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# Pathways to Inclusion: Organizational Practices and Collaboration in the Least Restrictive Environment in a High School in Northern California

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## Abstract

In the United States, the provision to educate all students with disabilities in their least restrictive environment (LRE) is outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). One way to support students' education in their LRE is through a two-teacher inclusion (one special and one general educator) class. However, despite its potential benefits, the creation, implementation and support of LREs through inclusion classes have many challenges. In this research, an exploratory case study approach provided an opportunity to investigate the experiences of the principal, an assistant principal, and teachers in relation to the creation and implementation for LREs at Florence High School in Sheppard High School District (located in Northern California). The school name and district have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

In total, there were ten participants in this study, including the principal, one assistant principal, and eight current and former inclusion teachers (special and general educators) from Florence High School have been included in the study as participants. Transcripts from participant interviews were analyzed in order to identify themes and patterns. The results of this study suggest that teachers and as well as the principal and assistant principal in this study are committed to supporting all students. However, teachers face obstacles in the implementation of LREs such as minimal professional development, a lack of time for collaboration to support student learning. Additionally, teachers at this school are seeking more opportunities to discuss schedules and partnerships. The recommendations are intended to provide insight into the organizational practices that support the inclusion model of teaching in an effort to effectively inform future relevant decision-making and expand inclusion at Florence High School.

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## Chapter 1

The U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which was amended in 2004, guaranteed students a free appropriate public education in the child's least restrictive environment (LRE). Based on the IDEA (2004), students should be provided the maximum supports possible to aid them in being educated in their LRE. After this amendment, some educators became interested in ways to move more students into general education classes. The topic of including students with special needs in general education classrooms has been present in literature for some time (Bailey & du Plessis, 1997; Keys, Hanley-Maxwell, & Capper, 1999) and continues to remain relevant.

Inclusion classrooms are one model for addressing the mandate for LREs. An inclusion classroom adheres to a philosophy of accepting students, families and educators, celebrating diversity and valuing the education of all learners in high quality general education classrooms and schools (Hornby, 2014). An inclusion class is also an environment where "advocates of inclusion work collaboratively to create a unified educational system" (Salend, 2011, p. 7).

Another approach to meeting students' need for placement in the LRE is known as "mainstreaming." Although inclusion grew out of mainstreaming and the two share many goals such as fostering academic and social development of students, there are significant differences between them (Salend, 2011). The mainstreaming approach involves the full or partial participation and placement of *selected* special education students' in a general education class, based on readiness, as determined by teachers (Salend, 2011).

According to Salend (2011), the primary differences between inclusion and mainstreaming is that in an inclusion environment, *all* students have full access to general education and in the mainstreaming approach *some* students have selected access to general education classes. Selection suggests that some students are not ready or do not possess the ability to participate in general education. Mainstreaming focuses on the idea that a student must demonstrate readiness, so students who are not selected remain outside the general education setting (Salend, 2011). The existence of special education classes and the use of categories to differentiate students, suggest that differences are deficiencies, which can affect the ability to include students successfully (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Kozleski, Artiles, & Waitoller, 2014). An inclusion classroom also requires a paradigm shift from working individually to a more collaborative approach. This model would prevent sending special education students out of the general education classroom for differentiated instruction (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2016).

Salend (2011) describes the philosophy of inclusion as follows:

Inclusion is a philosophy that brings students, families, educators and community members together to create schools based on acceptance, belonging and community. Inclusionary schools welcome, acknowledge, affirm and celebrate the value of all learners by educating them together in high-quality, age-appropriate general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools. (p.7)

The principles of inclusion involve: equal access to all learners; recognition of individual strengths, challenges and diversity; reflective practices and differentiated instruction; and community involvement and collaboration (Salend, 2011). The first principle involves granting access to all learners in the school to participate in classes and activities

regardless of any markers of difference (Salend, 2011). Another principle involves sensitivity and an awareness of the individual strengths and differences of learners (Salend, 2011). Inclusionary practices involve the promotion of equity, acceptance, collaboration and responsiveness to individual needs (Salend, 2011). With inclusion, educators must demonstrate an ability to be reflective of practices and create flexible, responsive classrooms that accommodate student needs (Salend, 2011). Lastly, the inclusion philosophy is all encompassing and involves a collaborative community of practitioners, individuals and families (Salend, 2011).

While the IDEA does not mandate the inclusion of students with disabilities, it makes a presumption favouring them (Crockett & Kauffman, 1998). The IDEA states that to the greatest extent possible special education students should be educated with non-disabled peers by being placed in an LRE (IDEA, 2004). According to Salend (2011), schools must provide a continuum of service options and should quickly try to move students to the least restrictive environment (typically the general education classroom). Schools should only move to more restrictive options when strictly necessary, such as when the student's academic performance warrants such placements. The LRE and the philosophy of inclusive schools both attempt to keep students in general education while providing the necessary supports (Salend, 2011). This inclusive approach to education reflects the principles of the LRE outlined in the IDEA because it involves the participation of families and communities, as well as the maximum involvement of students in academic and non-academic activities (Salend, 2011).

The philosophy of inclusion can be understood through a social justice lens. Social justice can be viewed in a variety of ways, but most commentators on the topic

(e.g., Ryan, 2013) agree that it involves legitimacy, fairness, and welfare for those who have historically been oppressed. Additionally, social justice can be achieved when underserved individuals are included in social practices and/or processes in a meaningful way, including processes of schooling (Ryan, 2006). For example, ensuring that individuals who have been denied voice and participation obtain fair recognition and have resources including social goods and services (Ryan, 2013). It is also important to examine the structures that interfere with recognition and distribution for disadvantaged individuals within institutions and society. Ryan (2006) argues that making structures more horizontal and equitable, as well as removing unfair barriers, is necessary in order to move towards inclusive practices.

Social justice and inclusion in education are significant fields of study and it is valuable to discuss the relationship between the two concepts. Social justice is a platform for scholars, educators and individuals to challenge inequitable policies and practices that have been oppressive to underrepresented groups (Ryan, 2013). Additionally, conceptualizations of social justice lead to an awareness of the need to remedy inequalities by giving a voice (or participation) to those with less power or who are less advantaged in society (Mertens, 2007). Inclusion is intimately related to basic components of social justice, specifically recognition and re-distribution for disadvantaged individuals and groups (Ryan, 2013). Inclusion means acknowledgement and equal access to the resources within an organization, as seen through the practices and policies of an institution. One of the primary goals of inclusion is to empower those who are not advantaged by providing a voice for representation of different viewpoints and experiences (Mertens, 2007).

Exploring the challenges of achieving fully inclusive classrooms could be used to critically transform the field of education and to encourage individuals to take a stand for social justice (Marshall, 2004). Recent literature related to the role of leadership for social justice aims to understand the impact educational leaders have on improving opportunities and removing barriers for students (Ryan, 2006). Reflecting on current practices with the intention to move towards fairness for all learners is an important element of what Ryan (2006) has called “inclusive leadership.” According to Ryan (2006) the vision of inclusive leaders is consistent with critical theory, which challenges the status quo in the attempt to rectify unfair conditions. As Ryan (2006) states, “not everyone does well in our educational institutions and not everyone is equally advantaged in our communities” (p. 4). At Florence High School understanding all of the challenges towards inclusion could help the leadership team in establishing communities that are inclusive to all members.

### **Positionality**

Bourke (2014) states that positionality describes the researcher’s role in the context of the research. According to Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Kee, Ntseane and Muhamad (2001), a researcher’s position is complex and there may be fluidity between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status’ (Merriam et al., 2001). Given my previous teaching experiences and my current role as a teacher at Florence High School, I consider myself to be an “insider” to this research. However, I also consider myself to be an “outsider,” as I am not a principal or assistant principal.

As I entered into this research, I reflected on the personal and professional experiences that have shaped my position. I began my teaching career as a general

education teacher approximately twelve years ago. Within the first five years of my career, I taught in three different countries including, Canada, the United States, and Korea. These experiences heightened my awareness of different educational perspectives and have aided me in becoming a more reflective educator and researcher. Experiencing different cultures and observing a variety of approaches to working with students with special needs provided me with a comparative lens on issues of inclusion.

Since the beginning of my teaching career, I sought to provide a classroom environment that was inclusive for all students. However, early in my teaching career I was impacted by a personal experience. A close relative was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and was placed in special education. That was a key moment in time for me and it was particularly enlightening for me as an educator. As a family member, I observed both her personal and educational obstacles. As a result, I was inspired to learn more about teaching diverse learners in the general education setting. Specifically, I was very interested in understanding how to meet the unique needs of learners in the general education setting. Eventually, I also earned my special education certification and am currently still teaching in that field, which provided me with yet another perspective as I gained exposure to the world outside of the general education classroom. I am aware of my individual self and social position and attempt to account for these biases through reflection of my own research and practices. Through reflexive questioning and continuous reflection of my research (Bourke, 2014), I attempt to acknowledge my own biases and move towards an objective perspective in this work.

## Statement of the Problem

According to Ryan (2006), many obstacles exist when attempting to create a more inclusive school community such as the reluctance to recognize or acknowledge exclusionary practices, resistance, or cynicism towards attempts to empower disadvantaged people. Even well meaning school leaders would face many challenges (Ryan, 2006).

In 2014-2015, the State of California recommended that approximately 50% of students remain with their non-disabled peers for more than 80% of the day (Sheppard School District internal reports). However, only 28.9% of students fell in this category (Sheppard School District internal reports). The State also recommended that no more than 24.6% of students remain with their non-disabled peers for less than 40% of the day (Sheppard School District internal reports). At Sheppard School District, 31.3% of students were into the latter category (Sheppard School District internal reports). The table below reflects these statistics.

**Table 1 Sheppard High School LRE Percentages**

Measure	State Recommendations	Sheppard School District	Target Met
A. > 80%	>49.2%	28.9%	No
B. < 40%	<24.6%	31.3%	No

\*A. Inside of the regular class 80% or more of the day

B. Inside regular class less than 40% of the day

\* Chart Adapted from Sheppard School District Internal Documents

A significant challenge at Florence High School is that in the school year 2014-2015, there were only two inclusion classes (Biology and Algebra) and in 2015-2016, there were only four classes (Biology, Geometry, Algebra, and World Literature). Furthermore, only 18 of the 175 special education students in 2015-2016 were enrolled in

an inclusion class (Florence High School internal reports). There is urgency in addressing this matter, as IDEA (2004) mandates education in the LRE for all special needs students.

So as the initiative is growing, the school is in need to understand the factors that contribute to the creation and support for LREs. This research study explores how Florence High School implemented LREs in inclusion classrooms through an analysis of the experiences of the principal, assistant principal and teachers in the creation, implementation and support of LREs.

Another major challenge in the implementation of inclusion classes at this site is the way in which teacher roles are understood. Despite the existence of many models for general and special education teachers to function in the classroom, it is surprising that there is a heavy emphasis on the one teach-one assists and one teach-one-observes models of co-teaching. The presence of these limited strategies for co-teaching partnerships in the school suggests that there is a need to learn from the organizational practices that promote these co-teaching models in order to break away from the reliance of these approaches.

According to Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger (2010), there are many co-teaching models of inclusion, such as:

1. One teach-one observes: one teacher teaches the class and the other teacher gathers data about the students.
2. Station teaching: students are divided into groups, teachers work in stations and one group of students work independently.
3. Parallel teaching: students are divided into groups teaching the same material and provide differentiation.



4. Alternative teaching: one teacher teaches most students and another teacher re-teaches or pre-teaches concepts to another group.
5. Teaming: two teachers teach a group of students simultaneously.
6. One teach - one assist: one teacher leads instruction and the other teacher provides support to students. (Friend et al., 2010).

**Figure 1 Co-teaching Approaches**

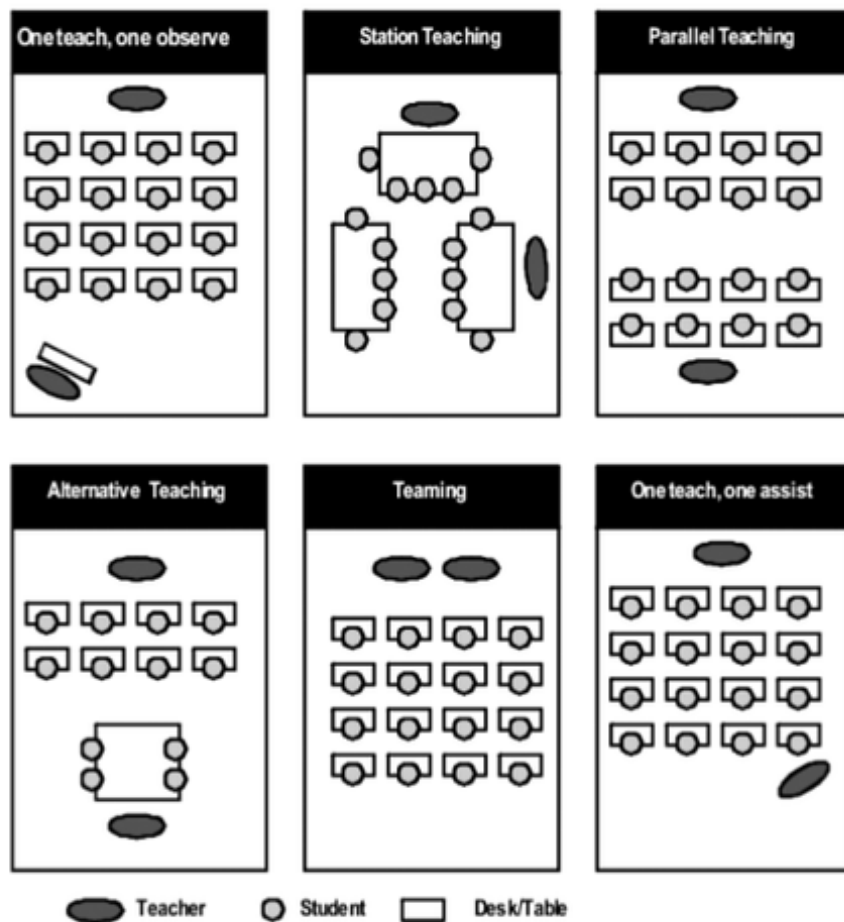


Figure 1: This figures illustrates the various approaches to co-teaching From M. Friend & W. D. Bursuck, 2009, Including Students With Special Needs: A Practical Guide for Classroom Teachers (5th ed., p. 92). Columbus, OH: Merrill.

The prevalence of the one-teach-and-one-assist model has become scrutinized, as there is a potential for under-utilization of teacher skills (Friend et al., 2010). For example, in a study on co-teaching, Harbort et al. (2007) found that special education

teachers spent approximately 45% of their time “monitoring” (watching) students. More research into the value of this monitoring may be needed to understand whether this is a worthwhile use of teacher time. Indeed, the one teach-one assist model, whereby the special educator typically assumes the assist role (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007) can occur when planning time is scarce, because it requires less preparation (Friend & Cook, 2007).

Inclusive classes with a special and general educator may include a division of labour whereby special educators perform tasks deemed time-consuming, unsuitable or problematic (homework assignments, discipline, or provide reinforcement) for general educators (Wood, 1998). According to Murawski and Bernhardt (2016), classes that require strategic approaches from a special education teacher require more than just monitoring; aids or assistants would be more appropriate for classes in which students do not require extensive support. Additionally, the one teach-one assist model does not necessarily address the need for individualization required in the IDEA (Wood, 1998). The IDEA (2004) explains that in order to ensure free appropriate public education, special education students must receive “specially designed instruction” (Sec. 300.39). This type of instruction may involve adapting content, methodology or adjusting the delivery of instruction to ensure that the child can access general education curriculum (IDEA, 2004).

According to Mulford (2008) school leaders face a complex, changing, and challenging landscape ahead. As the future of education is not certain due to multiple reforms and social changes (Australian Council of Deans of Education [ACDE], 2004; Leadbeater, 2005), school structures may need to be rethought. As such, school leaders

need to be part of a conversation about how to navigate these challenges (Mulford, 2008). According to Fullan (2001), effective leadership has a purpose to “make a difference” and mobilize people to take on difficult issues. Creating a school culture in which teachers are willing to tackle the demanding task of ensuring that all students are educated in the LRE may involve new strategies and ways of looking at the issue.

One change in education that is significant for school leaders is the increased focus on providing a high quality education for special education students (Ball & Green, 2014). Special education programs and inclusion models can appear different depending on the site, the school needs, and the resources. As far as Florence High School is concerned, there are two prevalent models of inclusion teaching: the one teach–one assist and the one teach-one observe model of teaching. Both models occur flexibly in the classroom based on the needs of the students, their behaviour, or the planned classroom activities. For example, if students are taking a quiz, one teacher may deliver the instructions while the other teacher observes. However, if students have questions, or need extended time based on Individualized Education Plan (IEP) accommodations, the model may shift to the one teach - one assist model, where the special education teacher monitors students or implements individual accommodations, as outlined in a student’s IEP. Given that student needs and behaviours are, in most cases, spontaneous, the models of teaching can respond and adapt to the classroom circumstances.

To help understand the problem of practice in this study, namely, the implementation of LREs in inclusion classrooms, it is useful to consider Bolman and Deal’s (2013) organizational frameworks. Specifically, the role of the *structural*, *human resources*, *symbolic*, and *political* frames are useful in understanding the organizational

structure of the school and its relation to the implementation of LREs in inclusion classrooms (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The *structural* framework would show us that a school organized around a one-teacher classroom could contribute to challenges in promoting strategies to implement LREs. From a *human resource* perspective, finding teachers with the skillset to provide content instruction or differentiated instruction, in addition to having strong collaborative skills, could help with providing adequate supports for students. From a *symbolic frame* perspective the development of a shared vision for inclusion within the organization would be fundamental (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This final frame is central to the creation of LREs for students as there may be conflicting personal viewpoints on the placement of special education students. Lastly, the *political frame* presents another consideration regarding the placement of students in the LRE. Namely, where power lies and which voices are heard could complicate further issues of student placement or teacher assignments (Bolman & Deal, 2013). These frames will be explored in more detail in the Theoretical Framework chapter.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Based on an analysis of the experiences of the principal, assistant principal and teachers in this study, this research aims to investigate how LREs have been implemented in Florence High School. In order to examine the creation and implementation of LREs in inclusion classrooms, I have chosen the case study approach. A case study can provide in depth exploration of a given topic and provide a holistic view. This method allows for an exploration of the contextual conditions specific to a given site (Yin, 2009).

Given that I have explored this issue using the case study model, it follows that the immediate significance of this study is specific to the context of Florence High

School. However, there may be a future potential of influencing other schools within the district as well as the possibility of a comparative study in another jurisdiction.

Understanding the challenges associated with creating and supporting LREs, will ultimately affect further implementation strategies. In understanding the obstacles that teachers perceive and/or face, the administration can become more knowledgeable about creating LREs for students at Florence High School. This study, although focused on the context of one school, has the potential to contribute to the literature in the field of educational leadership.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guide this study are:

1. How and by whom are LREs implemented at Florence High School?

*Sub-question 1:* What are the classroom practices of teachers at Florence School that support the creation and implementation of LREs?

*Sub-question 2:* What organizational structures support the implementation of LREs by teachers in Florence High School?

2. How do teachers, the principal and assistant principals experience the implementation of LREs in Florence High School?

*Sub-question:* What can the principal and assistant principals in charge of implementing LREs in Florence High School learn from these experiences?

## **Definition of Key Policy Terms**

**Child with a Disability.** According to the IDEA (2004), a child with a disability means a child evaluated in accordance with Sec. Sec. 300.304 through 300.311 as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as “emotional disturbance”), an orthopaedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (Part 300/A/ 300.8).

Categories and definitions may vary across jurisdictions, however, it is important to understand how the term is used in policy such as IDEA and also in literature. There are challenges to the single definition of the term “disability” (Wong, 2011). For example, the term “learning disability” is used to refer to a class of academic challenges a given child exhibits when trying learning skills in such areas as reading or mathematics (Kamphaus, 2005). Although the preferred term “exceptionality” is commonly used in Canada, the term “disability” is used in the U.S. IDEA policy and is commonly used by the participants in this study and therefore will also be used in the context of this study.

**Individualized Education Plan (IEP).** An IEP is a written document, which outlines the educational plan for a student in special education. The plan includes the present levels of performance for the child, measurable goals related to the student’s academic and functional performance, written accommodations and modifications (if necessary) available for the student. Additionally, the IEP outlines all related services, and aids to support the student. The IEP also includes a statement guaranteeing a student

education in the LRE (IDEA, 2004, Sec. 300, (d) (320)). The IEP team includes the following individuals: the student, the students' parents; at least one general education teacher; at least one special education teacher; agency members (as requested by the parent), service personnel and the student (as appropriate) (IDEA, 2004).

**Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).** The United States Department of Education (2016) defines the term as follows:

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities. (para. 1)

**Least restrictive environment (LRE).** Under the IDEA of 2004, the LRE is explained as follows:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (Sec. 612, (a) (5))

According to the IDEA's description of the LRE it is clear that to the maximum extent possible, students should be educated with their non-disabled peers (Rozalski, Miller & Stewart, 2011). Educating students with peers who are not disabled assumes that this education will take place in a general education setting (Rozalski et al., 2011). At the same time, the IDEA (2004) wording for LRE does not state that students must *always* be placed in a general education setting. Specifically, the LRE definition states that "whenever possible" students are educated with non-disabled peers, which acknowledges that a placement depends on the needs of the individual child (Rozalski et al., 2011). As such, the definition allows an option for students to be placed outside of the general education class if that setting is deemed to be inappropriate for the given child. IEP teams are responsible for placement decisions on the student's needs (Rozalski et al., 2011).

IDEA states that students should be educated with their non-disabled peers so students with disabilities have the *presumptive right* to be educated with non-disabled peers (Rozalski et al., 2011). The exception to this case only occurs when the severity or type of disability (as determined by the IEP team) does not allow for full inclusion, that is, when the education in the regular classes (including the use of aids and services) cannot be satisfactorily delivered (IDEA, 2004). According to Rozalski et al., (2011), it is valuable to consider strategies that can make the task of educating diverse learners together more manageable. As the demands for teachers are increasingly complex, it has become necessary to look at collaborative approaches to working with all students in the general education setting (Rozalski et al., 2011).



**Special education.** Under the IDEA of 2004, special education is explained as follows: Special education is “specially designed instruction” which is intended to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability at no cost to the parents. IDEA, 2004, Sec. 300 (a) (39)

At Florence High School, special education is a service in which students with an IEP receive a case manager (or special education teacher) who supports the student and ensures that the IEP is implemented. Special education classes at Florence High School consist of a small group of students (typically less than 16 students who are chronologically similar in age) taught in the same class, using a “pull out’ model where students are removed from general education and curriculum is modified from the original standards. While special education credits at Florence High School count towards a high school diploma, they are not accepted towards admission requirements for four-year college or university programs. Special education students who earn general education credits are eligible for college and university attendance, depending on grades and college admission requirements, which vary from school to school.

### **Organizational Context**

With over two thousand students in this high-performing school, teachers and the principal and assistant principals at Florence High School are aware of the need to provide a thoughtful and challenging curriculum. According to the school’s programmatic document, entitled *High Standards for All*, the curriculum at Florence High School strives to be rigorous, guaranteed, and viable. Rigorous implies that it engages students on all levels—their heart, hands, and head (*High Standards for All*). A guaranteed curriculum means that all students receive a similar curriculum and that all

team members are responsible for supporting all students. The course teams collaborate to collectively develop a strong program and intervene with supports for students as necessary.

The *High Standards for All* philosophy of the school means that staff strives to keep learning for all students as the constant, and the supports for students as the variable. *High Standards for All* also means that the staff is committed to high standards of learning and achievement for all of the students within the school, and as such, the success of all students in the school is important. The guiding principles of the *High Standards for All* philosophy are:

- *All students* are expected to learn at high levels.
- *Some students* will need more support and time to achieve those levels of learning. As a system, we do **whatever it takes** to create the time and provide the support for students to learn.
- *We don't give up* on kids. We reach out to encourage, support, prod, nudge, and require them to do their best.
- *All adults* in the PLCs are continuing to learn and grow. We are constantly striving to get better as individuals, teams, and systems in meeting student needs.
- We believe in a growth mindset for all of us—adults and teens—and support one another in learning.

A variety of interventions and supports are available to students, such as: special education, Avid (a program for students who will be first generation college students), Mental Health Team (a team that discusses students who may need further social-emotional support), and Administrative Tutorial, among other interventions.

Administrative Tutorial is a session provided to students who have been referred by staff based on earning a *D* or an *F* letter grade for a given course. The principal, assistant principal, teachers and tutors are available to work with students on academic issues.

Administrative Tutorial is offered within the school day twice weekly.

Departments within the school have adopted a *Redemption and Revision* policy where students are provided multiple attempts to demonstrate mastery learning. Florence High School has introduced PLCs as a strategy to improve teaching and learning through teacher collaboration. PLCs are teams or groups of individuals within an organization, which share common ideas such as (a) ensuring that students learn, (b) a culture of collaboration, and (c) a focus on results (Dufour, 2004). According to the *High Standards for All* document, all PLC teams must design curriculum that enables students the necessary additional time and support to meet course expectations. PLC course teams and departments have created these policies for assignments and existing grading policies based in their content area. Teams determine which assessments can be revised for a higher grade. Such revisions could take many forms such as a re-examination of a test/quiz, a re-write of an essay, or test corrections. Additionally, the number of attempts to improve an assignment and the highest possible grade for a revision are set within the PLC course teams. For example, in 10<sup>th</sup> grade English classes, teams have agreed that only certain assessments may be revised to earn up to 70% on the particular assignment. Some foreign language courses allow a revision up to 100% on quizzes. The specific policy around revision varies between teams. During staff-wide meetings, team members have the opportunity to discuss strategies and share ideas with other teams. Revising

work allows students an opportunity for more than one chance to achieve success. This approach values learning over grades or time.

Florence High School has very high levels of achievement compared to other schools in the State. For example, in the 2014-2015 school year, the school had a 97% graduation rate, compared to 81% in the State with 74% eligible to attend four-year California State Universities (CSUs) or University of California schools (UCs) compared to just 42% average in the State (Great Schools, 2016). According to Florence High School reports, results of state-wide assessments for 2014-2015 indicate that Florence High School students are scoring well above local averages. English Language proficiency is 87%, compared to an average of 44% in the State and Math proficiency is 83% compared to 35% in the State (Great Schools, 2016).

Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year the State of California adopted a Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which allowed school districts (including Sheppard School District), more local control of the budget (California Department of Education). As a part of the process, school districts work with teachers, students, parents, and principals to create a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) (Sheppard School District Website). According to this plan, the school districts' funds are primarily derived from local sources (currently 90%), including property taxes and other local parcel taxes (Sheppard School District Website). While there have been disparities documented in school districts across the country (Spears, 2014), Sheppard School District does not reflect this trend. This is due to significant local sources of funding and the relative control that the district has over its budget.

## **Organizing Instruction at Florence High School**

According to the IDEA (2004) students must be educated in the LRE whenever possible. School site IEP team members determine the appropriate placement for each student (IDEA, 2004). Changes to the IEP, including changes in classroom placement or percentage of time in general education, are decisions made by the IEP team (IDEA 2004). In the context of this study, I explore the creation and implementation of LREs through a co-teaching inclusion model. It is important to note that LREs have a relationship to a physical space (such as the general education class), it is instead a unique recommendation for a student to ensure that to the maximum extent s/he will be educated with non-disabled peers (IDEA, 2004). The LRE will vary based on each individual student. In this study, I explore the concept of LRE for students who have been recommended for a co-teaching inclusion class environment.

Instruction at Florence High School is structured around collaborative teaching teams. Most teachers teach two different content courses within a specific content area. However, some teachers, particularly special educators, teach more courses or teach within more than one department. All teachers are involved in PLCs teams at Florence High School. PLCs provide an opportunity for teachers to work together on curriculum development and instructional practice.

PLCs are determined and organized based on the courses taught by the teachers. Given that many teachers have multiple sections of two different courses, teachers are generally involved in two PLC groups. PLCs meet to work on common assessments, unit and lesson planning, in addition to anchor grading (where teachers grade student work together using a common rubric), and analyzing student work. Groups debrief on their

work, create group norms, common goals, and establish communication protocols such as email collaboration, the use of Google documents, or face-to-face meetings. The time for collaboration with teams is built into the weekly schedule (on Wednesday mornings) whereby students have one late start day each week. The collaborative teams rotate biweekly and teachers are able to participate in two teams. The collaboration schedule accommodates only two PLC groups per teacher, so teachers with more than two courses will not meet with additional course groups during the scheduled collaboration time.

In the 2015-2016 school year, teams of three or more members chose a team lead that takes responsibility for ensuring work within the teams is completed. During the meetings, notes are taken and information is communicated to the principal. According to the *New Leadership Agreement* (an agreement between teachers, the principal and assistant principals, and the school district regarding the leadership and compensation structure), team/ PLC leads receive a stipend for their work.

Teams work together to determine the Essential Learning Outcomes (ELO) for each course. The teachers of the respective course and PLC teams as a whole determine specific ELOs for a given course. Each unit of study within a course has ELOs which are intended to meet the following criteria: be made first, be most important, manageable and measurable (Lemov, 2011). Teams use collaboration time to refine the ELOs and determine which lessons and assessments are most appropriate.

The condition that ELOs should be made first requires that they are backward planned, whereby teachers consider the final outcome and determine the steps to get there (Lemov, 2011). Calendars are created for each unit beginning with the ELOs and the assessments in mind. Steps are broken down methodically to ensure that necessary

components of the given unit have been considered. In order to be most important, the ELOs must be based on a concept that has an enduring understanding of a topic; have leverage across disciplines, and ensure readiness for the next level or course of study (Lemov, 2011). Learning that is necessary, pre-requisite, and long lasting meet the criteria for being most important. Team members discuss different perspectives to consider viewpoints from the teachers.

Manageable ELOs can fit within the scope and sequence of the school year (Lemov, 2011). The school year is limited by a finite number of days and the concepts to be taught must align with the time available. Lastly, measurable ELOs are observable and have are able to provide evidence of learning (Lemov, 2011). ELOs must align to assignments and tasks in which students can demonstrate learning. PLC teams at Florence High School spend a considerable amount of time collaborating with course teams to create a viable curriculum for students. Although there is time at whole staff meetings to discuss some of the PLC work, much of it is done within departments individually by teachers or teams.

### **The Context of Special Education at Florence High School**

Florence High School has a relatively large special education department with specific courses, individualized curriculum, and PLC teams. In the 2015-2016 school year, the special education department had 13 teachers, including two teachers in a self-contained moderate-severe program and one teacher for visually impaired students. Ten teachers serve within a program for mild-moderate special education students and eight of the teachers teach content courses including English, Social Studies, Science and Math

(the other two teachers specialize in *Autism* and *Emotional Disturbance*). Teams work to establish clear vertical alignment of expectations for students from ninth to twelfth grade.

Many teachers within the special education department teach a Learning Skills course, which is a support course for students to have time to work on homework or to have extended time on tests. As Learning Skills course teachers, special educators collaborate with general education teachers to ensure that students are provided modifications or accommodations as needed. Special education teachers initiate the IEP process and solicit feedback from general education teachers as part of ongoing monitoring of student progress. Another important task for special education teachers is to determine students' proposed course of study. During course selection time, special educators make important recommendations and communicate with IEP team members to determine students' placement in the LRE. Overall, the special education department at Florence High School serves an important function to support students within the school.

In the 2015-2016 school year, there were 175 special education students at Florence High School. According to IEP eligibility data from internal reports, there were 30 students under the autism category, 11 students under the emotional disturbance category, one student with hearing impairment, four students with visual impairment, 35 with other health impairments, four with speech and language impairment, 72 students with specific learning disabilities, three students with traumatic brain injuries, one student with orthopaedic impairments, and 14 with intellectual impairments (Florence High School internal reports).

There are two distinct special education programs in the school including a program for students with mild to moderate disabilities and a program for students with



moderate to severe disabilities. The moderate to severe program, designed for students with disabilities who are participating in a functional curriculum and working towards a Certificate of Completion served 23 students in 2015-2016. There were 152 special education students working towards a high school diploma in the mild to moderate special education program in 2015-2016 (Florence High School internal reports). Despite the relatively significant number of special education students earning a diploma, only 18 special education students in the school were educated within inclusion classes in the 2015-2016 school year. All of the inclusion students in 2015-2016 were in ninth or tenth grade. Only one third of the students in inclusion classes (six students) were placed in two inclusion classes (Florence High School internal reports). It is important to note that most special education students had at least one general education class. However, such classes did not necessarily provide the special education support that is available with inclusion classes.

There is a significant contrast between the shared vision of supporting all students to meet high expectations and the relatively low number of students in inclusion classes. One way of considering this disparity is in reference to the work of Argyris and Schon (1974). According to Argyris and Schon (1974), individuals hold *maps* in their mind as to how to plan and implement actions. However, people are not always aware that the *maps* that are used to take action are not always the same as the theories they believe or *espouse* (Argyris & Schon, 1974). An *espoused* theory is a worldview that an individual holds and what individuals believe that their actions are based upon (Argyris & Schon, 1974). *Theories-in-use* are the worldviews that are implied by one's behaviour and are driven by the *maps* in one's mind (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Argyris and Schon's

(1974) distinction between espoused theory and theory in use may be relevant to understand the inconsistencies between with the idea of inclusion espoused by the school and its actual actions in this area.

### **Overview of Methodology and Methods**

This study aims to examine the processes and practices involved in the implementation of LREs in inclusive classrooms in Florence High School. In order to investigate this issue, it is important to examine the context closely with an in-depth approach. Based on the topic and the nature of the questions in this study, I use a qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2012). Qualitative research relies on rich, descriptive data about people or settings and is useful in understanding those topics in an in-depth manner (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Additionally, my questions relate to issues that lend themselves to the type of exploration that might arise during a case study (Yin, 2012). My questions also relate to how the LRE is created and supported in inclusion classrooms, which requires substantial explanation and elaboration. Overall, a case study approach provided an opportunity to study the social phenomenon in its natural environment (Yin, 2012).

Designing this case study was a challenging task. According to Yin (2009) a good case study is a hard thing to do, however it is a worthy research endeavour for certain topics. The case study approach is an all-encompassing approach and it considers real-world cases and understands the importance of contextual conditions (Yin, 2009). For this study, the unit of analysis is the process of creation and development of LREs for students at Florence High School. According to Yin (2012) the selection of the unit of analysis begins when the research questions are created, but it is always an ongoing

process, and discussing it with colleagues may help to appropriately select the correct unit. For this case study it has been determined that the unit of analysis is the LRE and the practices related to its creation and support in inclusion classrooms. This research study included teachers and the principal and assistant principal who have been invited to participate based on their relevant experiences with inclusion at Florence High School. The participants have either taught within an inclusion class at Florence High School or served in an administrative role with responsibilities over inclusion classes.

Yin (2009) states that the case study method relies on multiple sources of data to triangulate the information and ensure the integrity of the conclusions. In this case specifically, I have collected data from semi-structured interviews. My field notes journal, as well as transcripts from the interviews have been used for analysis. Internal documents such as a staff binder, institutional communications, and State reports have also been analyzed. Throughout the research, I relied on member checking for validation of the data. In order to better understand the phenomenon in the study, clustering or grouping of similar information occurred (Dey, 2003). During the analysis, I created codes based on the literature as well as the research data.

### **Assumptions**

As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that I make many assumptions in pursuing this research. My first assumption is that the inclusion model through LREs is valued by the school and district and will continue to be a viable model. This assumption comes from the fact that there have been inclusion classes every year in the recent history of the school. Additionally, every other school in the district has inclusion classes that

adopt a LRE approach for educating students. The second assumption I make is that the participants in this study will provide honest input during the interview. This assumption is based upon the confidentiality and anonymity that has been built into the study and the comprehensive nature of the interviewing.

### **Limitations**

In this study, I focus on the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in general education only through the creation of LREs. Due to time constraints, not all areas of inclusion have been explored in this study. For instance, while issues of gender, race, and social class are important in relation to inclusion, due to time and space limitations and the exploratory character of this study, I was only able to explore questions related to the LREs and disability in inclusive classrooms.

### **Overview of Data Analysis**

Content analysis was used in the analysis of the data for this study. Content analysis is an empirically grounded exploratory process (Krippendorff, 2012). According to Stan (2010), content analysis can be used with transcripts or other media to assist in creating codes to provide further insight into social phenomenon. Initial themes for analysis were created as a result of the review of literature. Inductive coding, or using the data to create categories, was also used in this study (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). Overall, through the analysis of data in this study, the following areas of significance were identified:

1. LREs and access to quality education for all students
  - Teacher preparation to teach in the LREs
  - PLCs and teaching in the LRE

## 2. Collaboration

- Partnerships
- Pairing process
- Role definition

## 3. Scheduling

- Allocation of time for class preparation in the LREs

These topics will be discussed in the analysis chapter. The findings and discussion chapter will position this study and its findings in the context of the literature review. In the final chapter, I will draw conclusions to the research questions and make recommendations based on the results of the study. It is the intent that these findings will provide further insight into the strategies that could improve the inclusion model at this school, or other schools where the conclusions of this study could be transferred (Patton, 2002).

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Search Method

The search in this literature review included studies that focused on the organizational processes related to the inclusion of special education students into the general education program and classroom. In California, preschool is provided for special education students through local school districts; therefore, preschool examples were included. The literature included research published prior to the 2004 IDEA amendment. This time period was selected because of increased interest leading up to the amendment of the IDEA in 2004, guaranteeing students with disabilities free appropriate public education. Lastly, the literature review was limited to works published in the English language.

The following databases were used to locate relevant material on the topic: (a) Google Scholar, (b) the online library database (Education Research Complete) from The University of Western Ontario, and (c) The Educational Research Information Center (ERIC). A search log and populated findings table were maintained during this process. A combination of different search terms was used during the literature search. The following terms were searched in academic databases: inclusion + collaboration, successful inclusion + collaboration, successful + inclusion + collaboration + special education, support + inclusion, collaboration + support + special needs + teacher strategies, co-teaching + collaboration, and PLCs +inclusion. The third step was the process of analyzing and reviewing the materials gathered during the search. During the analysis, relevant sources were closely reviewed and included in this section.

The following five themes emerged from the literature search and will be discussed in this literature review:

1. Professional Development/preparation for supporting learning in LREs
2. Collaboration between teachers in LREs
3. PLCs
4. Staffing for inclusive education
5. Perceptions of teachers and principals of including special education students in general education classes

As noted, the five themes discussed in this chapter focus on the creation and support for LREs, an extensive discussion of the theoretical perspectives to the study of organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2013) and the critical approaches to social justice and leadership will be conducted in the theoretical framework chapter.

### **Professional Development/ Preparation for Supporting Learning in LREs**

Donnelly and Watkins (2011) explain that some of the challenges to 21st century educational systems involve the need to create social inclusion, key ‘competencies’, and access to high quality education for all children. The literature reviewed for this research suggests that there is a common theme of insufficient preparation and professional development (PD) for teachers and principals. Allay, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson (2013) found that in elementary teacher preparation programs in the United States there was insufficient PD provided in relation to inclusive education. The purpose of Allay et al.’s study was to address the allocation of resources in pre-service teacher programs used to support the disposition needed for inclusion. Many of the 109 teacher preparation programs in Allay et al.’s study provided little to no preparation for teachers in the area

of inclusion and once teachers attained a teaching position, many may still felt unprepared for the challenge of teaching in an inclusion setting (Allay et al., 2013). This finding is important because, as Rodriguez, Saldana, and Moreno (2012) demonstrate, teacher preparation has a strong influence on teacher attitudes towards inclusion. Furthermore, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2005), improving equity in schools depends on having *competent* teachers, quality teaching, and access to quality teachers.

The term “competence” is not used only to describe the qualities of teachers, but also refers to the actions they take. The ability of educators to act must be matched with a professional judgement of what ‘ought’ to be done (Nes, 2014). The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education’s (EADSNE, 2012) Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I) project explored initial teacher education programs that were considered to be inclusive and developed an inclusive teacher profile. The objectives of the profile were to identify a framework of core values and competence, to highlight the competencies needed to prepare teachers for inclusive environments, to identify factors related to the implementation of the core values in inclusive education, and lastly to reinforce the idea that inclusive education is the responsibility of all educators (EADSNE, 2012).

According to the TE4I project (EADSNE, 2012), there are four core values related to teaching and learning in inclusive education, including valuing learner diversity, supporting all learners, working with others and personal PD. Valuing learner diversity can be described as viewing learner differences as an important asset to education (EADSNE, 2012). An alternative approach to understanding the knowledge



necessary for teaching diverse learners is to consider the barriers that exist (Nes, 2014). A consideration of possible learner barriers shifts the focus of student need from a medical perspective to a social justice paradigm (Nes, 2014). Supporting all learners means that teachers hold high expectations for students and attempt to promote academic and social-emotional learning of all students as well as possessing the ability to teach heterogeneous classes (EADSNE, 2012). Furthermore, Nes (2014) extends this concept to special educators, stating that such teachers should also have knowledge of effective teaching in various educational settings, both in and out of heterogeneous classes. Additionally, it is imperative that special educators value working with a wide range of professionals and appreciate the knowledge, skills and contributions of each discipline and understand the importance of life-long learning and the educator's responsibility to continue professional learning (EADSNE, 2012).

According to Brown, Howerter, and Morgan (2013), when special education teachers do not feel prepared to deliver content in the classroom it could affect collaboration with general education teachers. Despite the difficulty that some teachers may experience in delivering content, it is important for both general and special educators to be prepared to deliver substantial content. This capacity increases the likelihood that both teachers are comfortable performing duties and instructing all students. Sharma and Sokal (2015) conducted a comparative study on the impact of two stand-alone courses for pre-service teachers on attitudes, concerns and perceptions of self-efficacy for working in inclusive classrooms where students with disabilities were included with general education students. In their study, Sharma and Sokal (2015) analyzed survey results from 28 Australian and 60 Canadian pre-service teachers and

found that preparation for teachers through coursework improved Australian pre-service teachers' attitudes, reduced concerns, and improved self-efficacy. Similarly, the Canadian pre-service teachers experienced reduced concerns and improved self-efficacy in working with inclusive classrooms based on the coursework; however, these pre-service teachers experienced higher levels of apprehension for working in inclusive classrooms (Sharma & Sokal, 2015). One concern from the participants in this study related to the lack of resources. According to Sharma and Sokal (2015), modifying pre-service course materials to focus on supporting the inclusive classroom could help create more positive attitudes. Although initial preparation for teachers generally occurs in pre-service programs, schools and districts also provide PD based on current needs. McLeskey and Waldron (2011) also found that high-quality PD at the school level helped teachers improve classroom practices related to teaching inclusively.

According to Pugach and Blanton (2014), PD for teachers towards inclusive education has been traditionally inconsistent and only loosely connected with theory and practice, despite a widespread international recognition of its importance. A significant challenge to creating inclusive education PD is that it must address the complexities of work at multiple levels (across school grades and with individual teachers) in addition to considering multiple disciplines, such as English, Math and other content areas (Pugach & Blanton, 2014). From an organizational perspective, there must be a shift towards an understanding that all teachers are responsible for all students, thus requiring further PD in order to serve a diverse student body (Pugach & Blanton, 2014). Another obstacle of inclusive education PD relates the need to respond to the complexity of the intersection of

student identities, such as multiple forms of marginalization related to race, gender, ability, sexual orientation and other markers of identity (Pugach & Blanton, 2014).

### **Collaboration between teachers in LREs**

Although the term *collaboration* has become a popular term in education literature, Friend (2000) claims that there are four central myths about collaboration in school. According to Friend (2000), some of the myths around collaboration include: “everyone is doing it,” “more is better,” “it’s all about feeling good and liking others,” and lastly that “it comes naturally.” Friend (2000) acknowledges that there is a great deal of collaboration in schools, but it is a myth that everyone is doing it. Many collaborative efforts are formal and explicitly fostered by principals, but much of this collaboration is “directive,” where leaders determine the goal and members volunteer for tasks, or “informative,” where principals make decisions and other members are merely informed (Friend, 2000).

These types of interactions between colleagues may be shared or “with others,” but not necessarily collaborative (Friend, 2000). The myth that “more is better” is based on the premise that if collaboration is good, then more collaboration is even better; however Friend (2000) states that given the limited time teachers have in their work schedules, they have very limited capacity for collaboration. For example, special education teachers who desire to work with general education teachers cannot possibly meet with all teachers in a meaningful way, which turns the focus of collaboration to only specific priorities (Friend, 2000). Additionally, in Friend’s (2000) view, collaboration should be “a means to an end” to facilitate goals. The result of collaboration is not simply about making sure everyone leaves feeling liked, but rather ensuring that individuals are

respected. Finally, there is a myth that collaboration comes naturally for educators (Friend, 2000). Although some individuals possess intuitive collaborative skills, others do not, so there must be ongoing PD for team members to effectively learn and improve their collaboration skills (Friend, 2000).

Perhaps the most common theme from the literature presented in this review is the logistical concern of ensuring time for collaboration between special and general education teachers (Friend et al., 2010; Santoli, Sachs, Romey, & McClurg, 2008). There are two parts to this concern. First, consistent collaboration is necessary to support learners: in a traditional classroom, there is only one teacher. If there are two teachers in a classroom, but those teachers are not managing behaviour similarly, teaching or grading in a consistent manner, there could be confusions that may affect student learning. As noted above, there can be many configurations such as: one teach-one observes, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching; teaming and one teach- one assist (Friend et al., 2010) but at a minimum, there are two teachers working with the entire class together. Friend et al.'s (2010) insights show that the professionals in an inclusion classroom need to work together in coordination in an effort to align the curriculum and support all learners.

In Friend et al.'s (2010) study, special education teachers were perceived as aides. Their findings suggest that when special educators are present, general education teachers spend less time with students with disabilities. Having special educators function in the role of classroom aide can be problematic on many levels. First, it challenges the equity between the two teachers because it places one teacher in a higher role than the other. Second, this hierarchy also may imply that the special educator alone is responsible for

special education students (Friend et al., 2010). Indeed, when one teacher is seen as an aide in the classroom a relation of subordination is created between the two teachers, which in turn reduce equitable collaboration. In a co-teaching classroom, there may be times when there is a lot of direct instruction, but even in these scenarios, one teacher could provide direct instruction of new concept or vocabulary and the other teacher could present the remainder of the lesson (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989). According to Bauwens et al. (1989), it is beneficial for the special educator to have solid content knowledge so both teachers can move between roles as fluidly. Overall, there are many ways for teachers to collaborate both in and out of the classroom setting, and it is valuable to consider the various ways in which collaboration occurs.

Mumford and Chandler (2009) found that teachers who participate in the IEP development and collaborate on common goals are able to provide meaningful input into the IEP and provide necessary feedback to support the development of a specialized plan for students. Bennett and Gallagher (2013) support this finding as they indicate that collaboration is one of the strongest predictors of positive attitudes towards inclusion. Participating and collaborating in the IEP process provides an opportunity to connect with special education personnel (Mumford & Chandler, 2009).

According to Hines (2008) high schools need educators with collaborative skills to run inclusion classes. In addition to the benefits for students, collaboration through co-teaching can have a positive benefit for educators. When educators collaborate well, strategies such as those listed above, namely, IEP design and support, and co-teaching, are able to occur. Strong collaboration opens creative possibilities and provides multiple

perspectives on content and problem solving. At the same time, unproductive or non-existent collaboration poses challenges to effective LREs functioning (Hines, 2008).

In the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2005) revealed that 35% of secondary school teachers made no modification to general education curriculum for special education students, 52% of teachers made some modification, 11% made significant modification, and 2% provided a specialized curriculum. According to Paulsen (2008), in order to support the increased number of special education students in general education classes, it is essential for teachers to collaborate. However, some barriers to collaboration included the lack of time available within the school day, not enough individuals to share the workload, and lack of PD in collaboration (Paulsen, 2008). These barriers are important areas of focus within schools in order to improve collaboration to support special education students (Paulsen, 2008).

### **Professional Learning Communities**

In considering teacher collaboration, it is worthwhile to discuss Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). According to Dufour (2004), PLC is a term that is commonly used in education and as a result sometimes loses its meaning, however there are some defining features. PLCs involve:

A systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement. (DuFour, 2004, p. 6)

An essential idea in PLCs is the belief that collaboration can be transformative in the practice of teaching and positively impact rates of student achievement (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). School-based peer collaboration is one possible way in which teachers can contribute to the success of their students (Dufour, 2004). According to Stoll et al. (2006), PLCs share the following features: shared vision and values (having a sense of collective purpose), collective responsibility (a consistent and collective responsibility for student's learning), reflective professional inquiry (examining teacher practice), collaboration (collaborative activity that goes beyond superficial exchanges), and a belief that group and individual learning is important (schools are learning environments).

According to Riveros, Newton and Burgess (2012) past initiatives on collaboration have not fully considered the creation of relationships as a part of teachers' professional practices. From this perspective, reforms may rely on teacher attitudes, not necessarily a transformation of educational practices (Riveros, Newton & Burgess, 2012). Overall, if PLC learning is to promote collaborative learning, then there must also be an acknowledgement of the role that teachers participate in the practices (Riveros et al., 2012). A practice can be understood as a collection of individuals, including their actions, linguistic words and writing, as well as material objects that come together in meaningful ways (Newton & Riveros, 2015). Teacher professional learning is a dynamic process and includes individual action as well as interactions between colleagues and students (Riveros, 2012).

In Richmond and Manokore's study (2011), teachers acknowledged and valued collegiality as a necessary component of developing as a professional and felt that

working in PLC groups provided an opportunity to learn about teaching practices. Furthermore, in Richmond and Manokore's (2011) view, the most effective PLC groups involved members from within a school-site and from other sites, as community became an essential element of improving teaching practices and student achievement. PLC groups require a culture where teacher learning is supported (Richmond & Manokore, 2011).

The creation of a collaborative community focused on including students with disabilities is challenging, but extremely worthwhile in improving outcomes for both students with disabilities and other students as well (Hardman & Shepard, 2011). Given the complex nature of teaching special education, acquiring expertise in working with special education students is a journey that cannot be traveled alone (Hardman & Shepard, 2011). Given that there is a large variety of learner needs, collaboration with a supportive extended professional network can be beneficial to team members (Hardman & Shepard, 2011). Although the focus of PLC groups vary, the purpose remains the same: the collective work of the team is important because strong teaching practices lead to better student achievement (Hardman & Shepard, 2011).

Despite evidence of the value of teacher collaboration, education systems have not invested much attention in this area (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Much of the work that exists fails to address the issue that school culture may need to change in order for collaboration to be productive (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006); for example, at times job-embedded PD, does not have clear direction or work towards accomplishing school goals. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) offer three broad suggestions for changing school culture through collaborative communities: first, joint teacher work should have one area of



focus such as, subject content (knowledge centered to deepen students' skills), learner needs (such as learner interest, need or background), or assessment of student learning (such as providing ongoing feedback to students); second, teacher learning communities depend on how well the work is designed or guided; and third, that the community development and sustenance relies on a proactive administration, in addition to broad teacher leadership. Principals with skills in facilitation can change the school culture and can help create new norms, provide focus, rationale and serve as a vehicle for change (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Pugach and Blanton (2014) state that when used explicitly, PLCs have the potential to be a significant approach to PD focused on inclusive education. In a similar fashion to the value of PD development for general education teachers, special education teachers can improve instructional practices, such as the enrichment of literacy instruction, or interactive strategies that promote a deeper level of student understanding (Pugach & Blanton, 2014). Overall, PLC-oriented inclusive education can contribute to meeting student needs and the demands on teachers and schools (Pugach & Blanton, 2014).

### **Staffing for Inclusive Education**

Finding qualified teachers who possess the skillset, preparation, and competencies to perform the wide array of duties required by inclusive classrooms is a challenge that schools face (Danielson, 2002). However, in the case of working with special education students this challenge is further complicated by the fact that educators must have content knowledge of the academic subject as well as knowledge of working with a diverse set of learners (King-Sears, Carran, Dammann, & Arter, 2012). School leaders, who understand

the areas of interest as well as the strengths within the school, can adapt the structure to respond to the challenges (Ball & Green, 2014).

Nilholm (2006) argues that a significant concern in special education involves the task of finding teachers with the ability to work with students who have a variety of needs. Teachers may have to adapt the instruction for special education students based on the individual learner's requirements, and the contents of the student's IEP. Additionally, Nilholm states that finding a way to group students such that they have the same opportunity to learn at their full potential is a concern. Schools must consider the type of students within the school and find a way to place each student based on the resources, such as the teachers in the school, the courses offered, and the sections available. Finding the best placement for all students may be difficult. An additional concern is how to ensure that resources promote learning, respond to individual needs, and are allocated equitably (Nilholm, 2006). School staff must find a way to provide a common educational experience for all students, while at the same time acknowledging and responding to the individual needs of all students (Nilholm, 2006).

When focused on student learning, it is imperative that teachers work collaboratively (Arthaud, Aram, Breck, Doelling, & Bushrow, 2007) by providing their own expertise in their respective area. General educators are typically prepared to focus on content mastery, whereas special educators are trained in learning differences and accommodations (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). As noted by Martinez (2003), inclusion reflects a belief that students have an educational right to be educated in the general education setting, so preparing all teachers for this environment may challenge their beliefs and expectations. According to Friend et al. (2010), partner choice and

collaboration between teachers are important considerations with co-teaching.

Additionally, how collaboration was understood at the leadership level was also identified as key to inclusion (Smith & Leonard, 2005).

In order to change school culture and practices, teachers require support and guidance in co-operative learning and communication (Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Some of the basic requirements of high-quality learning in school can only be achieved when students and teachers are guaranteed the following conditions: (a) an atmosphere that provides a feeling of safety, identity, and responsibility for learning; (b) teachers are enabled to reflect on their own pedagogical practices to widen perspectives; (c) there is active participation of students in decision-making processes and a democratization of voices and diversity; (d) the use of teaching and learning methods that adequately meet the needs of students, and (e) encouragement of students to work with others, to be self-reliant, responsible for learning, and problem solvers (Mazurkiewicz, 2013).

Additionally, in relation to professionalism in education, it is essential that teachers have opportunities for autonomy and to build their own professional knowledge by conducting research, writing articles and discussing the issues that they know best (Mazurkiewicz, 2013).

Although teachers traditionally work in separate classrooms they do depend on each other and function as a larger group that works collectively to fulfill the common goals of the school (Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Despite working in separate classrooms, teachers usually have a strong interdependent connection. Thus, it is imperative that learning initiatives are intentionally designed for groups (Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Group work in education is not new, but it is essential in preparing for the transformation to

inclusive schools. There must be cooperation and formal organization of work where time and space are secured for teachers to work together (Mazurkiewicz, 2013).

In order to fulfill the teaching responsibilities of inclusive education, teachers must gain both intellectual skills and knowledge to enable them to monitor students and to reflect on practice (Mazurkiewicz, 2013). The existence of a common discourse between teachers to confront the pressures of teacher isolation is important in building teacher capacity (Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Additionally, schools must work to strengthen collaborative skills and ensure a continued thinking about inclusive practices through the provision of PD in collaboration (Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Creating inclusive education is a great challenge and educators require the continued support of each other to solve problems (Mazurkiewicz, 2013).

### **Teachers and principals' perceptions of including special education students in general education classes**

According to Hines (2008), a favourable attitude from teachers towards inclusion will increase the likelihood of success for students with disabilities and for all students. Teachers are charged with important duties as well as building relationships with students. Having a favourable and realistic attitude towards students with disabilities improves the experience of students in inclusive settings (Mumford & Chandler, 2009).

The results of Santoli et al.'s (2008) study, which examined attitudes of educators around the topic of inclusion, indicated that some educators believe that inclusion classes could be unfair to general education students. Educators felt that the level of rigor in general education classes may be undermined with diverse groups of students (Santoli et al, 2008). The methodology for their study included quantitative research in the form of a

survey administered to educators prior to inclusion. The sample consisted of 56 middle school educators.

According to Santoli et al. (2008), the majority of respondents indicated that they were not willing to make the necessary changes needed for inclusion as they believed that students with disabilities could not be educated in regular education settings. Less than half of the participants felt that inclusion was desirable. Time for meetings, collaboration or to take on the responsibility generally was identified as an area of concern (Santoli et al., 2008).

A recent Canadian study examined inclusive practices in secondary schools. Students with intellectual disabilities, teachers, educational assistants, jobs coaches, parents, peers and community completed surveys (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). The results of the study indicated that job coaches and parents hold the more affirmative attitudes about inclusion and that teachers most often agreed that inclusion has a positive effect on students (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013).

Rodriguez et al. (2012) stated that teacher attitudes towards inclusion are affected by experience, preparation, and the perception of support. When teachers feel that there are resources available to support them in working with special education students, their perceptions about inclusion become more open and accepting, especially when accompanied by collaboration with experts or other practitioners. Additionally, Rodriguez et al. (2012) found that when teachers experience inclusive environments, their attitudes tend to become more favourable towards mainstream classrooms with special education students.

In a qualitative study that included a sample of 12 sites, Liggett, Johnston, and Hasazi (1996) found that state and district leaders, more than other principals or teachers, can influence significant change in the implementation of the LRE in the IDEA. Without the explicit support of principals towards moving special education students into general education settings, there is little change in in that direction (Liggett et al., 1996). Specifically, superintendents and special education directors had the greatest influence within districts in terms of shaping LRE policy (Liggett et al., 1996).

A survey-based study by Vidovich and Lombard (1998), involving three school districts in Pennsylvania, looked at principal, teacher, and parent perceptions of inclusion. The results of the study indicate that principals had a more positive perspective than teachers regarding the inclusion of all students in general education (Vidovich & Lombard, 1998). Based on a survey measuring perceptions toward inclusion, principals scored highest, followed by parents and then teachers (Vidovich & Lombard, 1998). All of the principals in the study agreed that recommending placement for a student with disabilities was based on individual need, not just special education eligibility (grouping based on disability category). Some states require specific categorical labels for special education identification and eligibility (Vidovich & Lombard, 1998). The principals also indicated that physical integration with general education peers was important, and stated that they encourage their teachers to accept students with disabilities in their classrooms. The majority of principals in Vidovich and Lombard's study agreed that social integration with nondisabled peers was important.

A study by Villa, Thousand, Meyers, and Nevin (1996) assessing the perceptions of 680 general educators, special educators, and principals provided further insight into

educator perceptions of inclusion. This study used the Heterogeneous Education Teacher Survey and the Regular Education Initiative Teacher Survey-Revised (Villa et al., 1996). Principals and teachers responded positively to items on the survey indicating that participants felt that heterogeneous groups are beneficial for students (Villa et al., 1996). Additionally, the participants from all groups reported favorable expectations around shared responsibilities and decision making for special and general educators in working with special education students (Villa et al., 1996). There was a statistical increase in positive participant attitudes based on the availability of in-service PD, the degree of administrative support, the extent of collaboration between general and special educations and adequate time structured for collaboration (Villa et al., 1996). Teachers with experience working with students with disabilities had more favorable responses regarding the benefits of heterogeneous classes than those without experience (Villa et al., 1996). The findings of this study suggest that school leaders must make a concerted effort to foster a culture of collaboration and shared decision making as well as routines which support staff working together with students in heterogeneous classes (Villa et al., 1996).

### **Conclusions of this literature review**

This chapter provided a review of educational leadership literature related to the creation and development of LREs for inclusion classrooms. The following five areas were covered: PD/ preparation for supporting learning in LREs, collaboration between teachers in LREs, professional learning communities, staffing for inclusive education, and teachers and principals' perceptions of including special education students in

general education classes. This section offers a review of relevant literature in order to situate the study in the context of the scholarship on inclusive education.

The first section of the review examined PD and preparation for supporting LREs. Overall, the literature suggests that teachers and principals are not adequately prepared in their pre-service programs for creating and implementing LREs in schools (Allay et al., 2013). This finding is significant, as pre-service preparation has a powerful influence on the educators' attitudes around inclusion (Rodriguez et al., 2012). Sharma and Sokal (2015) found that dedicated coursework during pre-service program improved the self-efficacy of teachers in the area of supporting inclusive classrooms. The four core values related to teaching and learning in an inclusive environment include valuing diversity, supporting all learners, working with others collaboratively, and engaging in PD are clearly important because as inclusive education is the responsibility all of educators (EADSNE, 2012). Lastly, PD is necessary for the development of inclusive schools, however there are many challenges, including addressing the complexities of student needs and identity (Pugach & Blanton, 2014).

According to Friend et al. (2010), parity between general and special educations is necessary in terms of the collaboration between teachers in LREs; inadequate time for collaboration between teachers within the school day is another significant barrier (Friend et al., 2010). Additionally, a lack of PD in collaborative skills (Paulsen, 2008), and ineffective collaborations, can threaten the functioning of LREs (Hines, 2008).

PLCs are collaborative initiatives that share vision, values and a responsibility for student learning (Dufour, 2004; Stoll et al., 2006). Strong leaders with effective facilitation skills, in addition to broad teacher leadership within schools, can support



change towards instructional improvement (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Given that PLCs are an important structure related to LREs at Florence High School, insight into their benefits and challenges will inform the context of this study. As Pugach and Blanton (2014) noted, PLCs are beneficial to both student and teacher demands and can contribute to improvements in classroom practices.

Staffing for inclusive education was another theme explored in this literature review. School leaders have to adapt the school structure to respond to the needs of the school (Ball & Green, 2014). Supporting students with disabilities in the general education classroom requires specific knowledge and abilities as well as the assurance that resources are allocated equitably (Nilholm, 2006). Other staffing concerns relevant to this study include issues scheduling constraints, time for collaboration, teacher scheduling, and pairing (Friend et al., 2010). Additionally, teachers require support and guidance in working and communicating with others including a safe environment, opportunities for reflection, democratization of voice, participation of students, appropriate teaching methods that meet the needs of diverse learners, and the encouragement of students to develop problem solving skills (Mazurkiewicz, 2013).

Lastly, this literature review addressed teachers, principals' perceptions of including special education students in general education classes. Areas such as experience, PD, and the perception of support affect attitudes towards inclusion. Attitudes towards inclusion tend to become more favourable with experience (Rodriguez et al., 2012). In an attempt to answer the research questions in this study, it is important to acknowledge the importance of leaders' perceptions and actions in terms of supporting LREs (Liggett et al., 1996).

## Chapter 3

### Theoretical Framework

Each researcher enters into an investigation with a particular perspective for considering the problem. This perspective may be formed through readings of related literature, formal education, and experiences. Below is an explanation of the theoretical frameworks used within this research study. Specifically, an articulation of the notion of inclusion as a social justice issue, a discussion of critical and distributed approaches to leadership, and an elaboration of an organizational perspective that includes Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural, human resources, symbolic, and political frames.

Although a critical theory and social justice lens is not directly linked to Bolman and Deal's (2013) organization frameworks, I have utilized both to approach the problem of practice. I have adopted Bolman and Deal's (2013) frameworks as the key analytical lens in this work. However, I also include critical and social justice theories to compliment the analysis of the organizational frameworks. Bolman and Deal's frames provide insight in understanding the organizational environment of the research context. These four frames provide a foundation for understanding and explaining organizational environments and the implementation of initiatives, such as inclusive education policies. Critical theory and social justice theories allow for a deeper understanding to the concerns of power and inequity that exist surrounding this research. Critical thinking and analysis of oppression provides a deeper knowledge and direction, and helps avoid hopelessness and powerlessness (Hackman, 2005).

## **Inclusive Education, History, Definitions and Controversies**

It is valuable to consider the history, definitions, and controversies around inclusion. According to Operti, Walker, and Zhan (2014), there is a surprising amount of confusion around the term “inclusion” and the basic premise that all children have the right to an inclusive learning environment. Originally, the focus for inclusive practitioners was on creating educational improvements for specific learners (mostly children with disabilities), which was influenced by the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (Operti et al., 2014). Over time, this focus widened to all marginalized children (as declared in the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000). Presently, the focus of inclusive education is on improving the capabilities of the education system across levels and settings to respond to the needs of all students, particularly those who are underprivileged (Operti et al., 2014).

Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the first international recognition of the basic right to education for all as necessary for the development of all individuals (Operti et al., 2014). The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child was the first legally binding international document to incorporate a full range of human rights focused on children (Operti et al., 2014). At the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, representatives from 155 countries and many organizations collectively agreed to make primary education available to all children; moreover, the conference indicated that both women and individuals with disabilities were often excluded access to education. Therefore, outcomes for these individuals need to improve, paving the way for addressing the exclusion of marginalized groups (Operti et al., 2014).

Article 24 of the Salamanca Statement of 1994 refers to an inclusive education system that is tailored to the general human right to education and aims to tear down barriers of exclusion. It provides recognition of the right to education, predicated on an assumption that learners are unique with different needs (Opertti et al., 2014). Not only does the Salamanca Statement obligate educational systems to provide education, it aims to challenge signatory countries to remove obstacles to inclusion (Opertti et al., 2014).

Kozleski et al. (2014) examine inclusive education through the following lenses: educational access, participation, opportunities to learn, and equity. These authors define inclusion as an educational activity at multiple levels that compresses or expands in response to student identity and experiences for individuals that are outside dominant cultural norms. Kozleski et al. warn that a focus on inclusion can sometimes implicitly suggest assimilation towards dominant norms as it can create pressure to conform to dominant groups; therefore it is important that equity be used as a measure of whether inclusive education is realized. Given that inclusive education is contextualized into a broader understanding of cultural norms, it is important to understand equity and inclusive education from a multi-dimensional perspective that accounts for the role of culture, history, and the context of daily life (Kozleski et al., 2014).

According to Kozleski et al. (2014), the different interpretations of inclusive education (frequently connected with education for individuals with disabilities) are not beneficial as it implies that specific qualifications or knowledge is necessary.

Additionally, according to Kozleski et al., since the notion of difference relating to disability is a code for failure, groups of students are given lower expectations and provide with a less engaging curriculum (Kozleski et al., 2014). Identifying students as

“different” interferes with the extent to which they can participate and access education (Kozleski et al., 2014). Overall, policies adjust to their context and barriers exist at many levels, but education that is truly inclusive has a transformative power to change communities for the better (Kozleski et al., 2014).

## **Equity and Inclusion**

Although inclusive education has promised the redistribution of goods and the recognition of difference, according to Kozleski et al. (2014), it has fallen short and lost direction of these goals. Inclusive education has been appropriated at different levels (national, state, local, school and classroom) by institutional contexts that are entrenched in old ideologies of unbalanced power structures (Kozleski et al., 2014). The contradictions between the goals of inclusion and the reality of minoritized students in schools suggest that equity must be at the forefront of discussions around inclusive education (Kozleski et al., 2014). An important consideration is the issue of exploration of the intersectional ties of marginalization as some students may experience multiple forms of discrimination based on the intersections of race, gender, ability and sexual identity (Kozleski et al., 2014). Policy is one area in which these intersectionalities can be addressed (Kozleski et al., 2014).

The globalization of policies in education has created local patterns that embody historical legacies and cultural influences (Kozleski et al., 2014). Understanding inclusion as well as exclusion remains a complex task, however, Ainscow et al. (2006) outlined six ways of understanding inclusion: (a) as a response to disciplinary exclusion, (b) in relation to all groups seen as being vulnerable to exclusion, (c) as developing the school for all, (d) as Education for All, (e) as a principled approach to education and

society, and (f) as a concern with disabled students and others categorized as “having special educational needs” (p.15). According to Ainscow et al., there is an underlying assumption that inclusion is exclusively a topic of educating students with special needs into mainstream classes, but this belief ignores the ways in which participation of all marginalized groups may be enhanced or constrained. Through this disability lens of inclusion, there is a significant effect of categorization on the whole education system; despite only small numbers of students in special education, it can create the assumption that students should be segregated because of deficiencies or differences as it occurs in special education (Ainscow et al., 2006). This categorization process acts as a barrier to the goals of inclusion (Ainscow et al., 2006).

Ainscow et al. (2006) state that not only is inclusion associated with the education of students with disabilities; there is also a connection to behavior management and the topic of exclusion. In the 1986 U.S. Education Act, the term exclusion was used to describe the temporary or permanent removal of students from school for disciplinary reasons. Ainscow et al. understand the term to be broadly related to discrimination in schools and societies not only to an administrative separation from the school environment. As a result of this definition of exclusion, inclusion can be seen as reducing discrimination on the basis of forms of social difference including class, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other markers of identity (Ainscow et al., 2006). Another conceptualization of inclusion relates to the development of “a school for all” (Ainscow et al., 2006). This notion carries with it advantages and disadvantages; for example, some interpretations involve schools valuing diversity and embracing differences, however other school communities focus on assimilation to a homogeneous norm (Ainscow et al.,

2006). According to Ainscow et al., the idea of a school for all is premised on the idea that schools and communities work together and value diversity. Ainscow et al. call for a reinvigoration of the Education For All (EFA) movement in which there is attention to the participation of all individuals within schools and their local communities. Lastly, Ainscow et al. describe inclusion as a principled approach to both education and society. Overall, Ainscow et al. define inclusion as the processes of increasing participation and reducing exclusion in communities, cultures, and curriculum; restructuring culture, policies, and practices so that schools can respond to the diversity in their local communities; and seeking the achievement of students at risk protecting them from exclusion of any form.

In this section I have examined the principles of inclusive education including its history, definition, and the many controversies surrounding the topic. It is valuable to study leadership for inclusion because the investment of fairness for students affects the present and future of schools (Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Below, I will elaborate on the key approaches that have considered the role of school leaders in promoting inclusive education in schools.

## Leadership and Inclusion

**Critical approaches to leadership in education.** In considering the problem of practice and research focus, a social justice/critical theory framework was employed in this study. This theoretical framework has a profound impact on how this research has been conducted and how data have been interpreted. According to Gunter (2001), critical theory can provide alternative ways of understanding a situation as a means of supporting critical evaluation of practices and social structures. From the critical standpoint, some of relevant questions to ask may include: Who has the power? Who benefits from a given situation? Who is excluded? and why are some individuals excluded? In addition to asking why the exclusion exists, the critical approach in educational administration would be concerned with how inclusive-minded leaders can affect change in the practices of school administration and decision-making. According to Gunter (2001), critical theory problematizes language, practice, and beliefs about organizational structures and provides alternative ways of understanding the oppressive nature of social realities.

In Lupton's (2005) view, schools are an essential part of society and as such, should provide a fair environment for children and other individuals in the school community. Social justice demands that improvement within schools is grounded in an understanding of social issues outside of schools as well. Achieving social justice in educational leadership is a continuous effort, even in difficult, undemocratic conditions, and the outcomes of this effort must be accountable to every generation (Bogotch, 2014). In this sense, educational leaders have a responsibility to educate adults and children about the power dynamics that affect social justice through deliberate actions (Bogotch,



2014). The outcomes for future generations will not be realized unless social justice is undeniable for the current generation (Bogotch, 2014).

The issue of inclusion and the creation of LREs relates to important questions of equity and social justice. Diversity and inclusion have become a legitimate concern in the field of education, and particularly, in educational administration and leadership (Ryan, 2006) as inequity exists around identity markers associated with ethnicity, race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical ability, language, and others (Ryan, 2006). Leading for inclusion in schools requires educating teachers, and principals about issues of inequity and exclusion (Ryan, 2006). This is the lens used in this study to understand the concerns with educating students in their LRE. With an awareness of these issues, the challenges to the practice of inclusion are explored with the intent of expanding opportunities for all students.

In a case study that examined the role of the principal in inclusive education, Waldron, McLeskey, and Redd (2011) found that principals are able to ensure that there is effective collaboration between teachers, set the direction, improve conditions in the school, ensure that there is high-quality instruction across settings, and guarantee that data is used to determine critical decisions. Additionally, Waldron et al. (2011) state that many schools are still attempting to find ways to be more inclusive to students who struggle academically. One of the challenges for school leaders are the sometimes conflicting calls to be both excellent and equitable and the increasing demands to improve achievement outcomes, while also educating students with learning needs in general education classes per IDEA guidelines (Waldron et al., 2011). According to the findings of Waldron et al.'s (2011) study, the principal was able to set direction through

the development of school goals, which included a focus on students with disabilities. Additionally, teachers were included in decision-making and were asked to provide input regarding their experiences. The principal also clearly communicated a school vision centred on inclusion to all teachers (Waldron et al., 2011).

During the time when the shared vision was being discussed with the staff, the principal also worked to redesign the organization and provide opportunities for staff to share responsibility for decision-making (Waldron et al., 2011). Through this shared responsibility, teachers felt empowered and the professional relationships became the basis of a collaborative culture where there was a collective effort to work towards the school goals (Waldron et al., 2011). In order to improve working conditions at the school, the principal developed a learning community, which was aligned with the school's vision. Other efforts to improve the school focused on the creation of a more efficient schedule and the recognition of achievements in the school, furthermore, the principal was able to make decisions about staffing including hiring and evaluations (Waldron et al., 2011).

Providing high quality instruction for all students was a major motivating factor toward moving to a more inclusive model; one way to improve the instruction in this example was through the availability of PD (Waldron et al., 2011). Staff meetings were allocated time to provide teachers an opportunity to collaborate. Lastly, another way of improving instruction was for the general education teacher to work directly with small homogeneous groups in general education classes (when a special educator was present) (Waldron et al., 2011). Lastly, the school in this example moved to a more inclusive approach when data from close monitoring of student progress were used to drive

decision-making (Waldron et al., 2011). Through this study, it was revealed that the role of principals in creating an inclusive educational environment is significant (Waldron et al., 2011).

In another study involving over 50 principals in Ontario, Canada, Edmunds, Macmillan, Specht, Nowicki, and Edmunds (2009) examined the insights of principals around inclusion in their schools. The following components were explored: (a) physical resources; (b) philosophy, policies, and mandates; (c) school environment; (d) school personnel; (e) delivery of special education; and (f) classroom teaching practices.

In terms of the physical space, some principals stated that their school space was accessible and inclusive, while others described the space negatively in terms of accessibility (Edmunds et al., 2009). Some of the ways in which the physical space was considered to be accessible included having chairs with noise reducers; fully accessible floors with elevator and special needs washrooms, The physical space was considered to be less accessible when there was no wheel-chair accessibility, automatic doors, access to portables or washrooms with limitations (Edmunds et al., 2009).

In relation to inclusive policies, most of the principals in the study indicated that school mandates aligned or adhered to Board or Ontario Ministry of Education philosophies or policies on the topic; some of the board policies indicated that students have the right to an inclusive education, that schools must address the diverse needs that affect learning, that students have the right to participate in learning, that educators have the responsibility to provide similar opportunities for all, and that diversity is celebrated and everyone is valued (Edmunds et al., 2009). Additionally, principals expressed the intention to create a welcoming environment in their schools, where teachers are

accepting of all students, the safety of students is ensured, and all students are educated about various student needs (Edmunds et al., 2009). All sites within this study had special education personnel, however, PD for staff in that area has been essentially nil as the Ministry of Education funding had been reactive with little strategic planning (Edmunds et al., 2009). Although some educators have skills in working with diverse learner needs, principals felt that teachers were not prepared well or ready to manage the challenges of inclusive classrooms (Edmunds et al., 2009).

**Leadership, Social Justice and Inclusion.** According to Theoharis (2007) “social justice leadership” means that school leaders recognize in their practice the importance of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other sources of marginalization. This definition is grounded on the assertion that the goal of social justice is not achieved when students with disabilities are segregated from the regular classroom or when they receive altered curriculum (Theoharis, 2007).

According to Theoharis (2007), principals can enact social justice through working for student success, improving school spaces, enhancing staff capacity and strengthening school community and culture. In terms of student success, principals who advocate for social justice feel a duty or “moral obligation” to improve the success of marginalized groups (Theoharis, 2007). Improving school structures to create social justice could include such changes as increasing the accountability student learning, the elimination of ability-tracked classes, and the inclusion of special education students whereby there is an increase in rigor and an increase to educational opportunities (Theoharis, 2007).

In order to enhance staff capacity, principals can resist the belief that typical teacher education or PD is sufficient in creating an orientation towards social justice for teachers; instead, they could address issues of social justice through ongoing staff development, such as leading an examination of existing and historical injustices within the school (Theoharis, 2007). Lastly, principals who advocate for social justice attempt to strengthen school culture by addressing areas of need such as school violence, bullying or low attendance as well as reaching out to the broader school community to increase voice and participation (Theoharis, 2007)

According to Ryan (2013), diversity and inclusion have become legitimate areas of inquiry in the field of education. Ryan (2013) discusses social justice as a way of considering a wide array of injustices instead of one particular area of disadvantage. Social justice occurs when individuals from a variety of groups are distributed various goods and responsibilities fairly, as well as when they are recognized and valued (Ryan, 2013). In Ryan's (2013) view, prevalent social structures create challenges and prevent those who are disempowered to have recognition and to have access to resources. The creation of LREs in schools is one way to redistribute resources and recognize the value of the students in the school.

Gewirtz (1998) does not attempt to offer a definitive conceptualization of social justice, but instead seeks to open up a debate or conversation, which may inform education policy. In her view, social justice can be understood from two perspectives: distributional and relational (Gewirtz, 1998). Fair distribution of resources, including both material and non-material resources is a necessary part of a just society. At the same time, looking at social justice as just a matter of allocating resources is limiting. In

Gewirtz's (1998) view, relational social justice takes into account the social structures, relationships and dynamics of power. Distributional social justice is about the individual and how goods are allocated among people; relational social justice is about the inter-connections between people (Gewirtz, 1998).

Social justice is typically understood as a noun in the English language. However, according to Griffiths (2014) the term is better understood as a verb. From this viewpoint, social justice pertains to why actions are necessary, as well as the specific actions that might actually be taken to guarantee a fair distribution of resources and recognition of value (Griffiths, 2014). Educational leaders should be mindful of their contributions to improving schools and society, and making them “good places to be” or places that are characterized by justice and joy (Griffiths, 2014). Looking at social justice from this perspective may be useful in better understanding the concept. As principals and assistant principals navigate the complexities of social justice in schools, there are further considerations surrounding fairness for all school members. It is important to understand that the well being of any individual or group is not at the expense of other members in the school (Griffiths, 2014). It may seem like a tremendous undertaking to ensure that justice and joy characterize schools, but it is comforting to know that as long as the reasons for doing this work are known, the mistakes are recoverable (Griffiths, 2014).

Defining social justice as a process is valuable, but it can also be understood as a goal for individuals and society as a whole, (Bell, 2007). One major goal of social justice is the full participation for all groups within society, the fair distribution of resources, as well as basic emotional and physical security for marginalized groups (Bell, 2007). Additionally, another goal of social justice is to create an environment where

individuals are able to develop their full potential and are capable of democratic interaction with others (Bell, 2007). Social justice education can be evidenced in specific types of classroom practices (Hackman, 2005). For example, Hackman (2005) outlines five essential components for social justice education including: content mastery, critical thinking and the analysis of oppression, action and social change, personal reflection, and awareness of multicultural group dynamics. Content is necessary and essential for learning and a basic component of social justice (Hackman, 2005).

In terms of action and social change, it is necessary to intentionally empower students who have been historically taught to feel disempowered (Hackman, 2005). Another way to enact social justice in the classroom is to engage in self-reflection around subordinate and dominant identities, which can help move the school closer to a more socially just community (Hackman, 2005). Lastly, an awareness of multicultural group dynamics considers the relations of power between students and adults in the school, including the educators (Hackman, 2005).

According to Ryan (2006), exclusion occurs when individuals are not included in the practices or processes of an institution. This could be exemplified when students are sheltered within special education classrooms and do not have access the mainstream general education classes. The IDEA (2004) calls for students to be educated in the LRE for learning. For many students, the LRE is the general education classroom with accommodations. Inclusive schooling focuses on meeting the needs of all students, provides an emphasis on high quality instruction in the general education setting, and monitors student progress, responding to all students' needs (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011).

According to Precey and Mazurkiewicz (2013) inclusion has been an important topic due to the continued unequal balance of power, wealth, social status as well as the exclusion to particular social rewards and resources. Inclusion can be clearly understood through an examination of equality and equity (Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013). For instance, a free and uniform education for all students may be equal, however it fails to be equitable to all students if individual needs are not considered (Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013). If students were able to access the resources needed to adequately meet their learning needs then it would be equitable, inclusive, and transformative to their lives (Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013).

**Leadership for Inclusive Environments.** Precey and Mazurkiewicz (2013) examine three commonly referenced forms of leadership, transactional, transformational, and transformative and their relation to inclusion. Transactional leadership, which in their view, does not typically work well with inclusion, assumes that individuals are motivated by rewards and punishments and works best with a clear command chain, where people accept the authority of superiors (Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013). In this approach, the prime function of the subordinate is to follow through with work as outlined by his/her superior (Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013).

Transformational leadership relies on building and articulating a vision for a future, inspiring others, establishing goals, offering support, and demonstrating high levels of interpersonal engagement and resilience (Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Lastly, transformative leadership holds firm values of democracy, equity, and social justice, as well as an ability to live with challenges, facing them with moral courage (Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Transformative leadership seems most closely



connected to social change related to inclusion and democratic engagement (Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Mulford (2008) argues that due to the complexities of work in education, there has been a shift away from adjectival leadership. Instead, leaders adapt practices within schools to meet the needs of the ever-changing and challenging environment (Mulford, 2008).

Ottesen (2013) states that the goals of transformational leadership revolves around organizational change and is contextualized in the literature of school reform, improvement and instructional leadership. Transformative leadership, however, is rooted in critical theory and social justice, questions power structures, intends to raise critical consciousness, and challenge oppressive conditions (Ottesen, 2013). Precey, Entrena, and Jackson (2013) argue that if effective leadership is necessary to improve education, then it is essential to determine the characteristics of such leaders and understand the challenges of the varying contexts in which they may work (Precey et al., 2013).

Ottesen (2013) argues that dialogue for inclusion and social justice in educational leadership is a moral imperative to stop marginalization in schools. Dialogue has a power to make different perspectives visible and create opportunities for change (Ottesen, 2013). Such dialogue in schools is not without challenge, as leaders must find a way to balance equity with other pressures such as high stakes testing or the general climate of increasing accountability in schools (Ottesen, 2013). A truly dialogical perspective can be transformational in making school just places to be (Ottesen, 2013).

### **Studying Leadership Configurations**

At Florence High School, there is a distributed leadership (DL) structure with collaborative configurations. Teachers work in teams to make decisions and implement

initiatives within the school. According to Gronn (2009), leadership configurations are patterns of relationships related to DL. The concept of DL has been around for some time, but has recently gained more attention, as there has been more emphasis on the collective nature of leadership (Gronn, 2015). Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) argue that school leadership can be understood as a “distributed” practice, which is grounded in activity, instead of one individual’s position. From this additive perspective (Leithwood et al., 2007), leaders organize their practices across the organization’s structure as the site for leadership within the school (Spillane et al., 2001). For instance, in considering instructional development, the collective efforts from a variety of individuals could provide more complex and sophisticated activities than those of one leader alone. Distributed practices may span across many individuals and spaces within a school (Spillane et al., 2001). It is important to note that distributing leadership does not result in less demand for those in leadership positions; in fact, DL produces an increased demand for leaders to coordinate leaderships functions, build capacity in the school, monitor leadership work of others and provide useful feedback (Leithwood et al., 2007).

The distributed perspective of leadership considers the practices of individuals regardless of whether they hold a formalized role (Harris & Spillane, 2008). The popularity of DL reflects changes in leadership practices within institutions whereby leadership is purposefully distributed within a school due to external pressures and the increasingly complex workings within education (Harris & Spillane, 2008). In addition, there is growing research and evidence that DL makes a positive impact on organizations (Harris & Spillane, 2008). DL is concerned with maximizing organizational improvement and incorporating the many activities of groups and individuals within schools (Harris &

Spillane, 2008). On a practical level, the main concern relates to *who* distributes work, *how* leadership practices occur, and *what* impacts those practices have on the school (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Distributed leadership offers schools a frame and provides an opportunity to reflect about leadership distribution within the organization and there is a positive or negative difference based on the distribution as it focuses attention of the nuances of leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008).

Harris and Spillane (2008) state that some critical questions can be posed as a result of adopting a DL perspective such as, what is the overall distribution of leadership within the school? Is the distribution advancing the goals of organizational transformation? What could improve the distribution? Such questions allow conversations to move into the abstract and away from practice, offering a new lens and understanding of the relationships within schools and could potentially increase the likelihood that leadership can have a positive influence on change within schools (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Spillane et al. (2001) state that instead of simply focusing on leadership structures it is important to analyze the practices. The central argument of Spillane et al. (2001) is that school leadership, which covers the social and situational contexts, is not just the sum of the leaders' knowledge, skills and other capacities and abilities; these aspects are important, but it is more important to understand how teachers and principals become involved in practices that mobilize different individuals within the organization.

### **Understanding Organizational Frameworks**

This study relies on the four organizational frameworks outlined by Bolman and Deal (2013), including structural, human resources, symbolic, and political frames. These

frames can present a general picture of the organizational structure of the school. According to Bolman and Deal (2013), *the structural frame* relates to how work is allocated (differentiation) as well as how the work is coordinated (integration). Some significant concerns around structure relate to how work may be best enabled or impeded as well as what tensions structurally interfere with implementation. For example, one teacher within a classroom typically completes the assigning of grades. In an inclusion class the teacher may be listed as the teacher attached to a grade book. However, depending on the arrangement between the teachers, grading could be done by only one or both teachers, which could contribute to some confusion. In the context of a two-teacher classroom where one teacher is a special educator and the other is a general educator it may not be clear how to divide or co-ordinate responsibilities.

According to Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame, one way to allocate responsibilities is by work function. For example, instruction and assessment work may be assigned to teachers based on their function as a special versus general educator. This method may have benefits of specialization, but could create problems with the coordination of work or the two specializations working independently rather than in collaboration (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Typically, in a one-teacher classroom, the single teacher is responsible for teaching content, the assessment of students, and any other curricular or assessment tasks. In this case, the work is coordinated vertically or laterally within the school. In a two-teacher classroom, differentiation or specialization of work may occur as a result of the different preparation or experience that the two teachers have.

Bolman and Deal (2013) state that the more complex a role structure, or the more people completing a task, the more difficult it is to maintain focus on particular assignments. In the case of teaching in a co-taught LRE, there are two teachers working in a role typically fulfilled by one person, so it can be complicated to understand the roles clearly. According to Friend (2014), in co-teaching, the teachers share the same physical space, make collaborative instructional decisions, and share responsibility for the students. However, as Bolman and Deal (2013) explain, without clear roles, redundancy issues may exist. Given that much of the work done in organizations is completed collaboratively in teams (Bolman & Deal, 2013) it would be valuable to look at the work of inclusion partnerships closely.

Defining roles can reduce confusion and clarify responsibilities (Bolman & Deal, 2010). Even during times of conflict, Bolman and Deal (2010) recommend that roles can be clarified using a CAIRO chart. A chart can be useful in order to provide a visual representation of the responsibilities. For example, the chart would include each person involved with a particular task would be included on the chart. The letters “CAIRO” would be placed beside each person’s name. Each letter represents a different level of involvement; *C* represents that the individual is *consulted*; *A* designates the individual who needs to *approve* the task; *I* indicates that such individuals need to be *informed*; *R* represents the person who is *responsible* and *O* is reserved for individuals who are ‘*out of the loop*’ (Bolman & Deal, 2010). If the chart is filled out collectively, it usually highlights different views about tasks and also provides a tool for identifying individuals who are over or under loaded with work as well exposes the individuals who control work (Bolman & Deal, 2010).

The *human resource* frame relates to the satisfaction and inclusion of staff within the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Some of the challenges for organizations are to find the right fit between the people's strengths and the needs of the organization. There are several key assumptions at the core of the human resources frame. For example, employees and organizations enter in a reciprocal relationship because employees seek salaries and careers, while organizations rely of the motivation and ability of their people (Bolman & Deal, 2013). There must be an appropriate fit where employees have meaningful work and organizations have the employees with an adequate 'skillset' for the position (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Individuals have the need to feel satisfied by their work and be rewarded in addition to fitting into the organization's culture (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Schools often have more work than individuals to do it, however that should not be a reason for inaction (Bolman & Deal, 2010). Principals with strong leadership provide opportunities for staff to make meaningful contributions in school. As teachers feel that they have can impact the school, feelings spread to others and more people want to share in school improvement (Bolman & Deal, 2010). It is important for school leaders to acknowledge teachers' feelings and concerns, by spending time with them and building relationships (Bolman & Deal, 2010). Lastly, when teachers feel that they will not be scrutinized for their feedback, they can provide leaders with important insight regarding improvement in school practices (Bolman & Deal, 2010). Teaching in the LRE may require a slightly different skillset given that the position is much more collaborative than that of a traditional one teacher model (King-Sears et al., 2012). With regard to the

support for inclusion teaching, the school needs to find a way to attract the type of teacher who will find satisfaction in the work (Nilholm, 2006).

The *symbolic frame* within organizations represents a deeper, perhaps allegorical understanding of organizational culture and events (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Indeed, an organizational culture can be significant for employees. The symbolic frame encompasses an organization's values, myths, and vision (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Myths often originate in the beginning of an organization and can explain and maintain solidarity, which can transform an institution into a way of life (Bolman & Deal, 2013). An organization's values represent its view for the future. Values are intangible characteristics and the most important values are those that are lived (Bolman & Deal, 2013). A shared vision indicates the sense of purpose and links the history to the present (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Myths, values, and vision have only subtle distinctions and can conjoin (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The concepts of *ritual* and *ceremony* are core aspects of culture, and without them, schools can become lifeless and sterile (Bolman & Deal, 2010). Highs, lows, and transitions within the school require special attention. Principals can mark these events as special occasions or rituals that signify importance (Bolman & Deal, 2010). Additionally, teacher work and everyday accomplishments need to be celebrated to make little victories more meaningful (Bolman & Deal, 2010).

The symbolic frame can be used to help understand the problem of practice explored in this study, which involves creation and supporting LREs for students in inclusion classrooms at Florence High School. Bolman and Deal (2013) state that the symbolic frame “depicts a world far different from canons of rationality, certainty, and linearity” (p. 247). A central concept in Bolman and Deal's (2013) symbolic frame is the

idea of culture. Culture involves stories, rituals and myths of an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). As Bolman and Deal (2013) state, “culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise to accomplish desired ends” (p. 248). At Florence High School, inclusion classes have been a part of the culture of the school, particularly for special education teachers who have been directly involved. Some of the rituals around inclusion involve teaching in the general education teacher’s room, meeting on general education school-wide PLC teams, and collaborating with partners to improve student outcomes. Some of the myths of inclusion classes include the belief that both special and general education students can benefit from this school structure and that the partner relationships significantly affect the outcome of the class. Overall, the symbolic frame in the school connects the aspects of the past and ideals for the future within it.

In Bolman and Deal’s (2013) view, the *political frame* is an important element in describing the culture of a group or organization. This frame considers the power, relationships, allocation of resources, and decision-making processes between different groups. One particular consideration may be work allocation. The responsibility of how work is organized may not always be based on skills (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The political landscape can affect the interactions and performance of teams. For example, in the inclusion classroom, there is the partnership of two teachers, the relationship between distinct departments and special education, as well as that of teachers, the principal and assistant principals. The relationship between the general education teacher and the special education teacher could pose problems as the location of such classes is within the general education setting. Goals for an organization may not always come top-down, but



may evolve through a natural negotiation process (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In order to explore these processes of negotiation in more detail, critical approaches to educational leadership, with emphasis on social justice and inclusion, will also be applied to this study.

In schools, like many other organizations, the political frame proves to be very complex (Bolman & Deal, 2010). It can be extremely challenging to understand the politics in a particular school, however talking to others and listening to the narratives and stories can help one to put information together to identify different perspectives and areas of tension (Bolman & Deal, 2010). It is beneficial to build relationships with others who share the same ideas, but it is also important to meet with those who hold different views in order to understand them better (Bolman & Deal, 2010). Additionally, when dealing with political differences it is valuable to discuss differences openly and be willing to negotiate (Bolman & Deal, 2010). Each organization is unique and experiences political tensions that require the leaders' attention (Bolman & Deal, 2010).

### **Conclusions and Summary of the Theoretical Framework**

In this chapter, I discussed the history of inclusive education and outlined two main components of my theoretical framework, including the notions of critical leadership and its implications for social justice and inclusive education. According to Opertti et al. (2014), the history of inclusive education dates back to the 1948 Human Rights Declaration as the beginning of a rights' based approach to education. Kozleski et al. (2014) also explain that inclusive education must be considered from a multi-dimensional perspective that considers the role of history, culture and everyday life.

Critical theory and conceptualizations of social justice are a major component of the theoretical framework discussed in this chapter. Critical theory reveals the interconnections between individuals or groups (Gewirtz, 1998) and problematizes issues of oppression and marginalization (Gunter, 2001). Additionally, Theoharis (2007) explains that social justice aims to eliminate discrimination through inclusive practices. Overall, the inclusive component of my theoretical framework provides an empowering perspective for students (Hackman, 2005).

In this chapter, I introduced distributed leadership (DL) as it pertains to leadership practices for inclusive education. Spillane et al. (2001) noted that leadership is not related to one individual's role, but should be understood in the context of the entire school. Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames provide a comprehensive view of the organization. The frames essentially provide a mental model, which provides an orientation and a pathway to address diverse organizational challenges (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

## Chapter 4

### Research Methods

#### Qualitative case study approach

I have chosen to use qualitative research for this study because I was very interested in learning about teacher, principal and assistant principal experiences related to creating and maintaining LREs for students. Although time consuming, qualitative research offers rich descriptions of social phenomena and lends itself well for analysis of data recorded through field notes, and interviews (Drew, Hardman, & Hosp, 2007). During the study, I was aware of the importance of documenting my own thoughts and beliefs regarding inclusive education, as I looked for patterns in the data (Drew et al., 2007). The qualitative approach allowed me to capture the rich, descriptive stories told by the participants as they implemented LREs in Florence High School.

The context for this study is specific to one school (Florence High School) and interrogates a particular aspect of the way in which teachers the principal and assistant principal experience their work regarding the creation and support for LREs. Exploring the issue of the inclusion of special education students in LREs through a case study, allows a deep understanding of the current situation of inclusion at Florence High School. According to Aaltio and Heilmann (2010), in theory, a case study allows the researcher to understand the research environment better. Data can be gathered in multiple ways such as through observation, or interview, with the amount of data varying widely depending on the research study (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2010).

In order to identify and explore the specific challenges related to creating and supporting LREs in inclusion classrooms at Florence High School, this study adopts an

exploratory case study approach. According to the Ontario Centre for Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health (2015), an exploratory case study is used when the intent is to generate themes for further investigation and to answer initial questions such as: what does the case (or situation) look like and what themes can be brought forward? The case study approach is appropriate for this study because it considers at a specific situation (LRE creation and support) and a targeted sampling population of individuals who have been involved in the implementation of LREs, including the principal and assistant principals in charge of leading these initiatives at Florence High School. As noted in the literature review, previous research suggests that although there are challenges with the creation and support of LREs, it is a promising area of study in the field of educational leadership.

### **Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis for a study is the major entity that is being studied and can include individuals, groups, artefacts, geographical units and social interactions (Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2006). The type of analysis in a study determines the specific unit of analysis. During the consideration of the research questions, it was important to determine the unit of analysis or the “case” for this study, however, according to Baxter and Jack (2008) it is a difficult task for novice and seasoned researchers alike. Asking questions that narrow in the concept to be analyzed is useful in determining the unit of analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Additionally, Baxter and Jack recommend discussing the issue of the case with a colleague to assist in clarifying ideas.

It was indeed a challenge to determine the unit of analysis in this study. To begin thinking about the unit of analysis, it was important to discuss the issue with my

supervisor (Baxter & Jack, 2006). Additionally, in determining the unit of analysis it was important to ask questions regarding the topic of my analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Through the conversations between my supervisor and I, we were able to determine the unit of analysis as the LRE in Florence School and the practices related to its creation and support in inclusion classrooms. In chapter 1, I offered a thorough description of the organizational and social contexts of the study, including a description of the relevant policies and related school initiatives.

## **Participants**

The participants of this study include teachers, the principal and an assistant principal involved in supporting LREs through inclusion at the school. The teacher participants work or previously worked in special and regular education. The participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. Background information regarding the participants' professional experiences was included in the interview questions. In total, there were 10 participants in this study, including eight teachers and one principal and one assistant principal.

In order to preserve their anonymity, the names of the participants were changed to pseudonyms. The teacher participants included: Rachael, Sammy, Mary, Rebecca, Louise, Ken, Karl, and Java. The teachers range in work experience from one year to over twenty years. The principal and one assistant principal also participated in this study. For reasons of confidentiality, and due to the small sample size, when quoting Willa and Michelle, I use the term *administrator*. Willa and Michelle have significant work experience in the school and have been personally involved in supporting LREs. Both participants, Willa and Michelle, also have teaching experience with inclusion,

however those experiences were not at Florence High School and as such not explored in depth in this case study. Two men and eight women were included in this study. Table 2 outlines the breakdown of the participants, including information regarding gender, content area and position of responsibility (if applicable).

**Table 2 Participant Information**

Pseudonym	Gender	Special or General Education
Rachael	Female	Special education- approximately 15 years experience
Sammy	Female	Special education- approximately 10 years experience
Mary	Female	General education- approximately 10 years experience
Rebecca	Female	Special education- approximately 5 years experience
Louise	Female	General education- approximately 20 years experience
Ken	Male	Special education- approximately 15 years experience
Karl	Male	Special education- approximately 30 years experience
Java	Female	Special education- approximately 30 years experience
Willa	Female	Administrator - approximately 10 years experience at Florence
Michelle	Female	Administrator- approximately 10 years experience at Florence

### Data Collection Instruments

**Interviews (semi-structured).** Interviews were conducted to better understand teacher and school leaders' experiences at Florence High School regarding the creation and support of LREs in inclusion classrooms. According to Barlow (2010), even though during a semi-structured interview there is an intention to answer a specific question, other questions may emerge. At the beginning of the interview, as shown in Appendices 1

and 2, participants were asked to describe their background and experiences. Next, the participants were asked about the current practices around the creation and supports of LREs and inclusion at Florence High School; the participants' perceptions of the practice of inclusion and the organizational processes that facilitate the creation and support for LREs. The results of the research questions were interpreted, analyzed, and summarized according to emerging analytical categories (Wolfram Cox & Hassard, 2010). The interview questions for this study can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

**Field Notes Journal.** Over the course of the data collection process, I recorded insights into the data. Initially, the notes were shorthand, jotted notes, which I later wrote into paragraph form (Yin, 2012). Overall, the field notes served the purpose of capturing reflective notes throughout the study. The purpose of the journal was to capture my thoughts and other descriptive data relevant to the analysis of the problem of practice. I kept my journal in order to account for thoughts and observations not otherwise captured in other data. Additionally, I reviewed my field notes journal and have included my thoughts into the analysis and findings sections.

## **Analysis**

Inductive data analysis is the process in which researchers “follow the data” (Drew et al., 2007). I utilized inductive data analysis for the qualitative data gathered in this study in order to explore the concepts, themes and patterns in the data (Drew et al., 2007). Creswell (2013) indicates that the inductive logic of qualitative research involves researchers looking at literature to pose theories, analyze data from themes, ask open-ended questions, create field notes, gather information from participants, and ultimately,

find broad patterns. Miles et al. (2014) state that researchers must interpret their data in order to analyze it.

### **Content Analysis**

Content analysis is empirically grounded and the process is exploratory and is intended to be inferential in nature (Krippendorff, 2012). This form of analysis, centered on interpretation, has been extended to many types of recorded media, and can be used to analyze data including documents and interview transcripts in an attempt to track the frequency of keywords (Stan, 2010). Data are coded based on protocols decided before or during the analysis (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2009). Content analysis is appropriate for use in this study given that it relies on transcribed interview transcripts obtained from a recorded version of the material. In the past few decades, computer software has been developed to facilitate the process of content analysis by aiding in the review of large amounts of data (Stan, 2010). Specific software programs are available, however in this study such software was not utilized. The use of content analysis has now been recognized to identify communication patterns and help researchers learn a great deal about the social phenomenon in which they study and can be applied to a qualitative research setting (Stan, 2010). In this study, content analysis provided a solid approach to exploring the data. Overall, the examination of records of communication can provide more insight into individuals, groups, organizations or institutions (Stan, 2010).



## **The Coding Process**

According to Stan (2010), content analysis can be used wherever a physical record of communication exists. The first step in analyzing the data was to create a different code. Each category was determined from the data and was given a code to use for consistency during the analysis phase. For this study, data have been analyzed within word documents on a computer. The transcribed interviews have also been copied into a text box. In the two-column text box, transcribed interview data have been entered on the left hand side and the reflections of the researcher were aligned to the transcription on the right hand column. This process is part of the level one coding of the data. The highlighted colour codes were then applied to the data to organize the content. Next, the highlighted excerpted columns were copied into a new document with reflections. During the level-two analysis, data from all participants relating to a specific code were analyzed together to identify patterns or tensions (Patton, 2002).

## **Inductive Coding**

According to Gläser and Laudel (2013), inductive coding is a system in which categories are derived exclusively from the text being analyzed. Inductive coding based on the first level of coding assisted in the creation of new codes and aided in connecting concepts. Level two coding involves identifying the similar themes across transcribed interviews and moving all coded data into documents based on the specific themes. For example, all data involving time from all interviews are placed in one common document. In a similar way to level one coding, the document is divided into a table with columns. The right hand column is available to capture thoughts, connections to the

literature and other narrative comments and analysis. These notes are later explained in the findings chapter.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Shenton (2004), many critics have been hesitant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research. However, there have been frameworks for establishing criteria including *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* of trustworthiness for some time (Shenton, 2014). Researchers try to ensure credibility by attempting to demonstrate a true representation of the phenomenon under study (Shenton, 2014). Researchers aim to guarantee transferability by providing details to the reader such that the reader can determine whether the findings are applicable to a familiar setting (Shenton, 2014). Additionally, researchers strive to ensure dependability, or the ability to repeat the study and have similar results (Shenton, 2014). Lastly, in qualitative studies, researchers attempt to achieve confirmability where the results of the study reflect the data and not the researcher's opinions (Shenton, 2014). I have included a table below, which outlines the trustworthiness criteria in this study.

**Table 3 Trustworthiness Criteria**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Relationship to this study</b>
<i>Credibility</i> - the congruence of the findings with reality (Shenton, 2004).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Familiarity of participating culture</li> <li>b) Data triangulation- different methods</li> <li>c) Tactics to ensure honesty- providing the right to withdraw participation at any time, ensure anonymity and confidentiality.</li> <li>d) Member checks to ensure accuracy</li> <li>e) Thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny (Shenton, 2004).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) I was both a researcher and practitioner at the school where I conducted my study. I familiarized myself with internal documents to understand the culture and history of the organization thoroughly.</li> <li>b) Triangulation was used to reduce my bias as a researcher. I collected data from multiple sources including internal documents as well as from teacher and principal/assistant principal participant transcripts.</li> <li>c) Participants were given the possibility to withdraw participation at any point throughout the study.</li> <li>d) Member checking was conducted in order to verify the congruence of the data.</li> <li>e) I provided detailed descriptions of the context and actual experiences at Florence High School.</li> </ul>
<i>Transferability</i> - if the results can be applied to another situation (Shenton, 2004).	- In qualitative studies, the results are considered in the context of the organization or geographical area where the study was conducted (Shenton, 2004).	- The results of this case study are specific to the context of Florence High School, but may be particularly relevant to other schools within in the school district that may share a similar context.
<i>Dependability</i> - if the study was repeated, it would have similar results (Shenton, 2004).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The research design and its implementation was strategically planned and documented</li> <li>b) The operational detail of data gathering was systematically recorded</li> <li>c) Reflective appraisal of the project was maintained through a field journal (Shenton, 2004).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) This study was planned and executed strategically.</li> <li>b) The data in this study was gathered with great attention to details.</li> <li>c) As a researcher, I reflected on the project and the process of inquiry recording my reflections on a field journal.</li> </ul>
<i>Confirmability</i> - the results of the study are the experiences and ideas of participants and not the preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).	- Audit trail is also allows others to follow the research process (Shenton, 2004).	- All documents, transcripts, field journal notes and coding sheets were kept in order to trace back the origin of the analytical constructs.

## **Triangulation**

Triangulation is an important consideration in understanding the phenomenon in a research study (Wolfram Cox & Hassard, 2010). This study relies on data triangulation whereby data collected from different sources and times has been contrasted (Wolfram Cox & Hassard, 2010). This study relied upon the triangulation of qualitative data sources (Patton, 2002). Triangulation of the data in this study occurred during the data analysis process. According to Patton (2002) triangulation of data increases credibility and counters concerns surrounding a reliance on a single source of data. In this study, the data were triangulated contrasting the multiple interview transcripts with teacher and principal and assistant principal participants, available internal documents (such as the staff binder), institutional communications, current State data, and reports, as well as researcher field notes. A common misconception of triangulation is that multiple data sources will produce the same results. However, that is not the intention of the triangulation of data (Patton, 2002). Looking at potential inconsistencies closely provides an opportunity for further insight into the topic of research (Patton, 2002). According to Wolfram Cox and Hassard (2010), triangulation of the data provides a better understanding of the social phenomenon through the use of multiple methods in an attempt to reduce bias and to identify points of commonality.

## **Ethics**

An ethics application was submitted to the Western University Research Ethics Board. The ethics review occurred and was approved in the spring of 2015. This research study adheres to strict ethical guidelines as outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 (TCPS2). The Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 is the policy that guides all ethics reviews

for research in Canada. Participants in this study provided informed consent, and confidentiality has been maintained throughout the study. Informed consent ensures that participants understand the nature of the study as well as any potential risks or benefits (TCPS2). Ensuring confidentiality is the researcher's duty not to reveal the identity of individual participants (TCPS2). Throughout the study, I was committed to conducting an ethical research study that reflected the participants' views and experiences related the creation and support for LREs in inclusion classrooms at Florence High School. There is no formal ethics review process or committee in Sheppard High School District, instead I received permission to conduct this study from the principal of the school, who has the power to authorize research to be conducted in the school.

## Chapter 5

### Analysis

In this study, I acknowledge the voices of teachers, an assistant principal and the principal of the school. However, in the literature reviewed, generic terms such as *administrator* and *school leader* were used and the term *assistant principal* was absent. In my analysis and discussion, I apply this literature to both the principal and assistant principal roles as I draw connections.

### Analytic Themes

After completing the data collection process I reviewed and analyzed all collected interview data, documents, institutional communications, and field notes. During the analysis, where I looked at each piece of data separately, three key themes emerged: *LREs and access to quality education for all students, collaboration, and scheduling*. The first theme discussed in this chapter: LREs and access to quality education for all students, shows that despite the various constraints that exist in creating LREs for students in inclusion classrooms, all participants believed that all students should have access to quality education. There was a strong commitment from participants to do the ‘difficult work’ required in order to ensure that all students have fair and equitable access to quality education. In relation to the second theme, collaboration, the analysis shows how partners, namely a special education and general education teacher pairing, engage each other in creating and supporting LREs, how the tasks are completed, and the communication that exists between partners before, during, or after class. Overall, collaboration for the purpose of supporting students was a theme found strongly in the literature as well as the analysis. Finally, scheduling was an important topic discussed by

the participants. It was portrayed as a constraint, when the schedule impeded collaboration, or as a benefit, when the schedule was in line with other demands or facilitated collaboration. Teacher scheduling as well as course schedules were both discussed by participants.

After those initial themes were identified, a second level of analysis was conducted to each theme. That allowed for an in-depth exploration of each of the initial themes. The results of the second level analysis were the following subthemes:

1. LREs and access to quality education for all students
  - Teacher preparation to teach in the LREs
  - Professional Learning Communities and teaching in the LRE
2. Collaboration
  - Partnerships
  - Pairing process
  - Role definition
3. Scheduling
  - Allocation of time for class preparation in the LREs

### **LREs and Access to Quality Education for All Students**

Critical theory in education is concerned with how educators can affect equitable social change in schools (Gunter, 2001). At Florence High School, providing inclusion classes in the LRE aims to ensure that special education students have similar opportunities to access the same curriculum as their peers. Inclusion supports an increase in rigor and ultimately an increase in educational opportunities (Bogotch, 2014). In this study, providing access to quality education for all students arose as a key perceived benefit of educating students in LREs, despite the low number of special education students enrolled in such classes. Although, the numbers of students in inclusion classes

are quite small, it is important to recognize that achieving equity and social justice is a continuous effort (Bogotch, 2014). In describing the creation of LREs, some participants indicated an awareness of the mandates around creating LREs in the IDEA (2004). Others communicated a commitment to creating access to education for all students without making explicit reference to the IDEA (2004).

Although there were generally favourable responses regarding the value of teaching students with disabilities in the general education class, the practices at the school, such as the relatively small number of students in inclusion classes (only 18 of 175 students), suggest that there is some difference between beliefs and actions. A larger number of special other education students were in typical, non-inclusion general education classes. Argyris and Schon (1974) assert that in some organizations there is a disparity between the espoused theories and the theories-in-use. For instance, teachers, principals and assistant principals may be optimistic in their espoused theories of inclusion, but the practice, as noted above, may indicate otherwise. It may be valuable to continue to explore and enhance the access to education for all students in light of this tension.

As Hines (2008) asserts, a favourable attitude by educators towards inclusion can lead to increased problem solving between colleagues in this area. Moreover, in Hines (2008) view, principals have the power to impact teachers' attitudes towards inclusion through consistent planning and by fostering collaboration (Hines, 2008). It was extremely important for many of the participants that all students have an opportunity to achieve at high levels: *"I think the successes are that our underperforming kids can experience a challenging curriculum and not that we are not providing that in our own classes, but they really get to see how quickly it moves"* (Karl, special education).



Additionally, Ken (special education) states, *“I think exposing as many kids as possible to the general education population works really well.”* Schools should be a place of fairness where all students have similar opportunities (Lupton, 2005). At Florence High School, students who access LREs in inclusion classrooms, fulfill high school graduation requirements, and also have the possibility of becoming college eligible, which opens many more options beyond high school. Ryan (2013) states that social justice occurs when individuals are distributed goods fairly and when they are valued.

As Theoharis (2007) suggests, the inclusion of special education students into general education classes is a way to improve school structures and a way to promote social justice. For example, Rachael (special education) said, *“a lot of the special ed. kids performed more independently than they thought they could.”* Additionally, Michelle (administrator) stated, *“I think it’s really a good experience to get out to be out there with their peers and with different teacher expectations with scaffolding so that they could eventually meet the same expectations.”* Michelle’s point is noteworthy as it addresses both the equality of opportunity (Gewirtz, 1998) in the form of access to general education classes, but also emphasizes the need for an equality of outcome (Gewirtz, 1998) as it focuses on students meeting a similar standard. From each the teacher, principal and assistant principal perspectives, there is a shared belief that students benefit from learning in LREs.

Participants recognized that all students should be treated equally and be challenged academically. Typically, special education students take their academic courses in either special education or general education; however LRE through inclusion classes provides an alternative model where students can be included in general education

classes and activities, while still maintaining strong levels of special education support. The principal and assistant principals initiate conversations with the department chairs from the content areas and with special education teachers about potential inclusion class options based on the students' needs: "*It really depends from year to year if we have a student population that would really benefit [from LREs in inclusion classes] and must decide where they are going to do it, who the partners are going to be and whether [inclusion classes will be] expanded to different grade levels*" (Willa, administrator). At Florence High School, LREs in inclusion classes are offered when the principal and assistant principals believe there is a group of students who can benefit from the class.

Creating LREs through inclusion classes provide access for students to be held to higher levels of learning through exposure to the general education curriculum. Having special education students reaching and meeting the same standards as their peers is the embodiment of the *High Standards for All* philosophy at Florence High School. A detailed explanation of the *High Standards for All* philosophy was offered in chapter 1, so I will not repeat it here; suffice to say that the *High Standards for All* principles are part of the collective and aspirational mission at the school and an important theme for teachers, the principal and assistant principals at the site. In relation to this theme, three guiding principles stand out in the analysis of the interviews:

- *All students* are expected to learn at high levels.
- *Some students* will need more support and time to achieve those levels of learning.
- As a system, we do **whatever it takes** to create the time and provide the support for students to learn.

Several participants also referred to the LREs, stating the necessity for students to be educated in the best possible educational environment. Additionally, one participant, Java (special education), acknowledged the legal provision of a free appropriate public education (IDEA, 2004) stating the educator responsibilities towards the creation of LREs: *“so while there are a variety of comfort levels people understand that it’s a required part of your job and it’s part of providing free and appropriate public education.”* Rodriguez et al. (2012) state that as teachers experience inclusion environments, attitudes related to students with special needs in the general education class tend to become increasingly more favourable. In this study, all participants experienced working in an inclusion environment for at least one year, and overall, participants highlighted the benefits for students.

Schools are places that should be characterized by both justice and joy (Griffiths, 2014). Although that may be difficult to achieve, it is important that educational leaders attempt to follow practices that accomplish that outcome (Griffiths, 2014). At Florence High School, participants indicated that LREs could have a significant impact on learning. For example, Mary (general education) said, *“I do think inclusion can be really powerful.”* Additionally, another teacher stated, *“ I had a really successful experience doing it and I think it’s a really positive thing and a good thing to do when it’s done right”* (Rachael, special education). When Rebecca (special education) was asked about her initial feelings about working in an LRE, she said, *“I was excited because I was thinking that our kids would benefit from being in the environment with the support.”* The favourable attitudes towards the education of students in LREs through inclusion classes at Florence High School provide great hope for the future.

As special education students experience growth in inclusion classes, teachers at Florence High School witness increased confidence of students. Mumford and Chandler (2009) also found that students have improved experiences when teachers have a realistic attitude towards special education students. Furthermore, Santoli et al. (2008) concluded that educators are willing to make the necessary instructional changes when they believe that students are appropriately placed in an inclusion class.

At Florence High School, some participants felt that LREs through inclusion classes benefited all students. *“I think it is so beneficial for not only the students on an IEP but the general education teacher and the students as well”* (Sammy, special education). Additionally, Louise (general education) said, *“I think inclusion can be really valuable for not only the special education students; for the general education students as well.”* Willa, (administrator) stated, *“it [LRE through inclusion] can be incredibly beneficial to those students who are or might not otherwise be able to access the mainstream class as well as to the students who could benefit from working with a wide range of students.”*

Although there is strong evidence that teachers are willing to work with a variety of learners at Florence High School, there were a couple small examples from the evidence that suggest that there are times in which teachers did not feel a particular student benefited from the inclusion environment. In one example, Louise (general education) states that there were times when a student was removed from the class because *“it just wasn’t working.”* Additionally, Mary (general education) describes a situation where a student was also removed due to violent behaviour. Mary wonders, *“if there was an easier way to ensure that it’s inclusion but it’s also a safe space for*

*everyone.*” In these two examples, due to behaviour perceived to be challenging, the teachers felt that the classroom environment would be more beneficial to students if the student were removed. These examples were not the common experiences for these teachers or the other teachers in this study, however these examples show some of the challenges of inclusion at Florence High School.

As Willa, (administrator) stated, a *“fundamental purpose of school is to help all of our kids be in a place that they have all kinds of choices and they are not funnelled into one pathway.”* The ambitious task of providing multiple pathways for students must be balanced with the responsibilities placed on teachers, such as acknowledging the areas teachers cannot change. So while teachers may be willing to make changes to their lessons or curriculum to support students, teachers cannot change schedules, planning time, internal PD, or other areas of administrative concern (Santoli et al., 2008). Principals and assistant principals then must consider barriers to inclusion around these areas to ensure that school structures enable multiple pathways for all students.

In at least one case at Florence High School, there was no special education class for a high school-required course and all special education students were included in the general education setting with or without a modified grade. *“Two of the years we taught the class there was no special ed. version of the class. That was the class”* (Rachael, special education). If no special education version of the class was available there was a clear belief on the part of those involved in the decision that students could be successful and staff were committed to the success of the students.

The decision not to offer a special education version of a particular course suggests that there is a strong commitment from some staff within the school to support

the inclusion of students in regular classrooms. There is a significant degree of responsibility on the part of some teachers and the principal and assistant principals in such a situation. The resulting classroom scenario, where all students were integrated into one environment, suggests that the principal, assistant principals and teachers involved held a shared vision that such including special education students in regular classrooms would be a viable way to meet student needs. Additionally, although this example only appeared once in the data, it speaks to Gronn's (2009) notion of leadership configurations, indicating that desired outcomes can occur as a result of both planned and spontaneous actions of different individuals within the organizational. Although, providing LREs seems to be an intentional practice within the school, other structures, such as creating accommodations for special education students in a general education classroom, occurred organically as in the example outlined above.

**Teacher preparation to teach in the LREs.** Teachers who are well prepared for an inclusion environment, have clearer objectives, more engaging activities and are better able to address the demands of individual student needs (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). If teachers are not prepared adequately for the work, it may also affect their feelings about inclusion in general (Rodriguez et al., 2012). In Allay et al.'s (2013) study there was a similar finding, which indicated that teacher education programs do not provide sufficient preparation for inclusive education. Prior to working at the school, some teachers at Florence High School had some PD or information about how to work with special education students and were familiar with the two-teacher inclusion model, but most participants reported that they did not have any PD or preparation. For example, Sammy (special education) stated, "*When I was in my credential [pre-service teaching program]*

*I remember taking a class on inclusion which was many years ago.*” For Rachael, (special education), there was no preparation to teach in LREs at all: *“I haven’t had any additional training at all.”* For Rebecca (special education), there was also no formal or informal preparation, and she states: *“No, nothing”* in regards to her preparation in this area.

Improving equity in schools relies on access to quality teaching for all students (OECD, 2005). Despite the intention of teacher pre-service programs to provide teachers with the basic entry-level skills for classroom teaching, Allay et al. (2013) found that many pre-service teacher programs do not offer adequate preparation on inclusion teaching. In this study, when participants were asked if they were interested in further PD, there was a strong agreement that participants felt that it would be helpful.

When asked what the administrative team does to support inclusion, Willa (administrator) answered *“probably not as much as we should.”* Given the relatively small number of schools in the district (only five in total) there may not be the extended type of PD available, as there is in other districts. Additionally, two participants mentioned an out-of district PD that they attended after working in an inclusion class at the school. For instance, Rachael (special education) said that she attended *“an all day training”* with her partner. Additionally, Sammy (special education) stated that she also *“went to a couple workshops.”* Overall, no other participants identified other external workshops or PD that are available. It appears that there is a lack of available PD beyond the structure of the school or a lack of awareness on accessing such support.

**Professional Learning Communities and teaching in the LRE.** According to the OECD (2005), student learning depends of access to quality teaching in school. An indirect benefit identified by participants in special education content classes is that they can access content that is developed and refined by a team of teachers and apply it to their special education settings. Willa (administrator) noted: “our students who are in special education, for example are reading some of the same books that they are reading in the [general education setting].” Typically, at Florence High School, a special education teacher teaches three to four different courses and usually works independently. Many special education teachers teach content courses at Florence High School as the only teacher, thus collaborating with others on course content is not always possible. If special education teachers work in inclusion classes and participate in PLCs, they will be able to access the same materials as their general education peers (as teams have common materials to align their curriculum that are shared through a Google documents folder) and modify those materials in teaching the special education version of the course.

Blanton and Perez (2011) indicate that special education teachers can benefit significantly from working in PLCs. As Sammy (special education) explains, “*although, not everything that they were doing out in gen. ed. [...] I was able to take a lot of ideas and kind of follow their pacing, scope and sequence and bring it to the small group setting.*” In addition, Ken (special education) stated “*I would add lectures to my learning skills class to build on the material.*” For Rebecca (special education), the experience was different from Sammy’s situation. When asked about PLC collaboration, Rebecca stated “*I found that it was just an exchange of paperwork which we could do over e-mail so I*



*chose to do something better with my time*” and thus asked to be removed from the collaborative team.

In some cases, the structure of PLC groups, organized by the administration, was advantageous and enabled the creation of LREs for students. Alternately, where there was not strong integration of team members, the PLC did not result in collaboration between teachers to support the creation of LREs in inclusion classrooms for students. This particular example highlights an opportunity where administration could have intervened to support the work of the team. As McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) explain, leaders have the unique position to shift school culture and support changes in direction when needed.

The *High Standards for All* philosophy, which seems to be deeply rooted in the culture of Florence High School (as noted by all participants referencing its language in the interviews), is very relevant to the problem of practice for this study. Special education students at the school are entitled to the accommodations in their IEP (IDEA, 2004) including items such as extra time on tests and quizzes, extended time for assignments, and others. As course PLC teams adopt redemption and revision strategies, teachers begin to offer such supports for all students as a part of the regular practices. Additionally, when the culture of the school supports multiple attempts to learn content, more students’ (including special education students) can have an ability to be successful in their classes (*High Standards for All* document). Rachael, (special education) stated, “*we kept the bar the same [level]. But how are we going to get the [special education] kids to get there?*” As Rachael explains, teachers hold high expectations for students but adjust the amount and type of supports and accommodations available to students to help them reach the expectations.

## Collaboration

One of the strongest predictors of receptive attitudes towards LRE in inclusion classes involves collaboration between partners (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). During the interviews, participants were asked about the ways in which the two teachers collaborate. There were a variety of responses on this topic suggesting that there was not a consensus regarding how teachers choose to collaborate or how these collaborations were configured. Some participants seemed content with their collaborative relationship, whereas in other cases participants were not satisfied with the arrangements with their respective pairing colleague. Given the varied responses, it appears that the two inclusion partner teachers determine a collaboration schedule together, and there is not a consistent approach school-wide required by the administration.

According to the participants' accounts, one challenge for collaboration towards inclusion is that the special education teachers have non-classroom duties that can make collaboration more difficult. For example, case-managing students, writing IEPs, holding meetings, collaborating with other teachers, and typically teaching multiple content classes, which means that special education teachers are not always able to find the time to commit to plan collaborations with their partners. Much of the non-teaching day may be already accounted for with these duties, and committing to a standing time for collaboration planning can be challenging. As Rachael, (special education) questioned, *“how do you have those conversations when you are running all over campus?”* Working with a partner involves a commitment to collaborate and share responsibilities, however the balance and realities of the workday interfere with collaboration.

For special education teachers, inclusion classes and instruction are only part of the position. Case management of students with disabilities, writing IEPs, holding meetings with parents and other teachers, and monitoring progress, are other responsibilities. For example, Mary (general education) stated that her special education partner teacher *“was amazing when she could be there but obviously she was pulled in fifty thousand different directions. That did make it harder.”* Similarly, Rebecca (special education) noted that special education teachers teach multiple courses stating, *“I do not have a common prep [...] there’s no collaboration.”* PLC teams are created based on a structure of teaching two classes at this site. As a result, the non-classroom duties associated to the role of special education teachers complicate the possibilities for collaboration with regular classroom teachers.

According to Santoli et al. (2008), there are many obstacles to collaboration such as scheduling conflicts, limited preparation time, and other responsibilities. Some teachers at Florence High School noted that the responsibilities and the full schedule make teaching inclusion classes extremely challenging. For instance, Rachael (special education) reflected on the demands of the workload for special education teachers: *“teach 5 periods ...have one period where you are meeting with the teacher, but then there’s all this other stuff and so how do you cram it all into a school day.”* Having a chance to connect with their partner before class ensured that teachers walk into class feeling prepared and integrated, and that questions can be sorted out before students come into the room.

**Partnerships.** One obstacle related to collaboration revolved around the establishment of meaningful partnerships in the LREs. Friend et al. (2010) state that

special education teachers are often perceived as helpers, which can affect equity between the partners and their subsequent collaboration. Furthermore, by positioning them as helpers, special education teachers may develop lack of confidence. For example, Rebecca (special education) stated that she feels that the general education teacher is “technically ... the expert on the subject. I didn’t want to intervene.” In this example, Rebecca does not have any specified planning time and does not meet regularly with her partner teacher. Thus, communication between the two teachers happens exclusively in the classroom. The two teachers do not have an opportunity (outside of the classroom) within the workday to build a collegial relationship. Their interactions are based on conversations in the classroom, when students are present. As a result, they resort to reading each other’s cues.

Rebecca explained her experience: *“I felt like I was sitting on her toes if I was teaching.”* Without explicit communication between the partners, there are plenty of opportunities to misinterpret each other’s gestures, body language, or limited classroom interactions, which can create inconsistency for the students. It is problematic from a collaborative point of view if two seemingly equal teachers function in a hierarchical fashion, because partnerships are based on parity between teachers and successful collaboration for the creation of LREs depends on horizontal and equitable relations (Friend et al., 2010).

As teachers collaborate and negotiate the two-teacher inclusion classroom, it is important to them that not all responsibilities related to special education students are delegated to the special education teacher because this relegation could further isolate students. *“It’s a delicate balance because you don’t want to usurp or get in the way of the*

*relationship between the general ed. teacher and the student and the parent”* (Java, special education). Navigating the partner relationship could be challenging. Continued involvement from administration in setting norms and providing direction could potentially improve these concerns (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Another salient example of partnerships could be seen in Mary’s (general education) interactions with her partner teacher. For Mary, in working with her partner she learned more about supporting students and was able to reflect on her teaching practices. Mary said, *“I got really detailed descriptions of how I can support each student. I got specific strategies for how to support each student ... I would not have received that if there had not been another teacher sitting in the classroom with me.”* In this case, the two teachers collaborated frequently and used their expertise in the class to support the students. The teamwork between the teachers helped them to communicate efficiently with students and reflect on their own practices.

Collaboration can take many forms depending on the partnerships. Bolman and Deal (2013) note that labour can be divided laterally by function. In Mary’s example, the partnership divided some of the labour by function as each teacher provided input to the other related to the functional role (special or general educator) and skillset. This type of collaboration can be termed as “functional collaboration” as each teacher brings background and skills based on job function (such as special or general educator) to the team.

Partnership collaboration was an area where there seemed to be a lot of variation among the participants. It was evident that the teams had significant autonomy to determine the level of collaboration themselves. In some cases, partners collaborated

quite frequently and extensively, in other cases, there seemed to be minimal levels of collaboration. In Louise's (general education) partnership, the two teachers met regularly and prioritized the meeting time to plan and discuss student needs. She said, that the teachers were, "*committed to meeting, and that meeting was kind of the top priority*" (Louise, general education). This type of teamwork can be termed "regular collaborators" as these partners meet regularly and frequently. Quite differently than Louise, Karl (special education) described his experience in collaborating with partners, "[in] *my first couple of inclusion experiences there was a lot of collaboration. The last couple years including this one, I'm not thinking that there is going to be a ton.*" Partners who only collaborate during instructional time in the classroom can be considered "classroom collaborators."

Rebecca, (special education) does not meet with her partner and expressed her thoughts on the challenges: "*It is an obstacle not knowing exactly whom we're doing it with and what we're supposed to do.*" In this example, the partners were unclear about expectations and indicated that there was no time to meet. Additionally, Rebecca said that it would be helpful to have "*the support that I need from someone else, like telling us we have to go to training [or] we need to have collaboration time.*" At Florence High School, LRE partnerships are not told when to collaborate, and in this case, the relative autonomy of each partner was an obstacle for implementing LREs. Rebecca's situation points to the need for clear expectations from leaders. As Leithwood et al. (2007) assert, when responsibilities are distributed within the school, continuous monitoring and facilitation are also needed.

Another concern regarding collaboration was that some participants reported that they worked with multiple partners: *“I think it can also be challenging to find the right partnerships so that people are committed to teaching and working together”* (Willa, administrator). An additional constraint is that, at times, partnerships cannot be maintained long term. Michelle, (administrator) stated that, *“the needs can change every year, which means that pairings can change and it really works best if it’s consistent across the years.”* Despite the reality that change may be inevitable, it is best to negotiate the potential outcomes with stakeholders (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Ultimately, when partnerships must change it can place demands on the teachers to align to a new partner. A particular challenge for Karl (special education) was grading because there are different approaches to assessment. Learning and working together may enhance practice between teachers over time but this cannot happen if partnerships switch frequently. A common practice in the larger collaborative teams is for student work to be anchor graded (where teachers grade student work together using a common rubric). During such activities, teams can establish consistent grading practices. However, if inclusion partnerships change frequently and special education teachers move into new PLC teams, it could take additional time to establish new collaboration schemes. The participants coincided that insufficient time to develop strong relationships prevents the creation of alignments to support students in their LRE. As such, it is essential for principals to be aware of the impact of changing partnerships and to make a concerted effort to listen to the concerns of staff (Bolman & Deal, 2010).

As Michelle, (administrator) indicated, due to the ongoing needs in the school, partnerships can change. It is important to reflect upon the impact of change within

organizations. Bolman and Deal (2013) state, “change undermines existing structural arrangements, creating ambiguity, confusion, and distrust. People no longer know what is expected of them or what they can expect from others” (p. 382). Furthermore, this change often leads to conflict and generates winners and losers. Organizational change is natural and works best when there is some negotiation (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

**Pairing Process.** Some teachers and department chairs are more involved in scheduling practices than others. Pairing significantly appeared as a key element and affected the functioning of LREs. Participants repeatedly stated the value of a strong pairing. Depending of the partnership, pairing occurs in a variety of ways. First, the department chair, as well as the principal or assistant principal(s), are involved in the pairing selection. Rachael (special education), who has held a leadership role in the department, said that she “tried to make sure that we worked with the teachers” in the pairings decisions. Java (special education), who has also previously held a leadership role, described the pairing process as follows: “generally, you have our teacher and gen. ed. and it’s definitely working it out with the department chair from that department.”

Willa (administrator) revealed other ways in which pairings are decided. In her account, while pairing could happen through discussions with department chairs, there are other creative ways that determine pairings: “*In the past we have done little ‘mixers’ for the different ways that people are going to work together or to help select appropriate partners.*” Currently, there are no mixers to introduce potential partners. However, one of the challenges in determining partner matches is possible scheduling conflict. Michelle (administrator) states that in creating a schedule, “*sometimes it comes to making a choice between what has the fewest conflicts.*” Additionally, Willa (administrator) explains that,



*“scheduling teachers always proves challenging especially because inclusion is a different prep for everybody.”* Overall, the pairing of partners is impacted by many factors, including input from teachers, department chairs and the administration.

The many complexities included in the pairing process, can also be analyzed based on Bolman and Deal’s (2013) political frame. From their perspective, organizations have many competing interest groups within them, yet at the same time, there are scarce resources. The political frame considers power dynamics: who is listened to and how decisions are made (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In this study, special education participants felt as though the demands on their school day were different than their general education counterparts. Important decisions ultimately emerge through negotiation and bargaining and competing stakeholders jockey for competing interests (Bolman & Deal, 2013). At Florence High School, these competing interest groups may include different departments, such as special education, or specific teachers. In balancing a master schedule, negotiation and bargaining with departments and teachers may assist in an outcome that is satisfactory for all parties. Principals or assistant principals can consider how compromise and bargaining with stakeholders may be valuable in improving teaching and learning in LREs.

Many teachers at Florence High School reported that they would like to be more involved in the staffing and pairing process for inclusion classes. Rachael (special education) notes that it would take *“talking more to the staff, finding out who is genuinely interested, what it means and letting the interest come from the people.”* Allowing teachers an ability to provide input into potential partnerships may be useful in the pairing process, but since the special education department does not have a large staff in

each content area, co-teaching cannot work if those teachers cannot be matched appropriately.

The general education teacher may get placed in a partnership, but if it does not work out, there are other options. Michelle (administrator) acknowledges that the principal or assistant principals “*are not going to force that match*” between teachers, and the partnerships could be altered. It is a major challenge for school leaders to find teachers with strong skills to work with students at varying abilities (Nilholm, 2006). Although special education teachers are trained in this area, they may still be unwilling to work collaboratively in a partnership. In the school, if a special education teacher was unwilling, the class may not be offered or may potentially be taught unwillingly. Although there is no evidence to support the statement that pairing initiated by the staff is more effective, it is clear that participants would like to be consulted in the pairing process.

As Sammy (special education) noted, “*team teaching is not for everyone. I think it’s about having the right personality and the right teachers and any teachers who are ready to do it because it is a lot of work.*” Additionally, Michelle (administrator) stated, “*I think it’s really important that pairings work out and that both pairings want to be doing it and not that they are just assigned to it.*” Overall, participants would like to have input into the pairing process.

**Role definition.** At Florence High School, the lack of role definition for special educators in the LREs may contribute to confusion. Furthermore, this lack of definition results in a variety of different relationships, including a dynamic where the special educator can function in the helper role. According to Friend (2014), “perhaps the most

significant re-conceptualization critical to co-teaching is the notion of a two-teacher classroom rather than a one-teacher classroom with ‘help’ available from the other teacher” (p. 6). In Friend’s (2014) perspective the two-teacher classroom relies upon parity of teachers, that is, both individuals sharing equal responsibility for instruction and student learning. Given that a two-teacher classroom is less typical than the traditional one classroom structure, it may not be obvious to teachers exactly how their roles are organized in this setting.

According to Bolman and Deal (2013) the lack of clearly defined roles may contribute to redundancies. If there is a lack of clearly defined responsibilities, key tasks may not be addressed, resulting in a gap; conversely, if roles overlap, then there may be wasted time, conflict or redundancy of responsibilities (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Given that teachers already feel that they have challenges with ensuring that all responsibilities are managed, it may be easier to resort to division of labor options that are time efficient: “*We’re pulled in so many directions in special ed.*” (Java, special education). As a result of the tension, there seems to be a tendency at Florence High School for some special education teachers to relinquish the content responsibilities to the general education teacher as they identify the content area as an example of overload.

Due to the structure of special education roles including case management tasks (managing students on IEPs), content teaching in special education classes, and teaching in LREs, teachers may struggle to meet all of those responsibilities appropriately and consistently. For example, Ken, (special education) noted: “*I really relinquished...the content to the teacher, and I would be more [of an] instructional support.*” Special education teachers have different responsibilities, yet their school day is still organized in

the same structure as the general education teachers who do not have similar non-teaching tasks. Although, there is not a clear solution for how to resolve these differences in roles and responsibilities, it is important to consider how the structure of the school day does not take these differences into account. Willa (administrator) admits, *“it can be very challenging for the resource teacher (special education teacher) who is splintered.”* The splintering of special educators is an area for further conversation, as duties are significantly different from other teachers in the school.

Bolman and Deal (2013) argue that the structural frame allows a description of the roles within the organization. This frame is significant to the discussion of inclusion teachers’ responsibilities in the creation and implementation of LREs. According to the participants, the roles of special education teachers in relation to the support for LREs are not clearly specified. For example, Rebecca (special education) addressed in her comments the challenges of working in a partnership without clear direction. *“It’s to no-fault of either one of us. It was just [that] we didn’t know what to do”* Rebecca (special education). As a result, Rebecca noted that she turned into *“a background player.”* Karl (special education), who has worked with a few different inclusion classes, states: *“Some teachers are comfortable with me teaching lessons... The teacher I’m with currently with looks like I’ll be able to teach a little more and is okay with different teaching styles.”* It appears as though the lack of clear roles allows for some degree of decision-making regarding role at the teacher level, furthermore, in some cases, the lack of clear responsibilities results in the special educator deferring to the general education teacher for lesson delivery and instruction.

## Scheduling

Santoli et al. (2008) explained that making time for meetings, collaboration and the general responsibilities of inclusion were central concerns for teachers. Another consideration for some special education teachers in this study was the need to learn or refresh their understanding of the contents taught in the class. For a teacher to gain new content knowledge takes a lot of time. Brown et al. (2013) assert that it is important for both the general and special education teachers to deliver content. However, given that special education teachers must work with the general education curriculum, they may not be familiar with some of the content and they may need to learn it before or during the course, which takes additional time. *“One of the challenges is ...[to] be a part of what’s going on in the... [general education class] and being a real partner”* (Willa, administrator). As Willa points out, special educators are challenged to function in a general education environment, which is outside of the typical special education context.

From Bolman and Deal’s (2013) human resources frame, it is important to consider that organizations are “extended families” and individuals enter with different needs, feelings, skills and limitations. Teachers who are trained in specific areas of education, either special or general, enter the organizations with a capacity in their areas of specialization. Inclusion classes require a different set of skills; specifically, they require content knowledge and an ability to work with diverse learning needs (King-Sears et al., 2012). As Bolman and Deal (2013) explain, finding solutions to get the individuals within the organization to do the type of work needed, while at the same time acknowledging their personal feelings and needs is an obstacle for organizations. In terms

of addressing some of these needs, McLeskey and Waldron (2011) explain that that high quality PD can assist in teachers' ability to work in an inclusive setting.

The principal and assistant principals, along with a committee, determine the master school schedule. The scheduling of singletons (courses only offered once per day) such as inclusion classes, and doubletons (courses offered only twice per day), in addition to other specialty classes must take priority in the schedule. Creating a master schedule for a large high school is a very complex task, which is primarily assigned to one assistant principal at Florence High School. However, the principal and other assistant principals, as well as department chairs are involved. Teachers are asked their preferences and the master schedule is built based on the information provided by all parties. The schedule is discussed with department chairs and changes may be made before the final version of the master scheduled is released to teachers. Additional factors include availability of classrooms, as well as other activities, such as sports that occur at the school. The consequences of this scheduling process are that teachers are able to provide input on the courses they teach, and when they want to have preparation periods, but they may not be fully satisfied with the final result as there are many contributing factors and people involved.

Teacher participants expressed an interest in having their requests considered with regard to the scheduling of inclusion classes. Prior to scheduling, teachers do have an opportunity to express their requests to administration through a formal process. One participant in this study acknowledged that there has been responsiveness by the administration to the requests from teachers. For example, when asked about the timing of classes, Louise (general education) identified some challenges in scheduling but stated

that administration was quick to respond to improving the situation. *“Once we said that that’s not a good idea, they quickly changed it.”* It is important that the perspectives of teachers of inclusion are discussed and considered in the scheduling process. Mary (general education) felt that if inclusion classes were more widely offered, it may not seem like a dramatic undertaking, but as something that everyone at this site does. *“If it were just seen as something everybody does and not this weird thing foisted on you.”* This point brings up an interesting question as to whether LREs would be viewed differently if it were more widespread on campus. The perspective suggests that some of the challenges of inclusion at Florence High School may be alleviated if the practice were to be expanded.

One of the major requests from teachers working in an LRE at Florence High School was having a common preparation period for both teaches to meet and collaborate. Most participants reported that a consistent scheduling of a common preparation period has occurred over time. However, in one case, a common preparation period was not available for inclusion partners. In this case, the teachers did not collaborate or meet to prepare for class and ultimately functioned in a one-teach, one-assist structure. In terms of the schedule, there are many classes offered only once or twice –and those are given priority, but inclusion classes are not the only example: scheduling conflicts have been identified as an emerging constraint in the literature as well (Friend et al., 2010).

Additionally, the timing of inclusion classes was mentioned. Participants reported that given the travel time from one class to another, there was a preference for inclusion classes to be scheduled at a time in the day when there is more than a five minute passing

period to get to the other class. Classes that were scheduled at the beginning of the day or following a preparations period seem to allow an opportunity for meeting before class to plan and collaborate. Another important consideration from the participants is how the inclusion class is scheduled. Given that most teachers teach multiple sections of only two different courses, asking teachers to add an inclusion version of the course is an additional item to the teacher's workload. Even if teachers teach other sections of a particular course, the course will be taught differently, or at a different pace in an inclusion setting. Additionally, working with another person takes a certain amount of time to develop those collaborations. Teachers' willingness to add to their workload by taking on an inclusion class is a continued question at Florence High School.

**Allocation of time for class preparation in the LREs.** Florence High School is a high achieving school and demands are already great for teachers. For example, the school community expects a rigorous curriculum and collectively holds high expectations for all students. All participants indicated that both the provision and use of planning and instructional time are essential for people to work collaboratively. Indeed, they recognized that teaching in a LRE involves a significant amount of time for preparation and coordination of activities. Throughout the interviews, many participants identified that there are many organizational practices in place to support teachers: common preparation periods, release time during the year or during summer, and possibility of workshops.

Time is one of the main resources identified as essential to coordinate and prepare to teach in LREs at Florence High School. Despite good intentions, it is not always possible for teachers to find adequate time to work together to support all students.



Teachers have many demands and teaching in inclusion classrooms is only one of those responsibilities during the day. Some teachers, particularly special educators, may teach several courses and not be paired with their inclusion partner during professional learning communities. Additionally, time constraints overlap with scheduling issues when participants are not given a common preparation period with their inclusion partner.

There was an overwhelming response from participants in this study who felt that time was of the biggest constraints to the creation of LREs in inclusion classes at Florence High School. *“If you do inclusion right, it is a huge, huge, huge time suck, and people don’t have the time to do that”* (Rachael, special education). Some teachers expressed that they spent their preparation period for meeting with their inclusion partner at least once a week. A couple teachers stated that they meet with their partner even more often, almost daily. *“We always had a common prep period. We would meet at least twice a week to discuss what we’re doing”* (Ken, special education). One implication of collaborating often is that the preparation time for teaching in the LREs is privileged over other essential tasks such as planning for another class, grading, holding IEP meetings or any other task that teachers are expected to accomplish in their workday. Using the preparation period everyday is a huge time commitment. If teachers want to break away from the one-teach-one-assist model, a workload that allows time to work together is essential (Friend et al., 2010).

In order to balance priorities when meeting together, some partnerships discussed the need to honour the time provided, discussing some issues via email, creating an agenda and checking in frequently in between meetings. Some participants were able to meet during summertime. In the participants’ accounts, having time before school starts

is beneficial in starting the year off well; they noted that a more relaxed pacing might be beneficial. At Florence High School there are many opportunities to receive compensation for collaboration outside of school hours, which suggests that the administration is aware that there is a time constraint but also values the high quality work that teachers could accomplish when give more opportunity. Moreover, compensating teachers for the extra work is an outward demonstration of the commitment to collaboration efforts to improve high quality instruction and student outcomes. Despite the availability for additional work time, some participants with small children have added cost challenges to pay for childcare during the summer, given that typically teachers have the summer off and may have their children at home. Teachers who commute or travel during the summer would have to give up personal time. These are factors that must also be considered.

Many participants stated that there is a possibility for taking a release day with their partner. Some of the concerns surrounding this use of time included the fact that taking a release day also requires time to plan for a substitute teacher. Due to other school duties it may be difficult to schedule at a convenient time as well. Some participants did not mention the resource of release time or stated that they did not utilize that option.

*“We didn’t really have release time, but we did have the Wednesday morning time”*

(Louise, general education). Wednesday morning collaboration time is available, but as mentioned earlier, this can still is problematic if members from special education are not able to meet with the larger teams during structured time. Furthermore, this built-in time for collaboration is reserved for PLC groups, so only the work of the larger team can be accomplished at that time.

Another significant challenge for general education teachers involves the fact that teachers work in large classes all day long and adding to those numbers with high need students increases their time investment. For example, special education typically involves a lower student-teacher ratio because there is more time involved in creating and fulfilling a student's IEP, contacting parents, or working individually. At the same time that participating in the IEP process may take time, it is also a valuable investment as teachers who do so are more likely to be more informed in working with special needs students. Additionally, given that many departments in the school have embraced revision and redemption policies, special education students may also involve more time due to re-writes or re-dos for assignments. Lastly, if special education students require a modified grade, further time needs to be made to manage, grade and modify curriculum standards. Overall, participants acknowledge the lack of time and workload as a constraint in working with special education students in the LRE classroom setting.

## Chapter 6

### Findings and Discussion

This section contains a brief discussion of the summary of the major themes in this study. Key findings have been revealed as a result of the data analysis. Also, a discussion of the findings is provided in this section. The following themes and their respective subthemes have been included: LREs and access to quality education for all students, collaboration, and scheduling. I will show how the findings in this study contribute to the growing body of literature on inclusion and LRE creation and implementation. Additionally, this study provides further insight into the context at Florence High School in order to improve organizational practices and strengthen the current shared vision of the school, namely, to support all students to perform at high levels (*High Standards for All* document).

At Florence High School there is a strong commitment to successful outcomes for all learners and overall the school demonstrates great academic success. However, there is some evidence from the data that indicates that actions and beliefs of participants are not always aligned. In terms of teacher preparation to work in LREs at Florence High School, this study reveals that there is little evidence of preparation for inclusion from teacher education programs or through in-service PD at the District or school level. In most cases, the lack of PD or preparation did not impact participants' beliefs around working in inclusion classes. However, there are some minor examples of where participants experienced unfavourable opinions around the topic, which will be discussed in this chapter.

The analysis of collaboration towards inclusion at Florence High School is noteworthy as the experiences of partnerships, the pairing processes, and role definition vary substantially from participant to participant. The teachers in this study identified organizational constraints that interfered with the collaboration for inclusion in LREs. Additionally, there was significant variety in the pairing process including teacher input as well as the timing of the pairing. Although there was some variety in the way teachers interpreted the roles, many pairs followed a one teach-one assist model.

Lastly, creating the master schedule at a school as large as Florence High School is definitely complex and the principal and assistant principals must balance the many demands and interests involved in the process. In this study, the high workload and lack of time to collaborate in the creation of LREs was present and emphasized by many participants. As Bolman and Deal (2010) state, schools often do not have the adequate staff to complete the significant amount of work that must be done.

### **LREs and access to quality education for all students**

According to the participants, there is a belief that the staff is committed to supporting all students at Florence High School, which is consistent with the *High Standards for All* document. The accounts revealed that the teachers, the principal and assistant principals at Florence High School hold high expectations for students and are willing to assist them in achieving the standards, including students with identified learning needs. This contradicts Vidovich and Lombard's (1998) finding that principals hold more favourable views than teachers regarding inclusion. This finding is also inconsistent with Kozleski et al.'s (2014), who found that perceptions of special education are associated with failure and may cause teachers to hold lower standards for

such students. However, this finding confirms Santoli et al.'s (2008) study that found that teachers were willing to make the changes necessary to include diverse learners in the classroom when appropriately placed.

Overall, this finding suggests that teachers are willing for the most part to include students in their classes, however there are some circumstances (such as the belief that a student's behavior presents challenges to the learning environment) where teachers are unwilling or feel unable to make changes in order to include the student. One possible explanation for this inconsistency comes from Argyris and Schon's (1974) work where they assert there may be a difference between the espoused theories one holds, relative their theories-in-use one apply in daily life. As such, staff may be optimistic in their espoused theories of working in an inclusion class, but the theories in use may be less favourable when faced with challenges. It may be valuable to continue to explore access to education for all students in light of this tension as the goals of social justice are not realized when students are segregated (Theoharis, 2007).

The consequence of the divide between espoused theories and theories in use at Florence High School relate to the fulfillment of a distribution and recognition for marginalized groups in the school. As Ryan (2013) states, fair distribution and recognition occurs when marginalized groups have been able to participate in meaningful ways within the community. As Gewirtz (1998) states, for social justice to occur, there must be fair distribution of material and non-material goods for all groups. In order to ensure that students can participate in the same activities and opportunities at Florence High School, more students should be able to actively participate in general education, while at the same time receive the individualized support needed. Such fairness is

necessary to remedy inequalities (Mertens, 2007) and ensure a just future (Bogotch, 2014; Precey & Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Overall, despite strong commitments in belief, there is still continued work needed in this area.

**Teacher preparation to teach in the LREs.** Teacher competence relates to the actions of educators as well as the ability to enact professional judgement in a variety of situations (Nes, 2014). The OECD (2005) indicates that the improvement of schools depends on high quality teaching. However, ensuring that all teachers are competent may require continual PD (Pugach & Blanton, 2014). There are many complexities in providing PD for teachers in the area of inclusive education and even though it is now generally understood that PD in this area is beneficial for teachers, there has only been a loose connection between theory and practice (Pugach & Blanton, 2014). Overall, this study revealed that there is limited pre-service preparation and PD in the area of inclusive education available for staff. Furthermore, the participants in this study expressed an interest in more PD to work in inclusion classes.

Only a couple teachers indicated that they possessed some pre-service coursework on mainstreaming or basic preparation to teach students with learning disabilities, but all other teachers indicated that they have not been adequately prepared in this area. This confirms Allay et al.'s (2013) study that found that teacher programs provide insufficient preparation in relation to inclusive education. This is significant as teacher preparation impacts perceptions of self-efficacy for teachers working in inclusive classrooms (Sharma & Sokal, 2015).

Regardless of the preparation obtained prior to working at Florence High School, teacher participants also did not adequately receive PD provided by the school or district

specifically to work with students in their LRE. Two participants attended an external workshop[s], funded by the district. This finding suggests that there is a continued need for more PD in the area of inclusive education, which confirms Pugach and Blanton's (2014) work suggesting that there must be a shift towards a commitment that all teachers are responsible for all students, and some teachers require more preparation in order to do so. McLeskey and Waldron (2011) found that high-quality PD could improve classroom practices and as such there is a great potential benefit to providing adequate PD for teachers. Overall, there is a gap in the need or desire for further learning and the availability of PD at Florence High School.

Another interesting finding from this study resonates with the work of Rodriguez et al. (2012) who found that teacher preparation strongly influences attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. Despite the fact that many teachers at Florence High School received little to no PD on inclusive education, there was a strong consensus that more PD would ultimately be beneficial to students. In fact, all participants indicated that inclusive education provided some examples of benefits for students with and without disabilities. However, two out of the ten participants indicated that given specific difficult situations, such as student behaviour, there were not always favourable opinions from participants. Perhaps these are examples of a situation where further PD could have supported the teachers and student and changed opinions. This finding contradicts the results of the U.S. 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, (2005), which indicated only 35% of teachers reported making the modifications necessary for students to be successful.



**Professional Learning Communities and teaching in the LRE.** *High Standards for All* is a school-wide philosophy and encompasses a shared mission, a collective value and an inherent part of the school culture at Florence High School. The principal and assistant principals promote these views through distributing leadership practices and supporting collaborative teams through the PLC structure. The commitment of the participants in this study to include special education students into general education classes was present in the interviews with teachers, the principal and assistant principal. The data also confirmed teachers, the principal and the assistant principal felt that many special education students should be able to access the general education classroom and that in doing so, it was beneficial to all students. As Hines (2008) stated, teachers' attitudes around inclusion are important factors in the outcomes for students in their classes. Some participants in this study expressed an understanding of the requirement to educate students in the LRE (IDEA, 2004) and the necessity for educators to adapt practices to ensure that the provision is met for students. Overall, the organizational practices such as creating a shared vision, as well as collective values, and the promotion of these values through PLC work contributes to the theoretical and stated beliefs of the participants in this study.

Although the participants in this study reported favourable opinions of inclusion, there is still a gap between these beliefs and the small number (only 18) students who were enrolled in the four inclusion classes in 2015-2016. This suggests that there is still more work to be done in providing such opportunities for students at Florence High School. Achieving social justice requires taking mindful steps and working towards making schools good placed to be (Griffiths, 2014) for all students.

At Florence High School, some teacher partnerships work together on PLC teams, or have other ongoing collaborative meeting times, while others do not meet at all. Some special education partner teachers were not on a PLC team with their general education partner. As Blanton and Perez (2011) state, it is valuable for all special education teachers to be placed on teams as they benefit in the same ways as general education teachers. There is also an inconsistency in the collaboration patterns of partnerships based on interview and field note data in this study: For the pairings who collaborated frequently with their partner and PLC teams, teachers reported better experiences and optimism around the topic of inclusion. Conversely, teachers who did not collaborate frequently appeared to express more barriers to educating students in their LRE. Overall, principals can impact the collaborative work of teachers by preserving the shared vision, and focusing energy and discussion on student assessment data (including assessment data for students with disabilities) (Blanton & Perez, 2011).

Bolman and Deal's (2013) framework provides a method for understanding the structural perspective within an organization. In the case of Florence High School, the challenges around collaboration indicate that the structure of the school is centered around a one-teacher model where general and special education teachers are not necessarily integrated. The structural frame also relates to the way work is allocated and coordinated (Bolman & Deal, 2013). At Florence High School, there is no clear structure that indicates how teachers should allocate and coordinate work towards inclusion through PLCs, as special education teachers are not always present on teams with general education teachers. As a result of the lack of structure, some partnerships did not meet

frequently and potentially missed opportunities to collaborate to improve inclusive practices.

At Florence High School, PLCs are an important part of the culture, but there is some variation in terms of special education teachers' participation on these teams. In some cases, special education teachers play an active role on PLC collaboration with general educators, and in other cases, special education teachers are not involved with any school-wide collaborative teams. The special education teachers in this study who were actively involved with general education teachers in PLC teams reported that they felt part of the team and experienced benefits (including those in the area of curriculum). This finding is consistent with Blanton and Perez (2011) who reported that special education teachers experience benefits from working on PLC teams in the same way general education teachers benefit.

### **Collaboration**

As described in chapter 1, PLCs are important aspects of the organizational structure at Florence High School. The school vision focuses on collaborative work across teams, where practices are distributed through PLCs. However, special education does not fit neatly into this collaborative structure, as many teachers teach more than two different courses and thus cannot work on teams with all their course-alike groups. Furthermore, there are other constraints such as a lack of common preparation periods for some partnerships, in addition to the non-classroom duties for special education teachers.

**Partnerships.** One of the greatest predictors of responsive attitudes towards inclusion relates to collaboration within teacher partnerships (Bennett & Gallagher,

2013). As a result of the analysis of the data from the interview transcripts, it is clear that the collaboration styles and frequency between partnerships varied significantly. For example, there were regular collaborators, classroom collaborators and functional collaborators. Depending on the organizational constraints around scheduling and collaboration groups, participants varied from meeting daily, to weekly to not at all.

According to Leithwood et al. (2007), even though some of the collaborative leadership practices can be distributed to different individuals or groups within the school, monitoring and co-ordination efforts from the administrative team are still necessary. One major finding from this study was that different partnerships interpreted the need for collaboration in substantially different ways. This suggests that there may need to be more oversight as Leithwood et al. (2007) indicates that partners may not naturally negotiate their working relationship collegially or may not feel that close collaboration is necessary. Furthermore, while the administration at Florence High School does great work in setting vision and norms for PLC collaboration, this vision could be extended to include the necessary work needed in order to promote LREs. As McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) demonstrate, leaders with strong facilitation skills can change school culture to create new norms.

**Pairing process.** The administration team at Florence High School makes the ultimate decision regarding teacher partnerships. Participants in this study mentioned an interest in having more involvement in the pairing process. Advance planning may indicate to partner teachers that pairing is a priority. Furthermore, some partnerships were only informed at the beginning of a new school year, while others partnerships were informed in the spring prior to working together.

According to Brownell and Walther-Thomas (2002), collaboration is not about being friends with the partner, it is about trust and respect and sharing a common vision of creating better outcomes for students.

Although there may be times in which partnerships are irreconcilable, it may be more likely that partnerships need time to build mutual trust and respect. When partners change, there may be a tendency to move towards the established practices of previous partnerships instead of building new routines (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2002). This pattern may not be beneficial to the development of a meaningful relationship.

The organizational practices around the pairing of partners occur in a variety of ways at Florence High School. Pairing arises as a result of top-down scheduling as well as through inter-department collaboration, but overall, the patterns of pairing at the school have been inconsistent. Participants in this study reported a desire to be able to provide more input to administration about decisions regarding pairing.

**Role definition.** There are only a few teacher partnerships working in LRE settings at Florence High School. The two-teacher model, where there is one general educator and one special educator, can create challenges in determining roles within the school, given that the structure of the school revolves around a one teacher model where general education and special education teachers work in separate settings. Furthermore, partnerships determine roles on their own through the distributed model, partnerships define roles in different ways. In some cases, there is evidence of a one teach - one assist model, where general educators take on the role of teacher and the special educator takes on the 'helper' role (Friend et al., 2010). This also confirms Scruggs et al.'s (2007) findings, which indicate that when time is scarce, as is the case at Florence High School,

it is common to resort to the helper role, because it typically requires less planning time (Friend & Cook, 2007). This reliance on the helper role presents an underutilization of teacher skills (Friend, et al., 2010); may result in special education teachers doing work deemed undesirable (Wood, 1998) and may adversely impact fulfillment of the requirement to provide specially designed instruction for special education students (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2016). As such, the reliance on the helper role for special education teachers at this site should be considered further by administration.

### **Scheduling**

Creating a master schedule and assigning teachers to classes is a major undertaking from an organizational standpoint. In addition, the principal and assistant principals have the responsibility to assign teachers to inclusion classrooms and make time available for partner teachers to meet together during the school day. As Bolman and Deal (2013) noted, sometimes organizations have obstacles in finding qualified individuals to fill the necessary roles; however in the context of the two-teacher model for creating LREs in inclusion classrooms, there are additional skills and knowledge needed by teachers who work in these diverse learning environments (King-Sears et al., 2012). The principal and assistant principals at Florence High School create the master schedule and determine teacher partnerships based on the typical requirements of finding individuals with content knowledge, while balancing the logistical concerns of finding time for teachers to collaborate.

Bolman and Deal's (2013) political frame is also relevant to the topic of scheduling in that there are multiple stakeholders invested in the outcome of the master schedule. As Bolman and Deal (2013) state, within organizations different interest groups

negotiate as they attempt to gain power and position. At Florence High School there are many groups interested in the schedule and it is clear that different voices, such as department chairs, teachers, principal and assistant principals are able to provide input. The data in this study indicated that those individuals who held a position of responsibility in the school (such as a department chair) felt that they were more involved in the scheduling than other individuals. This supports Bolman and Deal (2013) who state that goals for an organization are not always top-down: In this study, participants felt that the principal and assistant principals listened to input from teachers regarding schedule. At the same time, individual in department chair roles tended to report higher levels of involvement than other teachers. Overall, this finding demonstrates that the principal and assistant principals considered input from multiple voices, however those individuals who hold positions of responsibility feel more involved in the process.

**Allocation of time for class preparation in the LREs.** Participants in this study indicated that the other workload demands and a lack of available time for teachers to collaborate towards improving student learning is a significant constraint to teaching in the LRE. On a positive note, many participants identified release time and paid work as available supports, but some expressed constraints in coordinating that work during holiday and off-hours. Such paid work opportunities may not necessarily support all types of required work such as daily lesson planning and more immediate, short-term tasks in that it does not occur regularly and may take place during vacation time. This finding is consistent with current literature and confirms the work of Friend et al. (2010), Paulsen (2008), and Santoli, et al. (2008), who also found that lack of time for collaborating is a significant obstacle for partner teachers. At Florence High School,

technology such as Google docs exists and the sharing of materials was mentioned in the interviews. Some teachers indicated that email communication is used often. Teachers also mentioned the use of telephone calls and text messages to communicate with partners.

An underlying pressure on time is a necessity for providing a rigorous curriculum. Florence High School is a very high performing school within a distinguished school district. The data confirmed that teachers felt that they needed to manage many priorities, as there were more tasks to be completed than time to do them. This confirms Bolman and Deal's claim (2010) that schools typically have more work to do than individuals to complete it. Teachers in this study explained that working with special education students adds more tasks to their workload, causing time to be scarce. This is a leadership concern if too many tasks are given without adequate time to complete them. As Bolman and Deal (2010) explain, a significant barrier in creating new school goals and initiatives lies in the fact that there is a multiplicity of goals. Furthermore, student achievement is currently the top priority in schools (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The data in this study suggest that time is scarce due to the many school goals, particularly providing a rigorous curriculum to support student achievement.

Overall, the findings and discussion in this chapter have offered important insight into the problem of practice for this study. In the next chapter, I will address the research questions that originated this study and will also offer recommendations based on the findings. Additionally, I will indicate possible future directions for further research.



## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

This research study focused on the experiences of the principal, one assistant principal, and teachers at Florence High School around the development and implementation of LREs. In this chapter, I will summarize the main components of this study including a review of the research context, literature review, theoretical framework, methods, analysis and findings. I will then respond to and discuss the research questions that guided this study. Next, I will make recommendations for practice at Florence High School based on the results of this study. Lastly, I will propose possible future directions for further research.

The IDEA (2004) guaranteed students a free appropriate public education in the child's LRE. The description of the LRE in the IDEA (2004) indicated a presumptive right for students to be educated in the general education setting (Crockett & Kauffman, 1998). Inclusion classes are one approach to providing the LRE to students, and this approach is currently used at Florence High School. As the practice is slowly expanding at Florence High School, there was a need to learn from the experiences of the principal, assistant principal and teachers with regard to the implementation of LREs. As a philosophy, inclusion brings families, educators and communities together to welcome and affirm all individuals (Salend, 2011).

A thorough review of literature was conducted and five areas were explored in this study including: PD/ preparation for supporting learning in LREs, collaboration between teachers in LREs, professional learning communities, staffing for inclusive education, and teachers and principals' perceptions of including special education

students in general education classes. The literature review situated this study in the context of scholarship in the area of inclusive education. Overall, the literature revealed that teachers and principals are inadequately prepared to teach in inclusive environments (Allay et al., 2013). Additionally, the literature demonstrated that collaboration between teachers in a co-teaching class is important; specifically, parity between the special and general educator (Friend et al., 2010) is essential and ineffective collaboration has a negative functioning on the creation of inclusive environments (Hines, 2008). The literature in suggested that PLCs can positively improve student achievement (Stoll et al., 2006) and can also be a powerful tool of and for inclusive schools (Pugach & Blanton, 2014). In terms of the literature on staffing, educators require both content knowledge and an ability to teach in diverse learning environments (King-Sears et al., 2012). Schools also require a culture that supports teachers and guides them in co-operative learning and communication (Mazurkiewicz, 2013). Lastly, the literature on perceptions of teachers and principals suggests that teacher and principal attitudes are important in the promotion of inclusive schools and those with experience working in heterogeneous environments tended to report more favorable attitudes than those without experience (Villa et al., 1996).

The theoretical framework of this study was comprised of two main components including critical leadership (and its implications for social justice) as well as inclusive education. Critical theory problematizes issues of oppression and marginalization (Gunter, 2001). Social justice discusses the array of injustices (Ryan, 2013) and can create an empowering student perspective (Hackman, 2005). This framework provided a lens for analyzing my problem of practice. Additionally, in an effort to analyze and

explain the organizational structures and practices at Florence High School, I also relied on Bolman and Deal's (2013) framework. I utilized the structural, human resource, political and symbolic frames (Bolman & Deal, 2013) to provide a foundation for understanding organizational environments. Furthermore, I discussed DL and its relationship to inclusive education.

This study used an exploratory case study approach to explore the organizational practices related to inclusion at Florence High School. I interviewed participants using semi-structured interviews to investigate their experiences in relation to this initiative. An ethics review was conducted and this study adhered to TCPS2 guidelines. In order to reduce bias within this study, I ensured that there was a high degree of trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability). In this work, I acknowledged my own position in this research and reflected throughout the study.

During the data collection phase, I gathered data from the following sources: semi-structured interview transcripts, internal communications, board documents and my field notes. During the analysis of data, I relied on content analysis to identify themes. However, themes were identified based on the relevant literature and the data. Through the identification of these themes the administrative team will be more informed as to the impact of current organizational practices in order to implement appropriate strategies in order to improve the LREs in inclusion classrooms at Florence High School in the future.

The findings of this study suggest that there is a strong commitment to supporting all students at Florence High School and were aligned to the values of the school culture and shared vision (outlined in *High Standards for All*). However, teachers expressed that they possess limited PD in working in inclusion classes and there are only minimal

opportunities for provided from the district. Despite a lack of PD, teachers expressed an interest in further preparation and felt that it would benefit students. In terms of PLC collaboration, not all special education teachers were involved with general education teachers on teams, but those who were actively involved (in collaboration with their partner teacher and PLC team) experienced benefits, particularly in the area of curriculum. An important finding from this study was that different partnerships interpreted the need for collaboration dissimilarly. Additionally, roles were also determined by pairings and there was variation in this area across the school. Overall, most teacher participants felt that they would like more opportunity to provide input into the pairing process. Those who held a position of responsibility tended to feel more involved in scheduling and pairing processes. Lastly, participants overwhelmingly reported a high workload and lack of time as a constraint, indicating that there were too tasks for the time provided.

### **Research Questions**

Below are the two guiding research questions and sub-questions from this study. In this section, I will also respond to each question based on the findings and results of the study.

1. How and by whom are LREs implemented at Florence High School?

The inclusion model is utilized at Florence High School to create LREs for special education students. This model involves the presence of one general educator and one special educator to support a regular general education class and a small number of

special education students. The early stage of the LRE creation begins with the identification of student needs. The principal, assistant principals and department chairs discuss areas of student need within the school together to determine if and where inclusion classes are required in the school.

Given that there are limited resources (section allocation and teachers), these needs are prioritized during the creation of the schedule and subsequent classes. At the present time, a limited number (only 18 in 2015-2016) of special education students are educated in inclusion classes. Given that staffing available in the school, as well as the content area expertise, the inclusion model is only used for grades nine and ten in only four courses (Biology, Algebra, Geometry and World Literature). This process occurs with varied levels of awareness and involvement from individual teachers. In some cases, teachers are informed in advance and are able to plan, but in other cases, teachers are informed at the start of a new school year. The timing of this information impacts the ability for teachers to prepare to teach in the LRE.

Prior to teaching in inclusion classes, teachers are not provided formal or informal learning opportunities to acquire strategies or otherwise prepare for the unique environment. This is a continued area of need given that teachers at Florence High School also have little to no preparation from their pre-service programs. Some teachers are able to gain acquire some strategies for working in inclusion classes by attending a one-day workshop, funded by the school or district by provided externally. Ongoing PD is currently not available to support teachers working in inclusion classes at Florence High School.

Once needs are determined and prioritized in the schedule, two teachers are assigned to work together in the LRE. At this stage, there are various ways in which LREs are implemented. The two teachers are paired together to teach the class, but may or may not work together on a PLC team. Most partnerships share a common preparation period and it is during that time that most pairings are able to collaborate to address student needs. Some pairings are regular collaborators and meet often and other partnerships are classroom collaborators and typically communicate in the classroom only.

Furthermore, in the classroom, partners negotiate the teaching roles. Without, clear role definition, pairings determine the roles and responsibilities necessary to implement the LRE. For example, many partners assume the one-teach, one-assist or one-teach, one-observe model whereby the special educator fulfills the role of helper. Given the many workload demands on teachers, there is little time to prepare to work in the LRE and as a result, oftentimes there is a reliance on such approaches. Some partnerships move more fluidly through different teaching approaches, utilizing the strategy they believe to be most beneficial in creating specially designed instruction for special education students in the classroom.

*Sub-question 1:* What are the classroom practices of teachers at Florence School that support the creation and implementation of Least Restrictive Environments?

The practices that support the creation and implementation of LREs include the development and support for a shared vision and goals related to supporting all students to perform at high levels, information and involvement from department chairs and

teachers regarding areas of student need within the school, and when provided, PD and allocation of time to prepare for teaching in the LRE.

The principal and assistant principals at Florence High School have created a shared vision and common goals for the school. The *High Standards for All* mission is ambitious, but is truly shared on this campus. The principal, assistant principals and teachers work diligently to help students perform at high levels. There is a belief that all students should be provided with the supports needed to reach high standards.

Approaches such as *Redemption and Revision* are strongly supported by PLC teams and individual teachers. Such approaches are incorporated into the repertoire of strategies available to inclusion teachers to create LREs. Allowing multiple opportunities for students to do well provides emphasizes that learning is important regardless of the time it takes to achieve. Furthermore, providing students with additional opportunities to achieve acknowledges the fact that not all students currently achieve at high standards in schools, (Ryan, 2006) and aims to alleviate that issue. Teachers, the principal and assistant principals at Florence High School have respect for students and aim to provide a rigorous curriculum for all students. Student achievement and outcomes are at the forefront of the development of LREs in the school. The principal, assistant principals and teachers welcome special education students in the classroom when they believe that the setting is appropriate for the student's needs. Furthermore, there is a growing interest in creating two-teacher classrooms where students can receive the necessary special education supports within the general education setting.

Another important practice in the creation and implementation of LREs at Florence High School relates to pairing. It is common practice to solicit input from

teachers in terms of choice of courses or schedule. Some participants, particularly those in a role of responsibility within the school, reported further involvement in the pairing process through discussion with the administration team. Involvement from department chairs and teachers to some extent helped inform the principal and assistant principals as to where inclusion classes could be provided to more students in order to implement LREs.

Lastly, there a practice that (when available) supports the creation of LREs at Florence High School is PD, paid work time or release time to collaborate with colleagues. Such opportunities assist teachers to feel prepared to teach special education students in the general education setting. Two teacher participants in the study reported attending PD on inclusive teaching (paid by the school or district). These teachers reported that the PD was helpful in their practice of teaching inclusion. Teachers also felt that they needed adequate time to prepare to teach students in the inclusion class. At Florence High School, release time and paid work was identified as being beneficial in ensuring that teachers had adequate time. However, many participants did not mention PD or the availability of release time or paid work, so these opportunities do not appear to be widely available and or utilized by teachers at the school.

*Sub-question 2: What organizational structures support the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment by teachers in Florence High School?*

The two main school-wide structures that support the implementation of LREs in inclusion classes include the provision of two teachers, a master schedule with common



preparation periods for partner teachers and PLC team collaboration time. These organizational structures provide a foundation for implementing LREs at Florence High School.

Although there are currently only four inclusion classes at Florence High School, the two-teacher structure supports the implementation of LREs. For regular collaborators, the two-teacher structure provides a classroom with teachers who combined possess two specializations (content knowledge and an understanding of special education). When teachers work collaboratively and share responsibilities, having two teachers reduces student-teacher ratio in the classrooms. Additionally, moving the special educator to the general education setting allows special education students to receive the aids necessary to remain in regular education. Ultimately, ensuring that special education students are with their peers, while receiving adequate supports in the mandate of the IDEA (2004).

A master schedule with a common preparation period for partner teachers is one of the most important organizational structures that support the implementation of LREs in inclusion classes at Florence High School. The participants in this study reported that it was a priority to have time for partners to work together in order to better create an inclusive learning environment and address individual student needs. Teachers rely on this time and space in order to collaborate and provide high-quality education to all students in the class. In all but one case, partner teachers were provided with a common preparation period for collaboration. In the case where common preparation period did not exist, those teachers did not meet regularly. Thus, the structure of the master schedule with a common preparation period for partner teachers supports the implementation of LREs, as teachers were able to use the time to plan for class or discuss student needs.

PLC teams are another important structure at Florence High School that can contribute to the implementation of LREs. All teachers within the school participate in weekly, rotating collaboration sessions with PLCs teams. These PLC teams work together to analyze student work, establish and develop strategies (in line with redemption and revision policies) to provide multiple attempts for mastery learning. Only a small number of special education teacher participants in this study mentioned the PLC teams. However, when actively involved on PLC teams (and when the teacher was a regular collaborator with their partner teacher), special education teachers also reported benefits to their supporting students, such as improving curriculum. Overall, improving curriculum is important because it moves closer to the objectives of social justice (Theoharis, 2007).

2. How do teachers, the principal and assistant principals experience the implementation of Least Restrictive Environments in Florence High School?

The participants in this study reported benefits and obstacles in the implementation of LREs at Florence High School. All participants identified successful and beneficial experiences in implementing LREs at the school. Specifically, teachers reported experiences where inclusion classes positively impacted special education students or the class in general. Teachers described the benefits of inclusion for students in a favourable manner. However, all participants were also able to identify some constraints with the implementation of LREs at Florence High School, including a lack of time, workload demands, lack of role definition, and the need for more collaboration.

Some participants identified that providing students with an opportunity to be educated mandated through the IDEA (2004). Other participants described the inclusion of special education students in general education setting as beneficial to all students. Participants in this study reported fond memories of positive outcomes for students based on their placement in inclusion classes, such as increased confidence, interaction with peers, and exposure to higher academic standards. Indeed, despite challenges, participants expressed favourable opinions about the implementation of LREs and stated that inclusion classes are beneficial to students overall.

Even though there were overwhelmingly positive reports of the benefits to students, teachers in this study experienced serious constraints during the implementation of LREs in inclusion classes due to workload demands and a lack of time to prepare to teach inclusion. Teachers expressed multiple workload demands that contributed to a scarcity of time. Teachers felt that in order to adequately support special education students in general education and to work with a partner teacher required a tremendous amount of time. The teachers in this study expressed a concern regarding how to manage all the responsibilities expected of them in the time available. There was no evidence in the data collected, including the interviews or the internal documents to suggest that the lack of time was due to a shortage funding for new teachers.

At Florence High School, DL impacts the experiences of the principal, assistant principals and teachers. For example, departments, partners and individual teachers have been given opportunities to influence the implementation of LREs by determining student need and making adjustments or modifying curriculum as needed. Teacher partnerships are also able to determine their own classroom roles, approaches to

inclusion teaching, and level of collaboration. In some cases, both partners were satisfied with the roles and collaboration and in other cases some teachers felt that more oversight or guidance from administration was necessary. Due to the autonomy teachers are given in working with their partner, there were reports of both favourable and unfavourable experiences in negotiating roles, classroom approaches and collaboration with their partner.

*Sub-question:* What can the principal and assistant principals in charge of implementing LREs in Florence High School learn from these experiences?

The principal and assistant principals in charge of implementing LREs at Florence High School can learn from the experiences of the participants in this study in order to improve future practices. Some of the specific areas that leaders can learn from these experiences include: shared vision, PD, workload and partner roles and collaboration. The experiences of the participants in this study expose a tension between the belief in the benefits of inclusion and the constraints in implementation.

This study can be helpful to the principal and assistant principals at Florence High School specifically in terms of the creation of a shared vision. The principal and assistant principals at Florence High School have done an excellent job in promoting a positive share vision to support all students at the school. The strong belief that all students deserve to learn at high levels is due to the culture within the school. More students need opportunities to remain in general education and reap the benefits of such experiences. Educational leaders, such as principals and assistant principals, have an ability to remove

most, if not almost all, barriers to inclusion (Ryan, 2006). Furthermore, school leaders have a responsibility to educate other principals and teachers about the inequities and exclusion in order to move towards more inclusive schools (Ryan, 2006). A continued dialogue about social justice is a moral imperative for school leaders (Ottesen, 2013). The conversation and vision around helping all students to achieve at high levels is important and a continued effort in this direction could be truly transformational to the lives of special education students at Florence High School.

Although the participants in this study expressed a belief and commitment to helping all students achieve academically. However, the lack of PD and the workload at the school negatively impact teachers' experiences in implementing LREs. Principals and assistant principals can learn in a sense from these experiences to the extent that more opportunities to provide PD for teachers could support inclusion teachers. Such PD is necessary to adequately prepare teachers to support all learners.

This study can be useful to school the principal and assistant principals in understanding the workload demands on teachers involved. The lack of time is a real constraint and despite good intentions this obstacle interferes with the implementation of LREs. As Bolman and Deal (2010) indicate that despite the fact that schools face a challenge because there is more work in schools than individuals to do it, inaction is not a solution.

The principal and assistant principals can learn from the experiences of the participants in this study in the area of partner roles and collaboration. Not all participants were satisfied with the teaching models in the inclusion setting and some teachers felt that there was not enough collaboration to support students adequately. As such,

principals and assistant principals may want to take note of these experiences and provide guidance as necessary to support partnerships navigate roles and negotiate appropriate communication and collaboration.

## **Recommendations**

### **LREs and access to quality education for all students**

In the section below, I outline recommendations for the principal and assistant principals at Florence High School related to ensuring access to quality education for all students. The principal and assistant principals could consider more PD opportunities for teachers in working with special education students and working collaboratively with another teacher to implement LREs. This recommendation is intended to address the lack of preparation teachers in this study indicated in their preparation to work in the LRE. Additionally, in this section I make suggestions for the integration of special education teachers into PLC teams to facilitate their active involvement in implementing LREs at Florence High School.

**Teacher preparations to work in the LRE.** Teachers identified a lack of PD opportunities to support teaching in the LRE inclusion class. Some participants indicated that they were interested and willing to participate in more learning, but had not been provided with such PD. Based on the data, the specific areas that teachers may require more PD is in the area of working with students with challenging behaviour. An additional area of need for more PD could be around navigating the pairing relationship with another teacher, including understanding roles and responsibilities and coordinating collaboration. Given that a traditional classroom has only one teacher, some participants

experienced challenges in determining roles or communicating with their partner. The principal and assistant principal can address this need for further learning by providing PD opportunities for teachers that focus on supporting challenging students as well as working effectively with a partner teacher. The principal and assistant principal may need to consider improving PD options for teachers at Florence High School. A lack of time to attend PD and the added workload of planning for an absence were also significant constraints related to attending PD sessions. Teachers must feel that the PD available is worthwhile and values their time.

**Professional Learning Communities and teaching in the LRE.** Special education teachers who were actively involved in PLC teams reports more favourable opinions, experiences, and practices related to working with students with disabilities in general education classes. Teachers who active in partnerships and PLC groups felt that inclusion was valuable to students but also stated that they would be willing to teach inclusion in the future. When special education teachers did not feel actively involved the team activities, including curriculum planning or grading, less favourable opinions and experiences were reported. Furthermore, teachers who were not involved in PLCs or did not meet regularly with their partner also tended to report more limited teaching approaches such one-teach-one-assist or one-teach-one-observe strategies.

Special education teachers who were actively collaborated with general education PLC teams (in addition to their partner) at Florence High School also reported benefits to their teaching strategies and curriculum. For the principal and assistant principals at Florence High School, this finding should be considered carefully when creating PLC teams and assigning special education teachers because it suggests that they may benefit

from involvement in teams. Perhaps there are some logistical issues to consider in creating teams with both special and general education teachers, but it is definitely an area for further consideration and research can assist in such an endeavour.

## **Collaboration**

The following recommendations relate to the topic of collaboration, including partnerships, the pairing process and role definition for inclusion teachers at Florence High School. Teachers in this study indicated a desire to have more opportunities to collaborate with their partner teacher. Additionally, teachers also stated that they would like more involvement in the pairing process. Lastly, teachers indicated a lack of clarity around their roles in implementing LREs at the school. As such, the recommendations in this section include: expanding opportunities for teachers to communicate and collaborate with partners to support student learning; increased participation in the pairing process to ensure that all stakeholders voices are heard, and beginning a dialogue in the school around inclusion teacher roles in the hopes to develop a variety of approaches to working with special education students.

**Partnerships.** Inclusion partnerships at Florence High School must work together to create an inclusive environment for all students. Additionally, the two teachers must solve problems related to how best to educate all learners regardless of need. Partnerships must also determine roles and responsibilities and determine an adequate level of collaboration in order to help all students achieve at high levels. A recommendation for the principal and assistant principals at Florence High School is to provide additional opportunities for partners to work together. Perhaps multiple opportunities could be



offered such as release time, additional paid work during the school year or summer so that partnerships could determine the most appropriate time.

At Florence High School are some practices such as collaboration between general and special education partnerships are distributed to teachers. There was wide variation in the frequency of collaboration, the definition of roles and teacher satisfaction with their partner. As these decisions are distributed to teachers, it may be helpful for some increased level of involvement from the principal and assistant principals to provide feedback to partnerships. Leithwood et al. (2007) explains that when there is a distributed leadership, there may also be an increased need for principals to co-ordinate this work.

**Pairing process.** As Bolman and Deal (2013) indicate, it is best to negotiate any organizational changes with stakeholders. Teachers at Florence High School have expressed an interest in being more involved in the pairing process. Specifically, teachers want to know in advance who their partner will be and have an opportunity to negotiate. Willa ([administrator](#)) mentioned that in the past there were mixers or other opportunities for potential teachers to meet colleagues who were also interested in teaching inclusion. In this way, such teachers would have more time and input into potential partnerships. Perhaps, more future opportunities to dialogue about partnerships would be appreciated by teachers.

**Role Definition.** The topic of role definition related to inclusion at Florence High School is very important. In order to avoid wasted time, role overlaps or gaps (Bolman & Deal, 2013), principals can work to define the roles of teachers more explicitly. For example, some partnerships may decide to divide work by function and others may choose another approach. However, if there is not clear communication about roles, inefficiencies, overlap or gaps (Bolman & Deal, 2013) may occur.

Another significant area related to roles revolves around expanding flexible roles in the classroom, so as not to rely on the limited approaches currently used at this site. Principals and assistant principals may need to provide more information regarding expanding role options such as the models described by Friend and Bursuck (2009) in Figure 1. Perhaps these models can support implementation of LREs as they expand possible approaches for addressing individual student needs and designing specially designed instruction. Clearly identifying roles for partner teachers may help in opening up a dialogue regarding expanding teaching strategies to move beyond one-teach, one assist and one-teach, one-observe approaches to allow for more specially designed instruction to address students' individual needs (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2016). Discussing roles in the school may lead to further conversations about current roles of teachers in inclusion classes at Florence High School. It would be valuable for the principal and assistant principals to continue the conversation about roles in the school so that teachers can utilize different strategies in supporting all students.

## **Scheduling**

Co-coordinating the scheduling on a master schedule including the complexity of assigning inclusion classes to teachers is a tremendous task. Participants expressed an interest in administration or department chairs initiating the partner scheduling early. Advance scheduling of the potential partnerships would allow that teachers have time to adequately prepare to work together.

Most participants in this study noted that a common preparation period was provided for partnerships. Having the common time to meet ensures that time is allocated in the schedule for standing collaboration to focus on student learning in the LREs. Teachers at Florence High School value their collective work, but also feel that appropriate time and space are necessary in order to make collaboration both efficient and meaningful in improving the outcomes of students. A continued open-dialogue with teachers about their preferences and constraints in the schedule is also constructive. Additionally, ensuring that schedules are equitable for the teachers in terms of courses taught and other workload concerns is essential. In the future, an on-going conversation with teachers regarding their experiences provides them with a voice and may provide a clear understanding of concerns in the scheduling process.

The most important recommendation in the area of scheduling is to expand inclusion classes at Florence High School. As Theoharis (2007) states, improving schools in an effort to create social justice involves the inclusion of special education students in general education classes. Furthermore, making structures within the school more horizontal and available to all students supports the goals of social justice (Ryan, 2006). More students at Florence High School should experience the benefits of a truly inclusive

class experience. The recommendation to expand the practice of inclusion is emphasized by a participant in this study; during her interview, Mary (general education) suggested that expanding the practice of inclusion at Florence High School could be a great solution to some of the obstacles. Expanding the practice as Mary indicates normalizes inclusion and can potentially change the culture within the school. If more or all teachers taught inclusion classes, more students could be to achieve at high levels, which is the ultimate mission of the school.

**Allocation of time for class preparation in the LREs.** Currently, there are supports in place at Florence High School to assist teachers to prepare for teaching inclusion. Participants identified that compensation for work and release time are possibly available to teachers. However, these resources may be more useful for year-round class versus daily planning. Additionally, more encouragement in accessing such supports may be useful, as some teachers in this study did not mention these resources. Many teachers identified the scarcity of time when teaching special education students in the general education class. One recommendation is for the principal and assistant principals to acknowledge the workload demands of teaching inclusion with a view to reviewing and ultimately reducing some responsibilities from teachers. For example, special education teachers at the school often teach more content courses than their general education counterparts. Adding inclusion classes adds to an already full schedule. Efforts should be made to ensure that there is an equitable workload between teachers and that all teachers have access to the available supports in the school.

## Further Research

This study explored the experiences of the principal, an assistant principal, and teachers around the creation and implementation of LREs at Florence High School. In the future, a longitudinal or follow-up study exploring the implementation of recommendations or a study on other interventions to increase inclusion could be conducted. Given that this research only focused on one school site, further comparative research would be valuable in understanding this topic at other sites within the district. Additionally, the single focus of the inclusion of special education students at Florence High School, limited the scope of the study, and there are other topics of inclusion (gender, race, language, and other forms of identity) yet to be explored through research at this site or other sites within Sheppard District. I hope this study will provide the foundation for further research into these important areas.

This exploratory case study examined the experiences of the principal, an assistant principal, and teachers around the creation and implementation of LREs at Florence High School. It is my intent that this study has contributed to the field of educational leadership and continued a conversation about the organizational practices related to supporting special education students in inclusion classrooms. As I stated above, there is more research needed and I urge others to take up research in the area of education for social justice to support *all* students in schools. Through reflection on the results of this study, it is my belief that the principal, assistant principals and teachers at Florence High School can and will continue to move closer to achieving the *High Standards for All* mission.

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## Appendix 1- Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Teachers

Participant:

Date of interview:

1. How long have you been teaching? How long have you taught inclusion?
2. What is your preparation with regard to teaching inclusion?
3. What do you see as your role in working with students with disabilities?
4. What is your opinion about inclusion?
5. Has your attitude towards inclusion changed because of teaching Inclusion classes?
6. In what ways do you collaborate with the special education / general education teacher?
7. What are the greatest challenges as an inclusion teacher?
8. What specific constraints/ obstacles do you see in the inclusion model?
9. Would you like to teach inclusion again next year or in the future?
10. In what ways do you feel supported to teach inclusion?
11. What specific supports would make inclusion easier/ more successful?
12. Could you provide concrete examples of successes or challenges to inclusion?
13. What are the supports offered to inclusion teachers by principals/ assistant principals?

## Appendix 2- Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Principals and Assistant Principals

Participant:  
Date of interview:

1. How long have you been as a principal/ assistant principal at Florence High School?
2. What is your background with regard to inclusion?
3. What is your opinion about inclusion?
4. What are the greatest challenges to inclusion at Florence High School?
5. What are the supports offered to inclusion teachers by principals/ assistant principals?

## Curriculum Vitae

### 1. Personal

Dr. Angelica de Koning

### 2. Academic Credentials

Edd., Western University, Educational Leadership, 2016

M. Ed., York University, Language, Culture and Teaching, 2010

B.A., University of Waterloo, Rhetoric and Professional Writing, 2003

### 3. Other Credentials

Ontario College of Teachers, Certificate of Qualification, 2007

California Teaching Credential, 2007