at Lakehead University, Faculty of Education library which you may access.

If you agree to be a participant in this study your role would be restricted to contacting the parents of the prospective child participants by mailing out to these parents the information and consent forms that are provided. In this way, the investigator will not know who in your class is designated as having a behavioural special need until provided with signed consents from their parents allowing the child to participate in the study. There is also a spot on the consent forms for the student to sign.

Please complete and sign the attached teacher consent form if you agree to participate in this study and leave your form in the school general office in an envelope with my name on the envelope. I will then contact you and provide you with the cover letter and consent forms for the parents and envelopes with pre-paid postage. Please see below for further information regarding mailing of the forms to the parents. If you have any further questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Sonja Grover or myself (contact details below; Dr. Grover is easiest to contact by email).

Sincerely,

Larysa Henry

<p>Larysa Henry, MEd Student</p> <p>Thunder Bay, ON P7B3J8</p> <p>Email: lmhenry@lakeheadu.ca</p>	<p>Dr. Sonja Grover, Supervisor Faculty of Education,</p> <p>Lakehead University 955 Oliver Road Thunder Bay, ON P7B5E1</p> <p>Phone: 807-343-8714 Email: sonja.grover@lakeheadu.ca</p>
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Instructions for Contacting the Parents of Potential Child Study Participants

Should You Agree as Teacher to be a Participant

Please remember that the confidentiality of the participant is of utmost importance. The participants' parents/guardians must be contacted via mail to protect their anonymity. Please do **not** give the forms to the children to bring home and do not discuss with the children.

1. Please mail the required cover letter and consent form to the families of students in your class who are identified by the Ministry as special needs students with behavioural difficulties. Please do not disclose to the investigator or anyone else to whom you are mailing the study information or even that the study is in progress. (The principal and your school board as mentioned have provided written consent for the study). You will provide only the **signed consent forms** to the investigator.
2. Once parents/guardians sign the consent form parents can send the consent to school with the participant to give to their teacher. Please collect these for the researcher who will be contacting you to collect the forms.
3. Please enable the students who have written parental consent the opportunity to participant in this study during lunchtime or after school by helping the researcher develop a schedule that works for the participants, the teacher, and the researcher.
4. Please work together with the researcher to ensure that students who will be staying after school to participate in this study will have transportation home. (For parents who have agreed to have their child participate, we will send out a form for the parent's signature giving the dates and times the child is scheduled to participate so that parents can agree to have their child stay at lunch or after school on that specific date).

Teacher Consent Form

The Perspectives of Students with Behavioural Difficulties
On the Efficacy of their Educational Placement

I, _____ have read and understood the cover information letter and the instructions for contacting parents. I am aware and understand that:

12. The child participants will not be identified in any way and the school and school board identities will also be protected.
 13. All of the data that is collected will be confidential.
 14. The interview/focus group will be audio taped with permission from the participant.
 15. The data will be presented as grouped data except for quotes with pseudonyms attached to illustrate recurrent themes in student comments
 16. There is no known risk to participants involved in this research.
 17. The participants are volunteers and may withdraw at any time from the study.
 18. The participant may choose not to answer any question asked as part of the research.
 19. If the participant chooses not to participate, or withdraw from the study there will be no negative academic or other consequences.
 20. The participant's parents and students will receive a summary of the study, upon request, following its completion and may remove any or all of the comments from the database pertaining to their contribution if they so wish.
 21. The raw data from this study (audio tapes and written notes from interviews/focus groups and transcriptions of these notes) will be held at Lakehead University in a locked cabinet for seven years and then destroyed as per Lakehead University regulations.
 22. The grouped data, without the students' identities revealed will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and may also be used to publish articles in academic journals or for presentation at academic conferences.
-

Name of Teacher

Signature of Teacher

Date

Appendix I

Principal Cover Letter

Dear Principal,

My name is Larysa Henry and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. I am conducting a study to investigate the perspectives of special needs students on their educational placement. To collect this information, grade 7 and 8 students identified with behavioural difficulties will be invited to participate in three sessions. All focus groups and interviews will be held at school either during lunch or after school with the teacher and parent's permission.

I will use the information from this study to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and I may report anonymous results in professional journals or at professional conferences with the identity of the students, the school and the school board held confidential. It is hoped that information from this study will provide useful insights into student perspectives on educational needs for those students designated by the Ministry as having behavioural difficulties. This study will benefit the participants by affording them the unique learning experience of participating in an empirical study. It will also allow students to voice their opinions about issues that directly affect them and children who share similar experiences.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Lakehead University Ethics Board and your school board. To make sure that participants and the school and school board remain anonymous and confidential, pseudonyms will be used and no other identifying information will be included in any summary of the findings. The school board and the school will not be identified or named in any of the write-up. There are no known risks associated with participating in this research. Data will remain confidential and will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years as per Lakehead University ethics regulations and then destroyed appropriately.

After the study is completed, a summary of the findings will be available at Lakehead University. Please complete and sign the attached consent form if you agree to allow this study to proceed at your school. If you have any further questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Sonja Grover or myself

Sincerely,

Larysa Henry

<p>Larysa Henry, MEd Student</p> <p>Thunder Bay, ON P7B3J8</p> <p>Email: lmhenry@lakeheadu.ca</p>	<p>Dr. Sonja Grover, Supervisor Faculty of Education,</p> <p>Lakehead University 955 Oliver Road Thunder Bay, ON P7B5E1</p> <p>Phone: 807-343-8714 Email: sonja.grover@lakeheadu.ca</p>
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Principal Consent Form

The Perspectives of Students with Behavioural Difficulties
On the Efficacy of their Educational Placement

I, _____ have read and understood the cover information letter. I am aware and understand that:

23. The child participants will not be identified in any way and the school and school board identities will also be protected.
24. All of the data that is collected will be confidential.
25. The interview/focus group will be audio taped only with permission from the participant.
26. The data will be presented as grouped data except for quotes with pseudonyms attached to illustrate recurrent themes in student comments
27. There is no known risk to participants involved in this research.
28. The participants are volunteers and may withdraw at any time from the study.
29. The participant may choose not to answer any question asked as part of the research.
30. If the participant chooses not to participate, or withdraw from the study there will be no negative academic or other consequences.
31. The participant's parents and students will receive a summary of the study, upon request, following its completion and may remove any or all of the comments from the database pertaining to their contribution if they so wish.
32. The raw data from this study (audio tapes and written notes from interviews/focus groups and transcriptions of these notes) will be held at Lakehead University in a locked cabinet for seven years and then destroyed as per Lakehead university regulations.
33. The grouped data, without the students' identities revealed will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and may also be used to publish articles in academic journals or for presentation at academic conferences.

Name of Principal

Signature of Principal

Date

Appendix J

Education Officer Cover Letter

Dear Education Officer,

My name is Larysa Henry and I am a Masters of Education student at Lakehead University. I am conducting a study to investigate the perspectives of special needs students on their educational placement. To collect this information, grade 7 and 8 students identified with behavioural difficulties will be invited to participate in three sessions. All focus groups and interviews will be held at school either during lunch or after school with the principal, teacher and parent's written consent.

I will use the information from this study to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and I may report results in professional journals or at professional conferences. All results will be reported as grouped data with the students' identities protected. The name of the school and school board will also be protected. It is hoped that information from this study will provide useful insights into student perspectives and educational needs for those students designated by the Ministry as having behavioural difficulties. This study will benefit the participants by affording them the unique learning experience of participating in an empirical study. It will also allow students to voice their opinions about issues that directly affect them and children who share similar experiences.

Please note that this study has been approved by the Lakehead University Ethics Board (approval letter attached). In addition, the required school board ethics application forms are attached. To make sure that participants and the school remain anonymous and confidential, pseudonyms (false names) will be used and no other identifying information will be included in any summary of the findings. The school board and the school will not be identified or name in any of the write-up. There are no known risks associated with participating in this research. Data will remain confidential and will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years and then destroyed appropriately.

After the study is completed, a summary of the findings will be available at Lakehead University in the Education library. If you agree to allow me to proceed with this study please sign the const form attached. If you have any further questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Sonja Grover or myself.

Sincerely,

Larysa Henry

<p>Larysa Henry MEd Student Thunder Bay, ON P7B3J8 Email: lmhenry@lakeheadu.ca</p>	<p>Dr. Sonja Grover, Supervisor Faculty of Education, Lakehead University 955 Oliver Road Thunder Bay, ON P7B5E1 Phone: 807-343-8714 Email: sonja.grover@lakeheadu.ca</p>
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Education Officer Consent Form

The Perspectives of Students with Behavioural Difficulties
On the Efficacy of their Educational Placement

I, _____ have read and understood the cover information letter. I am aware and understand that:

34. The child participants will not be identified in any way and the school and school board identities will also be protected.
35. All of the data that is collected will be confidential.
36. The interview/focus group will be audio taped with permission from the participant.
37. The data will be presented as grouped data except for quotes with pseudonyms attached to illustrate recurrent themes in student comments
38. There is no known risk to participants involved in this research.
39. The participants are volunteers and may withdraw at any time from the study.
40. The participant may choose not to answer any question asked as part of the research.
41. If the participant chooses not to participate, or withdraw from the study there will be no negative academic or other consequences.
42. The participant's parents and students will receive a summary of the study, upon request, following its completion and may remove any or all of the comments from the database pertaining to their contribution if they so wish.
43. The raw data from this study (audio tapes and written notes from interviews/focus groups and transcriptions of these notes) will be held at Lakehead University in a locked cabinet for seven years and then destroyed as per Lakehead university regulations.
44. The grouped data, without the students' identities revealed will be used to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and may also be used to publish articles in academic journals or for presentation at academic conferences.

Print Name (Education Officer Responsible for School Board Ethics Approval)

Signature (Education Officer Responsible for School Board Ethics Approval)

Date

Appendix K

Transcripts

Document included with separate page numbers.

Transcript # 1

The first transcript was collected on Thursday June 14th, 2007. This 'focus group discussion' took place with 3 students from the *Opportunities Program*. We had the conversation in a small supply room right next door to the participants' classroom. This room had an adjoining door to their class that their teachers warned should be used if the students were to get out of hand. As the researcher my mind began to imagine all the interesting scenarios that could take place. However, truth be told, the participants were excellent. They participated willingly and were very kind to one another and myself.

This transcript is to be used to further clarify the data collected. It provides the students authentic voice permitting the reader to acknowledge the context of the quotes utilized throughout this study. It is also to enable the reader to have a better understanding of the conversations that took place during the focus group discussion. Also, this appendix enables to reader to view the researchers comments and notes on the specific themes emerging from the participants' voices.

The letter L – signifies when the researcher (Larysa) is talking/asking questions. Otherwise, the participants' pseudonyms are used to identify their voice. The symbols [...] will be used to delete any identifying information.

Focus Group Discussion #1

L - This is just the background information. Maybe we can go around and tell a little bit about ourselves; what grade we are in, and how old we are. Just so I know. I can go first. My name is Larysa. I am in my 7th year of university I guess. I am doing my masters, and I am 25 years old, like I already told you. That is about it.

Bob – My name is Bob and I am 14. I go to [...], my main school is [...].

TOPHER - You don't go to [...].

Bob – Oh no (ha ha ha), my main school is [...].

L – [...], Ok. So you are 14, what grade are you in?

BOB - I'm in grade 8.

TOPHER - ha ha ha ha

L – Don't be shy. The tape is a little nerve racking, but don't worry about it.

JERRY - I'm Jerry. I'm from [...]

JERRY - I'm 13 and in Grade 7. I got kicked out of there a few months ago.

L – So, you have been here for a few months already?

JERRY - I don't know. Two or three.

TOPHER - About the same time I have been here.

L – Yes, because you both were here when I came in about a month ago to talk with your teacher. Were you here Bob?

TOPHER - No, he wasn't here. He just got here like a month ago.

L – OK, so Topher.

TOPHER - My name is Topher, 12 years old. I go to [...].

L – Great, perfect. So, I am looking specifically at students who have (or have been told they have) a behavioural difficulty. I am sure you know about yourself. But, I want to know specifically if you have ever been told you have this special need or this difficulty, and that teachers need to consider this in order to teach you effectively. And, if yes what is that special need or difficulty.

Comment: Right from the very beginning both Bob and Topher were answering questions for one another and working together. It was obvious they had formed a friendship while participating in this program.

Comment: The participants were a little nervous at first, but warmed up within minutes.

BOB - well like my teacher like said I had trouble in like science and stuff. Like doing it on paper, I didn't do a very good job. But, when she was like talking one-on-one and stuff with me one-on-one I got like perfect.

Comment: Bob was very aware that he needed one-on-one aid. When he did not get this extra attention he found it very hard to succeed.

L – So, you had problems getting it on paper.

BOB - The thing was if I said it and they marked my score and I explained it I got really good on that.

L – anything else?

TOPHER - tell her that you are hyper, and all over the place.

BOB - yeah I am hyper.

L – you are hyper?

Comment: Again, an example of the students answering questions for one another.

BOB - I am ADD and ADHD.

Comment: The participants were very interested in the process of ADD and ADHD diagnosis. They wanted to know exactly what it entailed and they needed to be steered back on topic a little.

L – so those are things you know about?

BOB - I know ADD is attention deficit disorder.

TOPHER - I am going to find out if I have it in August.

L – you are going to go for some tests?

TOPHER - I already went for the tests, we are going to get the results in August. I don't know why it takes so long?

L – Well it probably takes a little while to go through all of the results. So you are saying that you are a little hyper in class and have a hard time controlling your behaviours and stuff?

TOPHER - sometimes yeah.

L – How about you Jerry.

JERRY - No.

L – No. Nothing?

JERRY - No

L – So, did you just come to this school because you didn't like your other school.

JERRY - No, it is because I got kicked out. || [...]

L – So you were angry or upset?

JERRY - yes

L – That is a bit different then...

JERRY - I was in a hospital for a few months.

L – OK and it is something you are aware of or something that you have been told by your parents or guardians. You have been told how to work with that?

JERRY - Yes

L – Ok, I am just wondering, you all seem to be aware of yourself and what is going on in your life right now, so I want to know how this special need or difficulty bother you? Or does it bother you in any way?

BOB - yeah it does. It bothers my learning. I always get sidetracked or I have a lot of trouble focusing.

L – So what do you do to try and focus?

BOB - I don't know. I get all frustrated and stuff.

L – Hey Topher, you have to try to be quiet. Another thing that is important here is that we are listening and respecting each other's opinions. We are being pretty open about certain things and stuff.

Any of you – do you find these are things that frustrate you or bother you at school.

TOPHER - It does.

L – In what ways?

TOPHER - Um, I am all over the place. Most of the time the only place I am not is doing my work.

BOB - He wonders around. He wonders around in school and he can't sit down.

TOPHER - No, that is what you do.

BOB - Oh yeah, that is what I do. When the teacher gives me something to do I get up and walk around, and pace. I don't know, I keep moving around, I can't sit down, I keep fidgeting.

Comment: This student explained that he had problems at his regular school. He was in a lot of trouble. By the sounds of it, he had some problems with aggression and frustration. It was very difficult to believe because when I first met this young man the word I would use to describe him would be a big teddy-bear. I could not picture him being threatening.

Overall, I could not picture any of these participants acting out and having any sort of behavioural difficulties. They were so calm and supportive within the focus group discussion. It made me wondering if being in small, comfortable atmosphere enabled them to feel more relaxed and in control of their behaviours.

What is causing them to have e their behavioural difficulties?

Comment: Topher was tapping his hands and feet making noise which I feared would prevent the audio recording from picking up the participants voices. Therefore, I kindly reminded him to try to remain as quiet as possible.

L – Jerry do you feel the same way, do you like being at school?

JERRY - I like being at school.

Comment: I found it interesting that Jerry liked to be at school. Although he did not explain why, I believe it has to do with his home life.

L – Is there anything you want to add?

JERRY - No

L – What are your perspectives on being in the *Opportunities* class verses being in your regular class at you other school you came from?

BOB - Like what is better about it?

L – Ah, well what is better or what is the experience like. You went from being at one school, you are taken out and brought to another school. When you are done here you are going to go back....

TOPHER - [It is great to get away from our school, to get away from that school. To come here and the teachers are more like what I am looking for. Different, not different like being messed up, different like...]

Comment: I thought this was such a powerful way to express how he felt. "It is more what I am looking for". Obviously Topher has questioned what he needs from his teachers.

BOB - They are nicer

TOPHER - Yeah and they are more fun.

Comment: The participants identified some of the inclusive aspects of this segregated program. They provided a great dialogue emphasizing the realistic goals set within this alternative program. They also emphasized how accomplished they felt when they were able to attain these goals.

BOB - They are more fun, and it is just you get a lot more help

TOPHER - They don't get all worked up over stuff.

Comment: These students enjoyed having fun with *Opportunities*. It was something they did not seem to have in their regular class.

BOB - Yeah and you get all your work done. They give you enough time and they don't just pile it on you at once.

TOPHER - You don't have as much work as the other school. Kinda like a little break.

Comment: Sometimes I felt as though the participants did things (actions, or lack of actions) to get a reaction from their principals and teachers. The teachers/support workers within *Opportunities* did not seem to over-react with the participants and I think it was something they liked.

BOB - But you know what might be even cooler, like this might suck, but if they sort of made less work but they extended the year.

L – This program.

BOB - No no, the regular school year. But somehow you would have to deal with us getting less time off in the summer. Maybe if they would have more teachers, or if they gave us more time to get our work done.

Comment: The participants felt very passionately towards their *Opportunities* teachers.

TOPHER - No, I think if they would have more teachers like our *Opportunities* teacher it would all be a lot better.

Some of the things they mentioned were that their teachers were fun, helpful & practical.

L – Like the teachers you have in this program here.

BOB - Yeah.

L – So, you are really enjoying being in this program then?

C & TOPHER - Yes.

L – Jerry, what do you think about all of this? Do you really enjoy this program or did you like being at your other school more?

J - Enjoy it, but I also like the regular.

L – What do you think about this program?

JERRY - It is fine.

L – But it is not like your regular class?

JERRY - No. It is different.

L – Some of these questions I have here I wrote before I knew about your program. I developed these questions before I had talked with your teacher. So, some of my questions do not work too well. But, overall I get that you are telling me that you are enjoying this program? Have there been some negative aspects?

TOPHER - Yeah, sometimes. We will argue or you know...swear, swear, swear.

L – You don't get that in your other class.

TOPHER - Well you can get away with a lot more in this class. Like, if I would have done what I did in this class in my regular school I would have gotten suspended at my other school.

Comment: The program seems to be more forgiving towards the participants mistakes..

L – so they are a little more lenient?

TOPHER - yeah.

Comment: The participants emphasized that the *Opportunities* teachers were very patient with them. This is some that was vital to their success in the program.

L – What about, how did you feel the day you found out you were leaving your regular school? You were coming to this school?

TOPHER - I was angry

JERRY - After I came out of the hospital I came here.

L – You came straight here. Did you know before you went into the hospital that you were coming here?

JERRY - Yeah, I started here in March.

L – So you have been here for a long time. So, when you found out you were coming to a new school, and a new program, were you happy to hear that news?

JERRY - Yeah I didn't like my other school. The principal was really mean.

L – Do you find that is the person you are usually dealing with – the Principal?

TOPHER - Yeah my principal hates me so much.

JERRY - My principal hates me too.

BOB - I find my teacher likes me but my principal doesn't.

L – So, sometimes you get along with some people but have conflicts with others?

TOPHER - Yeah, well my principal every little thing I do she has a problem with me. When I was younger I was more of a badder, um not making really good choices, kind of kid. Now they are holding it against me. Every little thing I do I get in trouble for it.

JERRY - When I was younger I was really bad.

BOB - Yeah, may I add something? Ok, now when he goes for a break they won't let him go by himself because they are judging him on what they think he is going to do. They don't even think he is getting better.

L – They are living in your past?

TOPHER - Yeah. I was suppose to be going to a show game and the school said my mother had to come with me. I accidentally took someone's water bottle and this huge kid slammed me against the wall and ruined my sweatshirt.

L – When you are at your other school. Is it just you in your classroom or do you have someone in there working with you? Someone helping you.

TOPHER - In my other classroom I had a couple of counselors.

BOB - I had one too and I use to have EA's as well but then one day they just cut them right off.

Comment: Overall, the participants did not have good working relationships with their principals. They felt as though there were issues of power. Often the participants felt overpowered by their principals.

Comment: The students felt a power struggle at their regular school. They felt like outcasts by the staff (principals & teachers).

Comment: Sometimes the participants felt trapped by their past mistakes and reputation.

TOPHER - Yeah, we have EA's at our school too, but they are more downstairs than upstairs.

BOB - I use to have an EA full time they would watch me and help me, but as soon as I went to [another school]- boom - they took them away and just cut it right off.

Comment: Cutting of the Educational Assistants has something to do with the students entering Grade 7 & 8.

BOB - They said we rely on them too much so they took them away. My mom was right ticked off.

L - Sometimes that has to do with funding as well.

BOB - Yeah my mom said it was because they didn't want to pay them.

L - Well that is not the schools fault, that is a problem within the education system.

BOB - Yeah, but that is not right because it is affecting the kids learning.

Comment: Bob seemed so aware of the systematic problems within the education system.

TOPHER - But if they don't have the money, they don't have the money.

BOB - They have so much money, it is just what they chose to do with it.

He was so passionate the these problems are really affecting his educational experiences.

JERRY - I had to go to some counseling in the school. My grade 8 teacher thought my parents were being bad to me so they stuck [...] on me.

His responses were so mature and well articulated. I wondered if someone that he is in with close contact with is directly involved in education (either a teacher, secretary, principal, or teaching assistant).

BOB - What is that.

JERRY - Child social workers, they gave me a counselor.

L - you would go and work with your counselor or you would have talks with them and stuff.

JERRY - Sometimes they would take me bowling and stuff. They hang out with me and my brother. It stop though, he had to go away, he got sent to the Army.

L - Oh that is too bad. You don't get to spend time with him.

JERRY - I know.

L - So when you were at your other school, was it just you in the classroom or did you have someone in the classroom with you?

JERRY - I use to have a normal classroom.

L - Now I am wondering, what do you think it is going to be like when you go back to your classroom, when you are finished this program?

BOB - It is going to be hell.

Comment: I was shocked to hear curse words used to describe how the participants were going to feel when they returned to their regular classrooms.

JERRY - Yeah, the class I am going into has something like 40 kids in it.

L – So, all of you are going to stay in this program until the summer break?

BOB - Yeah. They said they are going to make the younger grades with less kids in them, but in the older grades there are so many kids in the classes.

L – you are coming up to an excellent point. With the junior grades they have reduced class sizes. So, each class will only have 15-20 students. But, the older grades (intermediate and senior) don't have that yet.

BOB - yeah and there are more issues in the older grades. It just isn't fair. The teachers who have larger classes need to take responsibility, stop complaining and accept it. If they don't like it they should get out of that.

Comment: The participants felt as though they needed more individual attention in their regular classes. With the large number of students in these classes they felt as though their needs were not being met.

L – That is a very interesting point. Do you have anything else to say? What do you think it is going to be like when you have to go back to school?

TOPHER - I think the principal is going to be all over me.

JERRY - I am going to a new school.

L – So, are you kind of excited?

JERRY - Yeah, I am excited. I am going to [a new school]. It is only a few streets away. I am excited because two of my friends go there. And, one kid I know use to go there as well.

L – So, are you excited to be in regular classroom and not to be in the *Opportunities* program anymore?

JERRY - Yeah.

L – for any reason in particular?

JERRY - No.

L – What about you Topher, what do you think?

TOPHER - I think all of the teachers are going to be watching me. They will probably think that I haven't changed.

L – What if you go there and they are watching you?

TOPHER - I am not going to get in trouble.

JERRY - Don't end up like me and get kicked out of school for a few months.

BOB - Yeah, that one principle was pissed off with you and had a grudge.

TOPHER - But that principle is going away.

BOB - But remember the principal told the vice-principle he liked you and you were so nice, but then the vice principal was so mean...

TOPHER - Oh yeah, she wasn't very nice. Even my mom noticed they was she talks about me. One time she phoned my mom and said "What he did was very bad, he is a bad kid" um "What you did was wrong and if he ever does that again he will be suspended, he is so rude." She will always say all this bad stuff about me. When my mom is there she will be so nice to her face, and then she is so mean to me.

Comment: This was more evidence of the power struggle this particular participant felt with the principal.

He felt doomed to failure and pressured by the principal.

L - It sounds like you are saying she is a little two-faced. She is saying one thing and doing another.

TOPHER - I got it on a recording and then I accidentally deleted.

L - I am going to switch the topic a little bit. I am going to talk a bit about inclusion. I am pretty sure all of you know what "inclusion" and "including" means. I am just going to read you the definition I came up with. "Inclusion means that everyone belongs. An inclusive environment is a safe place, where everyone is considered equal, and had equal *Opportunities*. An inclusive environment enables this group to have freedom of choice, freedom of voice their views and opinions." So, I just want to know if you think you have ever been in an inclusive classroom. Where you have had the freedom of choice, they freedom to voice your opinion and equal *Opportunities*?

TOPHER - No

BOB - No

TOPHER - In my other class you get made fun of. And if you do the wrong thing, sometimes you will get suspended.

Comment: I worry if suspension is an instant reaction for some of these people.

The Opportunities program was more lenient and patient with the participants.

The teachers took time to find the root of the problem and worked through it with the participants.

L - So, you find the students are not very welcoming to you? Jerry, do you feel like you have been in an inclusive classroom?

JERRY - What is an inclusive classroom?

L - Where you feel like you belong and you can express your opinion; your choice and people are not going to be treating you badly for what you say. Do you ever feel like that?

JERRY - Not really.

L – does the *Opportunities* program ever feel like that?

ALL - Yeah

BOB - Yeah, well mostly – yeah I guess.

The guys seem to be exchanging strange looks with one another

L – Basically I just want to know if you are enjoying this experience. What do you think was more inclusive, the *Opportunities* program or your experience in the regular classroom?

BOB - Actually, at my regular school you get to talk to your friends more.

TOPHER - Yeah, that is the one thing with this program.

BOB - Like the teachers are talking, or you are watching a movie you can't talk at all. You have to pay attention and listen. You can't daydream.

L – What makes you think that this program is inclusive?

TOPHER - It is way more open, and you can't tell lies and stuff.

L – So, it is pushing your core values? Are you able to express your opinion? Are you able to say, "hey I don't want to do that" are you able to say what you want?

TOPHER - Yeah, if you don't want to say something, or do something, like if you don't want to be part of a group, you can just sit at your desk. You don't always have to be a part of it. In the regular class we have to.

L – So, you can sit there, and if you don't want to talk you don't have to talk and that sort of thing?

TOPHER - I like it here because it is more hands-on work. Hands-on stuff is what I like.

L – Tell me some kinds of things.

TOPHER - We made pouches, Indian pouches. We made ring sticks. I want to be able to do more of that kind of stuff in my regular class. The thing closest to that might be something like science.

Comment: One problem with the segregated program is that it lacked social contact with other students outside of the program.

Although, I observed these students throughout the discussion and it was obvious that they had developed strong friendships with one another.

Comment: Opportunities forced students to focus on civic skills such as honesty and trust.

The program pushed these participants to question their core values.

BOB - Yeah, they should have lots of hands-on experiences in the other school. Not always paperwork and crap like that. You know stuff actually doing stuff. Some kids don't learn with that kind of stuff, they have to learn by hands-on experiences. Some kids find it a lot harder to write things down. Usually when I have to write stuff down I just write it, I don't ever have enough time to read it over after.

Comment: Bob was adamant about the necessity of hands-on experiences. He was a kinesthetic learner and it was very obvious that he valued experiments and learning by doing.

L – there have been researchers and people studying this area for many years. It is call multiple intelligences and they are things or areas that help people use their minds better.

TOPHER - Like building things and constructing things.

L – Yes, and ideally all teachers would allow for that in their classrooms. Do you feel like that is happening in your regular classrooms?

ALL - No.

L – Are you enjoying the hands on experiences Jerry?

JERRY - Yeah.

BOB - Like at our original school you don't really have hands-on experiences.

TOPHER - No you don't, you don't get anything.

Comment: Topher felt that his regular school did not satisfy his needs. He made it sounds as though none his needs were being met.

BOB - You only get to do that when you get to do experiments.

TOPHER - We get to do experiments. Like I mean science experiments.

L – Is it rotary at your school. Do you have a homeroom teacher and then switch teachers for different subjects?

TOPHER - Yeah, the grade 7 and 8's have rotary to get ready for high school and the other grades don't. I was in a grade 6/7 split so we got a separate recess.

L – Did you like that.

TOPHER - Yes, I hate having to go outside with everybody.

BOB - Yeah recess has changed, you can't do anything. You use to be able to go out and play tag and now you are not even allowed to do that. You can't do anything outside.

Comment: The participants made it sounds as though they felt restricted by all the rules and regulations in their regular schools. These were acting as barriers to their educational experiences.

L – So what do you do at recess?

BOB - We talk.

TOPHER - That is pretty much all that we are allowed to do. Like when we play soccer, the ball will go out of the school area and then the teacher will make one of us to go and get it. But, as we are coming back with the ball she will say, "Give me the ball" and then we will have to give her the ball and we can't play anymore.

Comment: I felt as though there was a power struggle occurring. The participants were feeling over-powered by their principal.

L – Now, what would you love to be doing out at recess?

TOPHER - Sports, football, hockey, ball hockey.

BOB - At my school we would play capture the flag and that was fun. Yeah you take the flag and hide it in the forest and then you run around and stuff. Now that was fun.

JERRY - Capture the flag, yeah it is great when the field is big. One team is on one side and the other team is on the other side. And you have to protect your flag.

BOB - I like playing in the forest because it is not all open and you cannot see everybody, so you can hide out and stuff. What we do is have the teacher stand in the middle and look out for both sides. It would be great if we could play a game like that at recess. Maybe not the little kids cuz they might fall and get scratched and stuff. But for us big kids it would be great.

L – now with this program you have recess, but it is separate from all the other classes. What do you think about that?

TOPHER - I don't really like it.

Comment: The fact that students do not get to participate in all school outdoor recess with the Opportunities program was very discouraging. The participants lacked social interactions with other students outside the program.

JERRY - Yeah you don't really get recess here.

TOPHER - Once we had a supply teacher and they didn't know about recess and the guys were really rough and close lined some of the other kids.

L – Do you think that is why you can't play those games at recess. Because some people abuse the rules? What do you do when something is going wrong? Do you deal with it or do you just take the privilege away? With the *Opportunities* program you are learning how to deal with all of these things right?

BOB - But if a game sucks what is the point in playing it.

TOPHER - when we play a game that sucks we try to find something to add into it to make it better.

L – OK, so this is the next question and it is kind of important. In what way is this classroom setting affecting your learning, your reading, your learning, and your understanding? So, first thing. Do you feel like you are learning in this *Opportunities* program?

TOPHER - Yes, I feel like I am learning how to control my behaviour.

BOB - I am learning how to be more social and stuff. I don't like reading a book and in the normal class I never get my work done. Most of the time here we can get our work done. In the other class I don't feel like I have enough time to get my work done and then I have to stay in at recess.

Comment: Bob demonstrated the success of this segregated program. Learning is occurring.

Students were also learning how to be more social with one another. Even if they did not realize it. They would be answering my interview questions for one another.

In some instances where they would normally get very frustrated with each other they had learned to respect each others boundaries and were actually quite fond of one another.

L – What about you Jerry, what do you think?

JERRY - Yeah I am learning. I feel like I am learning a lot.

L – What do you feel like you are learning?

JERRY - Like math and stuff?

L – Either math and other subjects, or are you learning socially or behaviorally?

JERRY - I think more social and behavioural stuff.

BOB - I just love how they have the two things, they have math/language and then they have the social/behavioural stuff. They teach us about social skills which cuts out a lot of stress because it is easier. I always get stressed out in school and this program makes me feel less stressed out. I think they should try to make it less stressful at my other school. They should take out the stuff that we will never really use in our lives and focus more on the important things. Like social skills that will help you in your social life or maybe in your bonding with people or even just talking.

Comment: These are great ways to brainstorm how to improve our education system.

It was apparent that these students had made some critical reflections on their educational experiences.

L – what would you cut out in order to do that?

BOB - What do you guys think?

L – What subjects would you cut out in order to put a more social spin on your learning?

TOPHER - None of them, all of them are important things you need to use in life. They need to find a balance. Maybe cutting every subject down by 5 minutes and then adding a social component.

BOB - Or maybe cutting them by 10 minutes – that would be so cool (said with excitement and joy).

L – Ok, let me get this straight. Let's say you have a 25 minute block. Cut it into a 20 minute block, and add the time to the end of the day where you could have a 60 minute social block.

BOB - yeah that would be awesome.

TOPHER - Not 60 minutes (ha ha ha)...but maybe 30 minutes. I wouldn't be able to sit still for 60 minutes.

The students were displaying such maturity. They were seriously considering what needed to occur in order for change to take place. They were very respectful and had some fantastic ideas.

L – No, lets say during this social period you were doing different activities, moving around, you weren't just sitting there.

BOB - One thing I know is that being in a normal class is hard. Some people are jerks, and it is hard to work with those people.

Comment: The difficulties these participants found with being in a regular class acts as a barrier to their success.

L – You don't feel included with those people?

BOB - No, No, other kids can lower your mark by lots. It is like they don't even try. If you have to work for them, then you suffer.

L – Do you all feel comfortable reading in front of your class?

CKJERRY - Yes

TOPHER - but in my other class, me and my friends are always trying to make each other laugh.

L – Do you like to perform or present in front of this class?

ALL - Yes

BOB - it depends what we have to present.

L – so I get the overall feeling that all of you are really enjoying being in this *Opportunities* class. Is that correct?

ALL - Yes

L – Now what about your needs, do you think that your needs are being adequately met here?

TOPHER - Yeah

BOB - yeah, not in the normal school though. I don't know, like, the only thing that they supply in normal classrooms it isn't enough. Not the thing, but the stuff

they do, how they interact with you. It makes you feel like you are not good enough.

Comment: Are these participants' needs being met?

JERRY - yeah I feel like my needs are being met, not really at my other school.

TOPHER - I feel the same.

L - What do you think about aid, do you think that you feel enough help when you need it.

TOPHER - Here yes, at my other school sometimes.

L - what kind of help are you usually asking for?

BOB - assistance

TOPHER - Show me how to do this properly, they always say "figure it out for yourself".

L - here?

TOPHER - No at my other school. Here they will get up, they will show us how, and if they can't they will keep trying until you get it. They will find a way. They will keep working and working and working until you figure it out.

Comment: The participants were very observant and noticed the extra time and effort their teachers made to help them specifically.

L - it is funny that you say that because I am a teacher and the first thing I say when someone asks me for help is...well for example if a student asks "how do you spell the word *Opportunities*" the first thing I would say is "sound it out"

TOPHER - Yeah but that is not what I mean. I mean with a math problem.

L - What, do you need your teacher to re-explain it.

TOPHER - No! It is not re-explaining it. It is understanding HOW to DO the problem. The foundation.

BOB - Yeah, they give you a question, but they never want to give you the answer. But, even for a test they could give you another question, they could go through it with you and explain it so that you understand how to answer it.

TOPHER - They will give you the answer, and sometimes they will go through it with you, and that really helps.

L - Jerry do you want to add anything else?

JERRY - No

L – OK, the last thing I want to ask, Topher - well I have already asked how do your teachers help and assist you? But, in what sort of ways do they help you or could they help you. You said showing you math problems, but in what other ways.

BOB - They could watch over you, well not watch over you but...like in my case, when I always get bored or down they can check in on me.

Comment: The participants seem to need a little extra attention and really appreciate it when they do receive it.

L – They could ask you how you are feeling.

BOB - No, no, I can't really explain it.

L – What about you Jerry, how do you think your teachers could help you?

JERRY - Listen to me.

L – and do they do that here?

Comment: Although they are only using a few words to capture their emotions, I find what they are saying to be very powerful.

JERRY - Yes.

L – and at your other school?

These are the things most important to them.

JERRY - No.

L – What about you Topher what do think.

TOPHER - not at the other school. Well, they do listen to you sometimes, but here they listen to you 24/7. Sometimes if you are just annoyed or something or frustrated. Here they ask you what is up and ask you if you need a break. They are so patient. At my other school they instantly tell you to be quiet right away.

L – what about giving you choice is that something that is important to you?

ALL - Yes

TOPHER - Yeah here I feel I have a lot of power.

Comment: You could see the emotion in Topher's eyes when he said "I have a lot of power." This was something very important to him.

L – you feel like you have a lot of power at this school, what about your regular school.

TOPHER - I have a little power but not as much as this school.

(Listen to students, power, choice – we are changing seats because the students were feeling uncomfortable).

L – this is great. Do you think that you are being supported effectively? How many teachers do you have?

TOPHER - We have a teacher, one aid, and 3 social workers.

Comment: The ratio of teacher to student was something all the participants were aware of. They felt this had a positive influence over their success in the program.

L – and in your regular classroom you would only have one teacher. Do you think that is something? Having more people to go to for help?

BOB - Yeah

L – So what are they doing that is right in there?

TOPHER - They listen to you. They are supportive. At the regular school some teachers don't seem to care. They don't care if you graduate. But here, they are helping you to graduate. We want to, but they are helping us make it happen.

BOB - Some of my teachers do care a lot, but it depends on the person. Some of them just want to get paid.

L – that is an interesting point.

TOPHER - I have had some teachers who are really cool and care.

Comment: The participants really emphasized how important it was to feel cared for by their teachers.

L – And that is a philosophy of teaching an ethic of care.

BOB - You just have to care. Yeah when a teacher doesn't care I bet you your marks will automatically go down.

L – you probably weren't feeling good about yourself.

JERRY - don't know.

L what about things that they can improve upon to make it better?

TOPHER - More EA's (Educational Assistants).

BOB - Or like a university student. More help in the class. Don't the university students need volunteer hours?

Comment: Bob had some very practical suggestions for improving the ratio of student to teacher/aid in the regular classroom.

L – Yeah there are lots of different positions, tutors in the classrooms, placement hours. Basically you would like to see that ratio of student to teacher to increase? Less students and more teachers.

What about here...are there any recommendations for the *Opportunities* program?

The next question is about children's rights and human rights. What you think about your rights. Technically you are still considered children, under the humans' right act – although I know that you are all young adults.

BOB - I have never really had time or wanted to think about it.

Comment: Or maybe it is just that nobody ever asked Bob about his rights as a child.

TOPHER - do your work, finish school, stay out of trouble.

Comment: Topher listed off some practical tips to follow.

L – Things...well things...you have already mentioned your rights as children. I am not too sure if you are already away of what you said, but you have mentioned your rights – to listen, communicate, to play – all these things are all your rights.

There was a long break between my question asking and their responding. The participants really had to think about how they wanted to answer these questions.

TOPHER - to have fun.

BOB - Yeah to have fun, and to not be annoying other people.

Comment: The participants did not have too much to say specifically about their rights when they were asked directly. However, throughout the entire meeting they displayed an understanding of their rights as children.

L – you should be voicing your opinion and you should have the freedom to voice your opinion in an environment where people are going to listen to you and respect what you have to say. So, respect is a human right.

The students got off topic talking about another student in their program

L – Let's switch the subject. Explain some of your rights you have as students with special needs. Each one of you told me that you have special needs so what do you think those rights are because of those needs.

Silences.....

Do you have needs?

BOB - I need more assistance and more focus. (pause) Maybe like a bright coloured room or a bright chalk board.

L – That is a great idea. Having things like that can help you.

BOB - some people are really attracted to bright colours and when they see them they really want to touch them and get involved.

L – Most people are. Think about all the signs you see when you walk down the street. Are you attracted to the dull signs or the big signs with flashing lights.

TOPHER - like going to Las Vegas. The signs in Las Vegas are awesome.

BOB - Picture neon lights or signs in the classroom.

TOPHER - that is just too colourful. Neon is too bright for me. At my school is always dark.

Comment: The participants are so self aware.

BOB - In a classroom you could have a traffic light.

L – OK, we are almost finished. Now, I want to know, each and everyone of you, are you satisfied with the way you are treated as a student? Or would you like to see any changes? If you would like to see changes express those changes.

TOPHER - More respect from teachers.

Comment: RESPECT seemed to be a major concern. It was something they did not feel they receive and therefore were always willing to give.

BOB - Yeah.

TOPHER - They should give you respect. Not all the respect in the world. But not like what my principal says – you are not going to succeed in life –

BOB - She said that?

TOPHER - Yeah

L – Those are horrible things to say, no body should ever say that to a person.

C - especially to a student.

TOPHER - She founds a way to cover up.

L – you know that you are a good student though? Don't you.

TOPHER - Yes. I think we need to and teachers need to make good choices.

BOB - I don't know. My teacher right now is pretty good.

L – is there anything you would like to see different.

BOB - Every teacher should get one of those stress-relieving balls.

Comment: They could sense their teachers stresses and this affected their learning environment.

JERRY - I am satisfied.

L – Any other comments.

BOB - You know how we are getting new teachers. If they actually checked if the teachers are good and what they are there for, if they could get teachers who actually care that would be much better.

Comment: I wonder how we could check to ensure all teachers were good before hiring them?

BOB - they should paint classrooms bright and make everything much more colorful.

TOPHER - I like white walls.

BOB - maybe they could put designs on the wall. Maybe they could paint an ocean scene. They could paint it blue...with a big wave. Make it so it inspires your imagination.

TOPHER - I don't like my principals. They are unfair. They are using what I did before against me now.

Comment: UNFAIR – this is a 'right' and I think Topher knows it, I just don't think he acknowledges it as his right.

L – Fair/unfair is a human right, you have the right to justice.

BOB - the principal doesn't give a damn.

L – Do you have a question on this research study, on what is going to happen next, or your participation with the study?

BOB - How is this going to reflect on our teachers?

L – Hopefully it will be used to make changes for the better.

THE END

Transcript # 2

The second focus group discussion took place on Thursday October 18th 2007. It took place with 2 more students from the *Opportunities Program*. Although it took place at a different school, and in a different classroom the teacher and support workers were the same. We also had the conversation in a small supply room right next door to the participants' classroom. This room had an adjoining door to their class that their teachers warned should be used if the students were to get out of hand. The room had two beanbag chairs and one metal chair. The students were very happy to be able to sit on the beanbags and chat about their educational experiences. The participants were a little shy at first and it took them some time to warm up to me, however overall they made a

significant contribution to this research. They participated willingly and were very kind to one another and myself.

The letter L – signifies when the researcher (Larysa) is talking/asking questions. Otherwise, the participants' pseudonyms are used to identify their voice. The symbols [...] will be used to delete any identifying information.

Focus Group Discussion #2

DEE - I am in grade 9, well grade 8 and I am 15 years old.

JHONY - I am in grade 7 and I am 11...ha ha ha no actually I am 12.

Comment: Jhony started off joking from the beginning. He was such a kind young man that I couldn't imagine how he ended up in a program like Opportunities.

L – Have you ever been told that you have a difficulty that teachers need to consider in order to help you? Do you have a problem in class or anything like that?

DEE - No

L – Not parents, teachers, or principles?

JHONY - No

L – Why do you think you are in this program?

JHONY - No, yeah, well. Because of my behaviour.

L – What was your behaviour like?

JHONY - Impolite, not nice, rude.

Comment: He knows exactly what he is doing.

Comment: He seemed to have such an attitude here. He is choosing to act out and be "rude". But why?

They participants gave very short answers to my questions. Sometimes I had to clarify words and provide explanations so they could understand my questions.

L – Are those things you can control.

JHONY - I bet I could control them but I don't want to.

Comment: This young man had an interesting perspective. He felt as though he was in this program because he was kicked out of school. The only way they were going to let him go to high school was if he was able to learn to read and to control his behaviours.

L – Do you know why you are here?

DEE - I was kicked out of high school, so they made me come here.

JHONY - He is probably always....he is [...].

L – Do you have some behavioural problems as well?

JHONY - Yeah, negative behaviour.

L – *Opportunities* is considered a segregated classroom.

These students seemed unaware of their specific needs...

L – how long have you both been here.

JHONY - this is only my second week here.

DEE - this is my fourth.

L – Are you missing being in your old class or do you like being here?

JHONY - I like it here.

DEE - I do too.

Making some jokes...these guys are so funny.

JHONY - I don't get bossed around. I don't get told what to do. I don't care about the other students.

L – how many of you are there in this class?

JHONY - 3...at least there were 3.

L – How did it make you feel when you were told you have to leave your other class and come to *Opportunities*?

JHONY - My teacher told me, I was so mad, I was furious. I was so mad. I haven't seen any of my friends. Except this guy.

DEE - I was taken out of school from the cops and came straight here.

L – Have you ever been in a program like this at your other schools or been taken out of your regular class to get help?

DEE - Yes. They had a program like this. It wasn't here in town it was on my reserve.

JHONY - I haven't been in a class like this.

Comment: Jhony was so comical. He was going on about how he is not able to see his friends and he was stuck in the same class with Dee.

But, by my observations these two students had developed quite a friendship while they were in the program together. They knew how to joke with one another and how to make each other laugh.

L – Did you ever have a teacher or an EA come into the class to help you or pull you out of the class?

DEE & JHONY - Yes, last year and other years.

L – Are you looking forward to going to your regular class?

JHONY - I am going to be sad because this is like my home.

Comment: Jhony felt so comfortable in this environment he called it his home.

DEE - I am excited to leave here because I am going to go to high school.

Comment: Dee was really looking forward to graduating from the program so he could go to high school.

L – do you know what inclusion means?

JHONY - That isn't in my vocabulary.

L – Inclusion means everyone belongs. An inclusive environment is a safe place, where everyone is considered equal, and has equal opportunities. An inclusive environment enables this group of people to have freedom of choice, and freedom to express their views or opinions. Have you ever been in an inclusive classroom?

JHONY - Here I do. I guess when I am with my friends. But not when my teacher is there.

DEE - No, I don't know, no.

L – That is what I working towards. Finding an environment when students feel included. Do you enjoy being in this class?

JHONY & DEE - yeah.

L – What do you think is more inclusive?

JHONY & DEE - *Opportunities.*

Comment: Both students answered simultaneously – This made me think that a purposefully segregated program can actually be more inclusive than what our education system is calling 'inclusive classrooms'.

L – What makes your other class less inclusive?

JHONY - My teacher, he doesn't let me go to gym, he doesn't let me play on the computer, and he suspended me one day for coming to school with out a backpack. Two days in a row some kid came to school without a backpack, some little, rich, white girl and she never got suspended.

Comment: There was a power struggle between this student and his teacher.

L – this is where equality is obviously playing a role for you.

JHONY - I am rich, brown boy, I am not trying to be racist, it was true she was rich and she was white.

Jhony felt that his regular classroom environment was unfair/unequal and this is a children's human rights concern.

L – What about you DEE, what made it less inclusive.

DEE - It was boring.

L – Now, you said you think *Opportunities* is inclusive. What about recess? You don't get to go outside for recess with anyone; you don't get to eat lunch with the other students.

JHONY - It doesn't matter. This is not our school we are just here for the program.

Comment: He can excuse things he doesn't like about the program because he knows it is not a permanent placement.

L – That is a good point. How much longer are you here for?

JHONY - 2 or 3 more weeks.

DEE - next semester

L – is it based on your behaviour?

JHONY - yes.

L – in *Opportunities*, do you feel like you are learning in this classroom?

JHONY - Do we get grades in this classroom, with *Opportunities*?

Comment: I think that the fact the *Opportunities* did not focus on marks that the students felt it was not something they had to worry about... or even think about.

L – I don't know how that works but I think it is based on your behaviour. What do you learn about?

JHONY - Just having fun.

L – Do you feel comfortable enough to read in this class?

DEE - No, if I was alone I would be more comfortable.

L – What about presenting in front of everyone.

JHONY - I feel comfortable everywhere.

DEE - No, I need to work on that.

L – overall are you feeling comfortable being here?

DEE - no.

L – now what about your regular class, do you feel like you are learning there? What are you learning about.

JHONY - math, science, history, English, spelling.

L – are you learning that here to.

JHONY - No, I am just learning math and English. The basic skills I will need in life.

Comment: Focus on civic goals of our education system. The program had a smaller academic workload and focused more on social/behavioural skills.

L – What about you Dee.

DEE - no, I was always being sent to the office.

L – who was sending you there?

DEE - the teachers, that was frustrating. I didn't feel comfortable in that class.

Comment: Constant struggle between teacher & student and principal & student.

L – Overall did you enjoy that class?

JHONY - yeah, I just didn't like the vice principal and some of the students.

L – you told me that you have some behavioural difficulties you have to work out. Do you feel like your teachers are helping you?

JHONY - Here they are helping me.

DEE - yeah.

JHONY - At my other school sometimes I could use some more help. Like in science. I need help with science.

L – How could you have stayed out of the office?

DEE - Just sit in class and be quiet. I was picking on everyone. Grabbing people and hurting them.

L – I don't picture the two of you to be like this. You are both so kind. What happens when you get into the school?

JHONY - We just go at it. They started and we want to finish it (hands pounding their fists).

Comment: These students did not seem to be the slightest bit aggressive. I could not even imagine them acting out or getting in fights. However, they believe that is the reason they are in this segregated program.

L – Something must be happening to cause you to do this.

Jhony is teasing Dee

L – OK, Do you receive enough help so that you feel comfortable with all your subject areas.

JHONY - Not science. Ha Ha ha.

They started to be silly

DEE - I need more help.

L – how do your teachers and teaching assistants help you?

DEE - I don't know they just help me.

JHONY - We only have assistance in math and English. They don't help us with anything else. They just go over things with us.

L – do you find that frustrating?

JHONY - yeah, I don't know how to do science.

L – in your opinion, do your teachers help you enough?

JHONY - The male teachers don't help me. I hate the male teachers and the male assistants. Some of them are OK but most of them I hate.

DEE - The teachers help me a little bit.

L – what are they doing right?

JHONY - These teachers are helping us. They are nice, they are kind, they don't boss you around, and they don't tell you what to do. They make us do our math but they don't say "get your math book out right now or else I am going to send you home!"

Comment: Science seems to be a struggling subjects for these students.

In my personal experience have observed numerous Gr. 7/8 teachers science lessons and often they have students read about a subject and answer questions directly from a text. This is a difficult method for these students to excel at and I believe that is part of the problem.

Comment: Care and compassion is what seems to make a difference with these students.

Asked verses Demanded - giving a voice is empowering

D - I am coming to school, doing my work, and I am not getting into trouble.

Jhony leaves to use the toilet laughing and giggling

L – What are they doing right here? [...]?

DEE - they are telling me not to do that. I am coming to school.

L – What do you think they can improve upon?

DEE - Learn to read better, and learn to write better.

Comment: This student felt failed by the system because he was entering Grade 9 and he still had trouble reading and writing.

L – If you could change your classroom what would you do?

DEE - I don't know?

Jhony returns

JHONY - Did I miss anything?

L – If you could change your classroom what would you do?

JHONY - There are a lot of things I would like to say, but I don't want to say it.

L – don't be afraid to say it, be bold.

JHONY - Can it include [...]?

L – No you have to be realistic.

JHONY - I would get all the science stuff I see on TV with tubes and stuff. With green stuff and blue stuff and orange stuff and it would be all bubbly. Then I would throw a rock at it and it would go poooff. My hair would be spiked and my face would be black.

Comment: This was such a descriptive explanation. It was obvious this student was craving stimulation in his classes.

DEE - kinda like a cartoon.

JHONY - OK, the science thing I said. I would like 20 teachers, 20 students, and 20 assistants.

Comment: Equal ratio of students to teachers. This student was expressing his need for one-on-one attention.

L – Equal number are important for you.

JHONY - I would be a professional teacher/principal/student/EA. I would go to college and by 13 I would be all that.

L – So you don't have anything in your class specifically that you would like to change? You mentioned that your teacher is a problem, how would you change that?

JHONY - I would send him to the grave. Well not really a grave. But he wouldn't be teaching anymore and I would fire him officially.

Comment: Jhony did not have a good relationship with his teacher. You could see all the emotion in his face. It really upset him.

L – This one is an important. I am talking about human rights. Explain your rights you have as children.

JHONY - I have a right to eat food.

DEE - Umm...I have the right to have clothes. |

JHONY - I have the right to take a shower and be clean and not be one of those greasy guys.

DEE - A hobo.

L – you have the right to a home.

Off track talking about slang

L – Explain some of the rights you have as students with behavioural difficulties? Do you think you have special rights?

JHONY - We have rights to bud in front of people in line to go to a hockey game.

Comment: The participant did have this happen to him but he did not let them bud in front of him, instead he explained that he "told them off."

L – you do have the right to learn.

L – are you satisfied as a student with a special need?

DEE - yes.

L – Is there anything you would like to see change? Do you have any additional comments?

JHONY - Why did you want to talk to us and about *Opportunities*?

L – I wanted to pick a program that was involved with students who have behavioural difficulties.

DEE - Is there more people in this interview.

L – Yes, 3 others.

THE END

Verification Notes

Verification took place with the participants over the period of three days, December 4th – 7th 2007. All the participants seemed intrigued to read over the material collected during the focus group discussions. A few minor changes were made to the original transcripts to accurately portray the participants' perspectives. Furthermore, minor changes were also made to respect the privacy of the participants.

Bob is now in high school. He is enjoying the new atmosphere however he misses *Opportunities*. "I loved *Opportunities*. It was so much fun." He thinks it was the teachers who really made the program fun. Bob made a great friend in *Opportunities* and has not been in touch with him since the end of June. He really misses his friend and is desperate to be in contact with him. The teacher of *Opportunities* explained that some of the participants have difficulties making and keeping friends. She believes that *Opportunities* is often the students' only opportunity to make friends.

Topher is back at his regular school as well. It just so happens that his regular school is the same school the *Opportunities* program moved to. Now that *Opportunities* runs out of his regular school, Topher has an agreement with his principal and teachers that he can visit the *Opportunities* classroom when he needs a break. This is a privilege that Topher really enjoys. Topher did mention that when he returned to his regular school he did feel like he was always being watched. Furthermore, he wishes he could go back to *Opportunities* because it was so fun.

Topher felt as though *Opportunities* provided him with the variety he needs in his day-to-day activities at school. Now in his regular class he feels it is too monotonous. He explained that all he does not is "sit down, do your work, next class. Sit down, do your work, next class. Sit down, do your work, next class..."

He felt *Opportunities* was lots of fun and the teacher was the main reason it was so much fun.

My question here is – How can we have more teachers like her in our regular schools? Is it her personality, training, or both?

Jerry is at a new regular school. He thinks everything is going pretty well. However, he made some great friends in the *Opportunities* program and he has not been able to see them since he graduated from the program. He really misses his friends and the program itself. He felt the teacher really made it fun. He has one friend at his new school that he knew from before. But, he still hasn't seen his best friend from his old school in a long, long time. His best friend is at the school Jerry was at before *Opportunities*. Jerry explained that he likes having recess again because "it gives [him] time to hang out with his friends."

The participants who partook in the first focus group discussions in June 2007 had returned to their regular classroom placements. This follow up meeting provided insight into their current situation at the regular school. The participants who partook in the second focus group discussion in October are still enrolled in the *Opportunities* program. These two participants' perspectives of the program varied a little.

Jhony is still in the *Opportunities* program. He explained it as being "awesome and fun." Jhony did not like the program as much at first, but now he does not want to leave. He expressed that "it is the teachers who make it so much fun."

Dee is also still in the *Opportunities* program. He feels more comfortable in the program. However, he is still looking forward to graduating from the program and moving on to high school.

The most prominent message relayed by these participants was that *Opportunities* is so much fun. All five participants repeated this to me over and over again. It was obvious by their facial expressions and body language that the program energized them. When I asked them to explain their answers they could not describe it any other way. They did express that the teachers were the reason the program was so successful and so much fun.