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ADVOCACY: INTEGRATING THE ETHICS OF CARE AND JUSTICE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

By

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ABSTRACT

ADVOCACY: INTEGRATING THE ETHICS OF CARE AND JUSTICE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

By

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The purpose of this study was to explore practices of three elementary principals in order to better understand how effective caring environments are created, tensions that principals face when leading an inclusive school, how they navigate such tensions, and how advocacy translate into practice.

The conceptual theories that guided this study included the ethic of care, the ethic of justice and sensemaking. The theories of care and justice were not considered alternatives of one another, rather they were viewed as an integrated theory, each maintain their own ontology while supporting the other in understanding advocacy for special education.

The qualitative methods were descriptive in nature and drew from multiple forms of data collection. They included individual interviews, focus groups and Photovoice, a process that collects images as the participants view them as a reflective tool to probe deeper into the lived experiences of the principals.

A comprehensive portrait was written for each principal and the school they serve. Their experiences were connected through pictures and shared tensions. Forms of advocacy, tensions and how principals navigated the tensions arose from the data analysis.

A central tenet emerged from the data. Policy and policy enactment favors a "just" system—the common good—for all children. Yet, principals approach it with a

caring ethic. This creates a struggle between the ethics of care and justice, but when both ethics are utilized as an integrated ethic, principals act is a just caring manner for all students. There is a need for rigorous preparation for principals, and general education teachers, in regards to students with disabilities so to better facilitate the integration of the ethics of care and justice.

This dissertation is dedicated to my brother, Mark. I will forever love and miss you.

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My success in this adventure stems from the love and support I received from my family and my good friends. Richard and Nelva Sherman, my loving parents, were not only my biggest cheerleaders, they were the ones that taught me to believe and have faith in myself. My friends, Tracy, Jen, Sharon and Stacy, were constant sources of support and encouragement. Thank you for the strength you gave to me throughout this process. Finally, Ted was my source of calm during the last crazy hours of completion. You knew I could do it, even I wasn't sure.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"There is only one child in the world and that child's name is ALL children."
—Carl Sandburg

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

The intersection of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) has brought the education of students with disabilities to the attention of school principals. Although research has indicated that school principals often lack the necessary knowledge and skills to understand and effectively administer special education policies (Burton, 2004; Farley, 2002; Monteith, 1994; Praisner, 2003; Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994), principals now find themselves more accountable for both the learning and assessment of their special education students. In light of this conundrum, I wanted to understand what tensions principals wrestle with when dealing with special education, as well as to learn how they maneuver around such knotty issues. In this phenomenological study, therefore, I examined three elementary school principals in their natural setting to better understand how they made sense of special education policies and procedures and the extent to which they translated them into action that supports students with disabilities in their buildings.

Statement of the Problem

With ever-increasing control from the federal government over local educational agencies, the job of the principal has gotten harder. Principals find themselves trying to comply with more and more policies, including the many demands of special education,

with less help and training. The research in this arena, discussed in Chapter 2, shows that few principals believe they are adequately trained to be administrators of special education. Nevertheless, the tenets set forth by NCLB hold schools, and principals, responsible for the learning of all students, including special education students. This begs the question: Without adequate training, how do current principals ensure a caring educational environment for their special education students? In essence, how do they advocate for such learners?

This situation raises many tensions for principals as they work within a pluralistic educational system that includes both general and special education students. Both streams are regulated by court cases and legislation. Both demand principals' time, knowledge, and expertise. Both have issues unique to themselves. Both can cause principals a number of headaches. Because principals are thought of primarily as general educational administrators, the concern then becomes focused on special education. Little research has been done to understand how practicing principals navigate these tensions or whether and how they effectively handle the competing interests of general and special education.

Purpose of the Study

My purpose in conducting this study was to explore how elementary principals make sense of special education and to what extent they may advocate for students with disabilities within their buildings. From this study I hoped to (a) to add to a small but growing body of inquiry focused on the roles and work of school principals as they address special education needs in their settings and (b) to offer insights for current school principals who are struggling to do the best for **all** children, special and general

education students alike. This aim is a necessary one. The literature on principals and special education indicates that school principals do not have enough training or enough knowledge of special education laws. In fact, a cursory look at M.A. principal programs at mid-western universities revealed a dearth of special education coursework for school principals. Much of the coursework that might be helpful to school principals is offered only in specialist programs in the administration of special education.[1]

Current research (see Chapter 2) paints an overwhelming and grim picture for current principals. The collective sense is that the principalship in inclusive schools is difficult to the point of bordering on impossible. In this dissertation, I looked at the work of elementary school principals from a different perspective, which is looking for effectiveness already in place. In brief, I set out to uncover not only the collisions, but also (and in particular) the critical moments and activities that revealed what works in an elementary school setting. Whereas quantitative methods have been used in the majority of research about principals and special education, I employed qualitative methods, a phenomenological approach, which pressed me to make meaning of experiences through thick description. In addition, I used the unique approach of Photovoice, which is an empowerment tool that invites participants both to share information and to engage in the data-analysis process.

Although the study does not easily lend itself to generalization, the findings will help us to understand what elementary principals do, have difficulty doing, and perhaps cannot or do not act/advocate for students with disabilities. The work illustrates how three elementary school principals navigate the tensions created by being responsible for

[1]Through a cursory look at 15 public universities within the state that this study was conducted, I found that only four offer either courses or certification in special education leadership.

both general and special education students. The research does not offer a panacea, but rather various avenues that have worked for other principals.

Assumptions

Improvements in the education of students with disabilities have come in three waves: access, acceptance, and accountability (see Chapter 2 for further discussion of this history). At the beginning of the American educational system, students with disabilities, physical or otherwise, were denied access to the classroom and to learning. Thought of as "backward," they were cast aside. Once such diverse learners were granted access to an education, their acceptance as a legitimate part of the educational system and as worthy learners was the next hurdle to overcome. Today, legislation holds schools accountable for the learning experiences of students with disabilities. What I learned from the literature is that the success of the programs undertaken during each of these waves--access, acceptance, and accountability—has been determined by the extent to which there was active advocacy.

The underlying assumption with which I approached this exploratory study was that the extent to which effective learning opportunities exist for students with disabilities depends on the nature of (and/or level of) advocacy on the part of the school principal. I assumed that the close alignment between NCLB and IDEIA '04 has encouraged, even forced, hesitant principals to become involved with the education of disabled students. Because there is a dearth of literature about advocacy and principals and because institutions of higher education do not necessarily train principals to view themselves as educational leaders for students with disabilities, we do not fully understand what advocacy looks like for elementary principals.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Just how do elementary school principals make sense of meeting the needs of students with disabilities, as well as ensure that **all** students' needs are met? Raising this question often makes most principals, special education directors and teachers, and general education educators apprehensive. Most administrators form vague understandings of what it means to be informed supporters of special education, leaving the actual daily work to the special education specialist, whereas other administrators become advocates for special education programs. In an attempt to understand principals' range of experiences and approaches, and to ensure that I could elicit rich descriptions, I chose a synthesis of three theories to enhance my understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The theories of ethic of care, ethic of justice, and sensemaking underlie the nested conceptual framework where sensemaking is woven throughout and between each theory (see *Figure 1.1* Conceptual Framework). The theories are discussed in depth in Chapter 2.

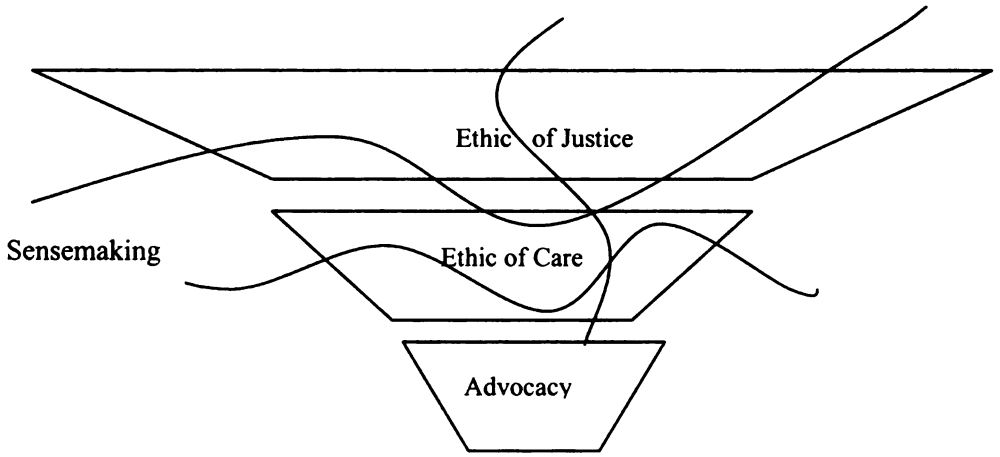


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

The ethic of care is the first facet of the conceptual lens through which I viewed principals' actions as a result of their decision-making. The ethic of care often is thought of as a feminine way of judging situations (Gilligan, 1982, as cited in Vreeke, 1991) because it is fundamentally focused on how humans treat one another. Relationships and connections with one another are emphasized. As such, it operates in the personal relations sphere (Clement, 1996). The ethic of care is "an essential link to the successful administration of just and caring educational programs for students with disabilities"(Pazey, 1995, p. 298) because these unique learners and their families require a strong connection to, a solid relationship with, and humane treatment by their principals.

We can see the ethic of care is yin and the ethic of justice is yang. The ethic of justice operates separate of context, free from the constraints that relationships may cause. The ethic of care is concerned with the more abstract concepts of fairness, equity, and justice (Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004). The ethic of justice, then, operates in the public relations sphere (Clement, 1996). According to Starratt (1991), the ethic of justice must serve the common good and the rights of all individuals within the school. It is here that the federal laws that govern the educational world come into play. Principals who operate from this ethic are knowledgeable about the laws that protect their students' individual rights, as well as those laws that protect the common good of all learners. Besides determining the knowledge base of school principals, I also wanted to better understand how principals work to (or not) share power, to critique and dispel stereotypes about special education, and to promote equity across programs. Scholars, such as Noddings (1993), Vreeke (1991), and Starratt (1991) often distinguish between the ethic

of care and the ethic of justice in that they have distinct fields of application: the ethic of care is used in the personal relation sphere and the ethic of justice is used in the public relations sphere. However, Clement (1996) deviates from the "either or" concept because such thinking results in "uncaring forms of justice and unjust forms of care" (p. 2). Clement (1996) contends in her book, *Care, Autonomy, and Justice*, that if the ethic of care alone can lead to exaggerated individual interests while drawing attention away from "the general realities that structure those situations, and which require our attention for any significant change" (p. 112). If justice alone is applied, then only the large good is strived for without consideration of individual needs.

Though Clement (1996) does see the value in understanding the ethic of care or the ethic of justice as separate; she does not believe that they are mutually exclusive or dichotomous. She posits that care should not be consigned only to the personal sphere and justice only to the public because their priorities "over lap" (p. 21). "Properly understood, the ethic of justice requires not just abstract principals but contextual details as well. Likewise, the ethic of care requires not only contextual details, but also general principles as well" (Clement, 1996, p. 76). Therefore, these ethics are "complementary approaches" (p. 4) that creates "an integrated ethic" (p. 121). In essence, if the ethics of care and justice are integrated, they are no long relegated to their separate spheres, but rather "that they can jointly determined deliberation in public as well as personal context. By integrating them in that we use both ethics instead of merely on in any given situation, we acknowledge their interdependence and their distinctiveness" (Clement, 1996, p. 121). Applying both ethics to any situation allows insights in ways that one ethic alone could not do (Clement, 1996).

Sensemaking, the final component of the theoretical framework, enriches our understanding of how principals navigate tensions that they encounter while working in a dual system. The assumption is made that how they make sense of a situation may directly influence how they balance the ethics of care and justice. Weick (1995) presents seven properties of sensemaking that include: (a) grounded in identity construction, (b) retrospective, (c) enactive of sensible environments, (d) social, (e) ongoing, (f) focused on and by extracted cues, and (g) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. As the foundation of the emergent lens, sensemaking pressed me to inquire about the principals' perceptions (thinking and reflection processes), how they perceived that their actions influenced the daily work of the schools and in particular the work of the special education program, and how what was learned from these experiences guided (or not) and generated (or not) activity that supported the needs of special education students, specifically, and general education students, holistically.

EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

The overarching exploratory question is: How do elementary building-level principals make meaning of and enact special education policies to create caring learning environments for students with disabilities?

Sub questions were as follows:

1. How do (if they do) elementary school principals make meaning of "advocacy"?
2. To what extent and through what concrete forms does "advocacy" translate into practice? Who benefits from "advocacy"?
3. What can we learn that has policy and practice implications? What can higher education learn from these findings?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Special education has a language all its own, a lexicon full of acronyms. The following terms are defined in the context in which they are used in this dissertation.

Advocacy

According to Freddolino, Moxley, and Hyduk (2005), "The purpose of advocacy within the profession is to improve the social status of individuals who may be considered vulnerable or oppressed, thereby enhancing their standing within a specific social system whether it is a community, organization, service system, societal institution, or society itself" (p. 119). Advocacy, then, becomes the decisions and actions by principals that deliberately benefit special education and the students it serves.

Disability

In current American education, the term *disability encompasses* a large field, from learning disabilities to physical disabilities. IDEIA '04 acknowledges 13 categories of disabilities for children ranging in age from 1 to 21 years. For this study, however, the term *disability* is used in an all-encompassing way; one eligibility category is not distinguished from another.

IDEIA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, the reauthorization of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

IEP

This acronym stands for an *individual education plan.* It refers to the meeting time to craft the plan, as well as the resulting documentation that outlines the education

and services a student will receive. This is a legal document that his reviewed once at least once a year.

NCLB

The No Child Left Behind Act enacted by George W. Bush in January of 2002. It is the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* and is the driving force behind the increase of accountability for public schools.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 set the stage for the ensuing study. In it, I laid out the rationale for exploring principal advocacy in elementary schools. In addition, I introduced the emergent conceptual framework employed to evaluate the findings, and introduced the exploratory questions. The historical context of special education and students with disabilities within American education is set forth in Chapter 2, the review of literature. The tenets of IDEIA and the IEP are clarified. Also explained are the theories comprising the emergent conceptual framework: the ethic of care, the ethic of justice, and sensemaking. In Chapter 3 I explain the research methods employed in this study, giving the rationale for the qualitative nature and instruments used. The findings of the study are presented and explored in Chapter 4. Tensions, both expected and unexpected, surface in this chapter. The findings are then analyzed in Chapter 5. Flaws in the emergent conceptual framework are presented, and a new model is proposed. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the additions to the existing research on principals and advocacy for students with disabilities, and suggestions are made for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"I implore you to see with a child's eyes,
to hear with a child's ears,
and to feel with a child's heart."
- Antonio Novello

BACKGROUND OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN AMERICA

American education always has struggled with diversity. Each generation has had to deal with the "influx of 'new students,'" and the dominant approach to assimilation of such diverse "new learners" has been homogenization (Riehl, 2000, p. 322). Yet, for all of the attempts to achieve homogenization through public legislation, there remains a subclass of American learners who have not become standardized--those with disabilities. The field of special education has a long and sordid history of being overlooked by general educators, politicians, and school leaders. For special education students, parents, and professionals, it often feels as if they are living in the shadows of American education.

In comparison to America's long history of public education, the integration of special education is in its infancy, barely a half-century old. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s set the tone for societal changes and educational justice in American education characterized by humanitarianism and egalitarianism. A recurring theme of the reforms was social equity and an attempt to right the educational inequities of the past. The intention of the reforms was to grant access to public education to all students, regardless of race or ability. But "[E]ducational leadership has never been known for its boldness or originality, in particular when it comes to issues of equity and justice," Kohl (1999, p. 310) pointed out. Therefore, the many changes in special

education did not originate from educational leaders, but rather from parents, lawyers, and Congress. Parents advocated for equal education for their disabled students, applying pressure first through the courts, and then through Congress. Since the latter half of the 1950s, involvement of the federal government in special education has increased, creating a succession of policies aimed at leveling the educational playing field for disabled students.

To date, special education has come in three waves: access, acceptance, and accountability. In this chapter I look at each of those waves and the decades that comprised America's educational history. The pieces of legislation, and their catalysts, are discussed, as well as how public school administrators have responded to each wave. A look at the dualistic system of American education and the tensions that such a system presents for administrators follows. Finally, ethics of care and justice and the theory of sensemaking are described as lenses through which to view and understand better the tensions experienced by principals.

Access

American education often is misconstrued as a constitutional right in and of itself. However, the framers of our nation left the responsibility for education to the individual states. They saw education as a vehicle to obtain the inalienable rights of liberty and property as granted by the 5th and 14th amendments to the United States Constitution. Therefore, to deny anyone an education is tantamount to denying the American dream. For years, children with mental, physical, and emotional differences were denied this right. Access to what every other American child had, a free and appropriate public education, emerged as the first battle in the fight for equal educational opportunity. To

understand why parents advocated for access to a public education, why Congress legislated admission for a select sub-culture of learners, why decades of professionals have made careers in the field of special education, and why school administrators have wrestled, and still do, with leading schools with disabled students in them, it is necessary to look at how students with disabilities once were treated.

Neglected and Abused: Special Education Pre-1950s

The edict found in the10th Amendment to the Constitution places responsibility for public education, and subsequently the decision of who is to be educated, in the hands of the individual states (Kohl, 1999). To ensure that students were being provided a public education, individual states began to enact compulsory education laws, starting with Rhode Island in 1840. By 1918, all states mandated school attendance; but sadly not all students were welcomed (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). In their book *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform,* Tyack and Cuban (1995) noted that those most in need of an education received the least amount. Kohl (1999) believed that disability is a "social construction and has to do with whom the society or local community will accept as being worthy of love and full participation" (p. 310).

In the first half of the 20th century, society did not deem disabled students worthy of full participation in schools. In 1938, only 1% of the disabled population were being educated (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Students with disabilities often were excluded from public schools because they were perceived as "misfits" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), deviants (Fiedler, 2000), and "uneducable" (Fiedler, 2000; Horn & Tynan, 2001; Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996; Osborne, DiMattia, & Curran, 1993; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Moreover, the judicial system justified such practice. Courts throughout the states

upheld the notion of restricted access, thus placing many schools in direct conflict with compulsory education. In 1893, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled in *Watson v. City of Cambridge* that a "child who was 'weak in the mind' and could not benefit from instruction, was troublesome to other children, and was unable to take 'ordinary, decent, physical care of himself' could be expelled from public school" (Horn & Tynan, 2001; Yell et al., 1998, p. 220). Decades of such legislation led many school administrators to believe that they would not see a return on their investment for educating such students (Rabe & Peterson, 1998) and therefore did not need educate them.

As a result, many families turned to private or state-run institutions for an education for their disabled children. Sadly enough, a number of students in such settings were used as guinea pigs for experiments. At the Willowbrook institution on Staten Island, New York, mentally retarded children were knowingly injected with hepatitis. Parents, desperate to maintain their children's place at the "school," were forced to consent to this inhumane treatment (Ensminger, 2004). Children at Fernald and Wrentham institutions were fed radioactive oatmeal without parental consent as part of a study by the Atomic Energy Commission (Renold, n.d.).

The treatment of disabled children, coupled with compulsory education's failing students with disabilities, led to the creation of *The White House Conference of 1910,* whose goal was to "define and establish remedial programs for children with disabilities ... educating these children in public school settings, rather than institutionalizing them" (Yell et al., 1998, p. 221). Yet, only a few states and larger urban districts provided programs for handicapped children in the form of special programs for the blind, deaf, or

physically/mentally handicapped. More often than not, these programs were intended for the incorrigible, the backward, and the unruly, and were isolated from the rest of the school. Educators, too, perpetuated the segregation of special education. Many thought that separate classes benefited specialized learners because the curriculum could be tailored to a homogeneous population, there would be more individualized attention, and a less competitive atmosphere would improve the self-esteem of disabled learners.

Between 1910 and 1930, segregated special education classes enjoyed support (Yell et al., 1998); this practice continued until the Great Depression. During this time in American history, schools struggled financially, and special education became an easy target for budget cutbacks. Many of the programs that did survive resembled the institutional settings. Such practices acted as a catalyst for advocacy.

Parents, mostly mothers, began to work together collectively "in response to the deplorable conditions that their children with special needs had to endure in school, as well as the increasing exclusion of children with disabilities from school" (Yell et al., 1998, p. 221). Refusing to lose the momentum generated by the 1910 *White House Conference*, parents banded together to advocate for the rights of their students. During the 1930s and 1940s, many small grassroots groups cropped up across the nation, lending support to fellow parents, working for local change, and setting the stage for future national advocacy groups.

One of the earliest local parent advocacy groups was formed in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, in 1933. Five mothers created the Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Council for Retarded Children and worked together to protest the expulsion of their mentally retarded youngsters from school (Yell et al., 1998). But parents were not the only players in the

special education advocacy game in the first half of the 20th century. Faculty and students at Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York established the Council of Exceptional Children, an organization for professionals. And the United Cerebral Palsy Association, Inc. was founded in 1949.

Despite the attention from the White House and small pockets of parent-advocates, children with disabilities continuously were relegated to the margins of society, ignored, neglected, and abused during the first half of the 20th century. This period lacked incentives for schools to educate disabled students, did not require accountability, and imposed no sanctions for those that excluded them.

The educational reforms swung the practice of educational administration to the scientific management model, patterned after the business and industrial world (Gamson, 2004). However, applying business-industrial values to education was detrimental to disabled students because, in business, the bottom line is a return on one's investment, and students with disabilities were believed to be defective and a weakness in the educational machinery. Administrators occupied a unique position as the "gatekeepers" to their schools. With or without established programs, superintendents, principals, and assistant principals could deny or grant students access to their schools as they saw fit. And special education programs were costly to school districts. For many administrators, special education was someone else's problem. In school systems that did provide classes for such "misfit," "uneducable" learners, the leadership style was "hands-off." Programs were merely rooms connected to the building and not the building-level principals' concern. It was not until the special education movement found its strength in

parent advocacy in two venues, the courts and eventually legislation, that school personnel were forced to notice it.

Isolated—The 1950s and 1960s

Not only did the landmark case of the civil rights movement, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), provide educational equality to African Americans, it also began to promote educational equality for students with disabilities. This groundbreaking victory granted equality of opportunity and greater constitutional protection to minorities under the 14th Amendment, which forbids states to deny any person living within their boundaries equal protection under the law. If states mandated compulsory education for students, then all students, regardless of their race, must be granted equal education. No longer did the "separate but equal" public education dictum reign. A call for the end of segregation was issued (Yell et al., 1998). *Brown*'s protection eventually was extended to students with disabilities, due to the work of special education advocates. "Advocates for students with disabilities, citing *Brown*, claimed that students with disabilities had the same rights as students without disabilities" (Yell et al., 1998, p. 221). This call for equality echoed the sentiment that children with handicaps had been treated differently and were not being afforded a public education. As history had proven, this criticism had merit. Advocates built their argument on the Supreme Court's civil rights stance that segregating students based solely on "unalterable characteristics (e.g., race or disability) was unconstitutional" (Yell et al., 1998, p. 221).

Until the 1950s, special education advocates were not united nationally. The extent of their influence was limited to bringing about change locally in their schools, administration, and communities. Uniting nationally created a networking system in

which parents, educators, and professionals could effect change on a larger scale. One such national advocacy group was the National Association for Retarded Citizens (NARC). This small but powerful alliance started as a group of parents who gathered after the annual meeting of the American Association on Mental Deficiency in 1950. Within the next year, the single unit grew to 57 local groups; by 1955, 412 groups had been formed. By 1964, NARC had 100,000 members and representatives from 28 counties (Segal, n.d.). This is just one example of a powerful grassroots parental group inspired by the struggle of African-Americans during the pre-*Brown* era.

Other advocacy groups that formed during the 1950s and 1960s include the National Association for Retarded Citizens (1950), the National Society for Autistic Children (1961), the National Association for Down Syndrome (1961), and the Association for Children With Learning Disabilities (1964). Both local and national parent advocacy groups, along with professional organizations, turned their attention for change to the same venue that the schools had used to exclude their children for decades: the legal system. They "banded ... to challenge state and federal governments in courts and ultimately to establish federal legislation that mandated a free and appropriate education for all children with disabilities" (Yell et al., 1998, p. 222). By the 1960s,

> advocates for children with disabilities wanted (1) a single entity that would coordinate federal educational efforts for children with disabilities; (2) increased categorical funding, that is funding for the exclusive purpose of educating students with disabilities; and (3) an enforceable entitlement, which was eventually obtained through the courts. (Martin et al., 1996, p. 26)

Specific court cases and their subsequent special education legislation are addressed later in this chapter.

The catalyst for taking another step closer to access to a public education for students with disabilities came from the Soviet Union. With the Cold War heating up into a space race, Americans were shocked when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957. The fear that America could be surpassed by Russia led the federal government to become more involved with public education during this era. As a reaction to Sputnik, in 1958, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) to improve mathematics and science programs in public elementary schools (Martin et al., 1996). The NDEA did not directly benefit students with disabilities, but it did open the door to federal involvement in special education. Public Law 85-926, which provided monies to colleges to strengthen the instruction for teaching mentally retarded children, was signed into law by President Eisenhower only four days after NDEA (Martin et al., 1996). But the first major federal vehicle to improve public education was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. As a result of this bill, Title I funds were allocated to serve special education students in state-operated or state-supported schools.

This was a conflict-ridden time for school administrators. For the first time, the courts were telling schools to educate selected populations of students who once had been excluded, the federal government was adding pressure to compete internationally, and parents advocated for an education for their children with disabilities. Yet school administrators were being sent mixed signals. In 1958 and 1969, two cases supported the practice of excluding the "feeble minded" from state-provided free public education (Yell et al., 1998). However, by the 1960s, most states had enacted laws that required an education for handicapped children, and by 1973, 45 states had redundant laws in this regard (Horn & Tynan, 2001; Martin et al., 1996). Coupled with the growing federal

involvement in education and advocacy pressure, school leaders were being forced to accept yet another disenfranchised population of learners.

Special education efforts varied from state to state, but most often during this era, special education entailed nothing more than "admittance to public schools" (Yell et al., 1998). Isolated in separate rooms, wings, and buildings, special education students did not participate along with general education students. Often, struggling students would drop out of school altogether. The states that did mandate education for disabled children had little authority with regard to how school leaders dealt with disabled learners because the laws were under funded and under enforced. Unified federal legislation existed to guide practice, so administrators were free to lead as they always had, view it as someone else's problem, and ignore it. The hierarchy remained intact.

Acceptance

The gains in access for disabled children forged in the mid-20th century fell short of a quality education. Mere access to a school did not bring about the intended change for which reformers advocated. The focus of special education was turned to acceptance, and the time was ripe for federal intervention. The Congress was "friendly" (Rabe & Peterson, 1998, p. 479), and in 1975 a landmark piece of legislation emerged. The practices of mainstreaming and inclusion of the 1980s and 1990s grew out of the legislation and helped support the concept of acceptance.

Segregated, but Legislated—The 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s

By 1973, 45 states had laws that mandated education for disabled students (Horn & Tynan, 2001; Martin et al., 1996). Unfortunately, not one of the 50 states educated all of their disabled children. In the first part of the decade, schools retained the right to

decide who was worthy of full participation (Kohl, 1999), and as a result many subpopulations of handicapped students were denied access to public education. Frustrated, the disability-rights movement in education did not just mimic the pre-*Brown* civil rights movement; its aims were significantly parallel to those of the ongoing, post-*Brown* movement for black equality (Kelman, 2001). The focus of special education advocates turned from "separate but equal" to acceptance for all disabled students. The 1970s saw an increase in national advocacy groups, such as The Association for the Severely Handicapped (TASH, 1974). United in numbers and cause, disability-rights advocates used the same venue that schools had been using to exclude disabled students, the same venue that had proven effective for the African American civil rights movement: the courts.

Two seminal cases emerged in 1972 to set the groundwork for current special education law and practices: *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education. PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* challenged the long-standing practice of denying students with limited cognitive functioning an education because they could not benefit from it (Horn & Tynan, 2001; Martin et al., 1996; Yell et al., 1998). This court case awarded full access to a free education that was appropriate for each student's learning capacity, up to the age of 21; it also favored students' being placed in the least restrictive environment, two principles on which the current legislation is built (Horn & Tynan, 2001; Martin et al., 1996).

Mills, a suit brought against the District of Columbia public schools for refusing to enroll or expelling students based on their disability, also set precedent for future

public policy. The district noted that an estimated 12,340 children in the D.C. area would not be granted a public education due to budget constraints. *Mills* upheld the 14th Amendment, stating that schools cannot discriminate on the basis of disability and cannot refuse to educate disabled children due to budgetary constraints (Horn & Tynan, 2001; Martin et al., 1996). *Mills* ensured for students with disabilities an equal right to a public education and more power to parents in the form of procedural protections and safeguards. Schools no longer could exclude disabled students because of fiscal constraints, as they had done in the Depression. Parents were to have access to all records, the right to prior knowledge before a change in placement was made, and the right to representation at due-process hearings. "The *PARC* and *Mills* cases caused a flurry of litigation. By 1973, more than 30 federal court decisions had upheld the principles of *PARC* and *Mills*" (Martin et al., 1996, p. 28).

Inspired by the gains that they had made in the judicial branch of the government, disability advocates turned their energies toward the legislative arm: Congress. Advocates also enjoyed the support of the states as they tackled Congress. "Once state laws and federal court decisions made clear the states' responsibility for providing a free, appropriate, public education to all children, regardless of disability, states joined advocates in seeking the passage of federal legislation to provide consistency, federal leadership and federal subsidy of the costs of special education" (Martin et al., 1996, p. 29). Because local school districts and states were left with new responsibilities that they did not know how to meet or lacked funds to do so, they looked to the federal government for unity.

In 1973, Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act (Public Law 93-112), a labor statute that found its way into public schools. Section 504 of this act is an extension of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 but was attached to PL 93-112 as an amendment. Section 504 prohibits any agency, including schools, that receives federal funds from discriminating on the basis of disabilities (Martin et al., 1996; Smith & Colon, 1998; Yell et al., 1998). However, for the next 20 years, Section 504 received no funding or monitoring and was "virtually ignored by local and state educational agencies" (Martin et al., 1996, p. 29). In 1974, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was amended in favor of disabled students. The Education Amendments of 1974 (P.L. 93-380) added funding for disability programs and created two federal offices for special education: the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped and the National Advisory Council on Handicapped Children. Advocates, though, believed this act to be insufficient and pressed onward.

America was home to 8 million children with disabilities in 1972 (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002). A congressional hearing in 1975 revealed that more than 1 million disabled children in America were still being excluded from schools and 2.2 to 3.5 million others were not receiving the appropriate education for their specific disability (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002; Doyle, 2002; Horn & Tynan, 2001; Martin et al., 1996; Smith & Colon, 1998). At the federal level, there was growing distrust of local education agencies to distribute equal education for disabled learners. Such restlessness led to the landmark legislation for special education, Public Law 94-142, a law that "set forth extraordinarily ambitious objectives and a regulatory framework of unprecedented complexity and detail for a federal education program (Rabe & Peterson, 1998, p. 212).

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHC) as "an umbrella law that was intended to right many wrongs" (Smith & Colon, 1998, p. 42) and to unite the various state laws. The EAHC Act has been amended four times since its inception, and in 2004 its name was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). Each reauthorization of IDEIA, the latest being in 2004, has added various components to the existing law, but the law today stays true to the six principles it was established on in 1975.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)

Public Law 94-142 rests on a foundation of existing judicial rulings and laws and has four provisions: Parts A, B, C, and D. Part A, entitled General Provisions, lays out the rationale for the law, its purpose, and relevant definitions. Part B, Assistance for Education of All Children with Disabilities, articulates the right of all students ages 3 through 21 to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Part C, Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, authorizes grants to states to provide early intervention services for children from birth to age 3. And Part D, National Activities to Improve Education of Children with Disabilities, focuses on "research and technology to improve services and results for children with disabilities and technical assistance and training for parents and special education personnel" (Yell, Drasgow, Bradly, & Justensen, 2004, p. 19). For most American school administrators, Part B of IDEIA directly influences their work and is that part of the law that is the focus of the remainder of this chapter. Part B, although not structured as such, comprises six major legal principles: zero reject or FAPE, Individual Education Plan (IEP), least restrictive environment (LRE), nondiscriminatory testing, procedural safeguards, and parent participation.

Zero reject.

This principle has its roots in the democratic philosophy that "every person is valuable and should be afforded equal opportunities to develop their full potential" (Fiedler, 2000, p. 69), the 14th Amendment, and in litigation of *PARC*. Zero reject ensures all students a "free and appropriate education." This means that states must provide special education for disabled children from birth to age 21, as granted in *PARC*. Schools also have the responsibility to locate, identify, and evaluate children suspected of having disabilities within their district and also private schools that reside within the district through "child find" activities (Fiedler, 2000; Martin et al., 1996; Smith & Colon, 1998; Williams & Katsiyannis, 1998; Yell et al., 1998).

Individual Education Plan (IEP).

"An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a document that outlines the instructional goals, objectives, evaluation criteria, specially-designed instruction, and related services that should be provided to a student with disabilities so he or she can succeed in school" (Bugaj, 2000, p. 41). Each student receiving special education programming must have an IEP, a document legally committing the school to provide specialized education and services. The IEP is created by a team of people that includes parents, the student, special and general education teachers, a representative from the local educational agency (LEA), personnel providing related services such as a speech therapist or occupational therapist, and other persons at the discretion of either the parents or the LEA. Included in the IEP are child-specific components such as the student's present level of academic and functional performance, targeted disability goals and objectives for improvement, a list of related services required, the extent to which the

child will participate in the general education setting, and how the student will be assessed on state and district tests. The IEP is reviewed at least once a year. However, parents, LEAs, and students can call for a new IEP meeting at any time to review or amend the existing document (Fiedler, 2000; Martin et al., 1996; Smith & Colon, 1998; Williams & Katsiyannis, 1998).

Least restrictive environment (LRE).

This principle, which was established by *PARC,* aims to help desegregate special education. As noted, most special education programs once were isolated and thought of as separate educational settings. Least restrictive environment in IDEIA requires that

> 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 that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature of severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aides and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (IDEIA, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1412)

It is clear that this principle derives from the civil rights movement for equality (Fiedler, 2000; Martin et al., 1996; Smith & Colon, 1998; Yell et al., 1998). Fiedler argued that students with disabilities "should experience the least restrictive educational means, and have the same rights of access to their environment as students without disabilities enjoy" (p. 86).

Nondiscriminatory testing.

The 5th and 14th Amendments ensure that students are not denied constitutional liberties such as an appropriate education (Turnbull, 1978). Those who crafted IDEIA understood that failure to properly identify disabled learners could, in fact, deny those students an appropriate public education. Therefore, the framers included within

§121a530 through §121a534 provisions to ensure that testing procedures are culturally and racially nondiscriminatory. The evaluations must be provided and administered in the native language of the child by a professional trained in the area of the suspected disability. The assessments used must be "technically sound instruments that assess multiple areas and factors" (Yell, 1998, p. 78), and no single instrument can be used to determine a disability. A multidisciplinary team must interpret the results of all assessments.

Procedural due process.

The principle of protection of student and parental rights stems from *Mills*. Local educational agencies are required to provide opportunities for parents to review evaluations and make informed decisions with regard to their child's placement (Smith & Colon, 1998). If parents or guardians disagree with the LEA, the differences are resolved through mediation or a due-process hearing (Fiedler, 2000; Martin et al., 1996; Smith & Colon, 1998; Yell et al., 1998).

Parental participation.

Steps to ensure that parents are notified, involved, and included in the evaluation, programming, and assessment of students with disabilities is mandated by law (Fiedler, 2000; Smith & Colon, 1998; Yell et al., 1998). In 1997, IDEIA was reauthorized with a focus on achievement and the movement of disabled children into regular education (Doyle, 2002). "In passing the law, Congress stated that IDEIA had been extremely successful in improving students' access to public school, and the critical issue in 1997 was to improve the performance and educational achievement of students with

disabilities in both the special and general education curriculum" (Yell et al., 1998, p. 226).

IDEIA '97 added the requirement of assessing all disabled students with state and district assessments (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000). Alternative assessments were required when the standard test was not appropriate for the student. It also required a general education teacher to attend and participate in the creation of a student's IEP (Williams & Katsiyannis, 1998). General educators are viewed as experts on the grade-level general curriculum and have vital information as to the success a student with disabilities can have in the curriculum. Finally, IDEIA '97 IEPs asked questions about how the disability affects the student's ability to progress in the general curriculum, to what extent the student will be educated both within and outside of general education, and what accommodations are to be given in the general education setting (Doyle, 2002).

"As a civil rights law, IDEIA is unique. It is the only such law that provides federal funds to educational agencies if they agree to comply with the requirements of the law" (Morrissey, 1998, p. 5). Realizing that IDEIA added new cost to LEAs, and continuing the funding started in the Education Amendments of 1974, P.L. 94-142 legislated federal state aid for special education programming (Rabe & Peterson, 1998; Smith & Colon, 1998; Yell et al., 1998). Congress allocated funds up to 40% of the excess cost of educating a student to states that met the legal requirements. All 50 states enacted state redundant plans for the education of disabled students (Morrissey, 1998). However, funding for special education quickly became a subject of controversy. Federal funding was increased to help offset special education programs—from $152 million in

1976 to more than $1 billion by 1982 (Rabe & Peterson, 1998)—but this fell short of the 40% promised.

Green (1983) likens public policy to an instrument, crude and unrefined. IDEIA is a statute law created by the legislative branch of American government. It is the responsibility of the courts to interpret the meaning of statute law and create case law (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002; Fiedler, 2000). These two very different sources of laws often create problems for those who are required to implement such laws. After P.L. 94-142 was passed in 1975, access to FAPE was granted to disabled learners. In fact, IDEIA mandated schools to mainstream to the maximum extent appropriate (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002). It is important to remember that Congress did not mandate mainstreaming, but an education in the LRE. Mainstreaming was a technique used to meet the criterion of LRE. Unfortunately, Congress did not define mainstreaming, and the 1980s saw numerous court cases attempting to define and clarify the term (*Roncker v. Walter,* 1983; *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education*, 1989; *Greer v. Rome*, 1991) (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002). Through these court cases and others, mainstreaming became the practice of removing a special education student from the classroom and educating him or her in a separate environment. Then, when and where appropriate, the student was mainstreamed back into general education in situations where the child could participate and perform at grade level. Unfortunately, such integration into general education took place primarily during lunch, recess, physical education, and art classes (Bateman & Bateman, 2002; Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002; Fiedler, 2000). The mainstreaming movement in the education of disabled students continued to segregate special education from general education. School leaders continued as they had in the

past, viewing special education as someone else's responsibility. Students who disrupted the flow of general education classrooms were removed to isolated settings, so teachers were happy. Parents were still elated at gaining a public education for their disabled children. Yet special educators felt isolated from their general education counterparts because they had little in common with them (Osborne et al., 1993).

The practice of mainstreaming was not questioned until 1993, when the family of an autistic child took the school to court. In *Oberti v. Clementon*, 1993, the school wanted to remove this disruptive youngster from the general education setting. However, the court held that "inclusion is a 'right,' not a privilege for a select few" (Bateman & Bateman, 2002, p. 2). This ruling marked a change in the practice of mainstreaming to that of inclusion. Nowadays, these two terms often are used interchangeably (Bateman & Bateman, 2002; Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002; Fiedler, 2000), but they refer to different educational practices. Inclusion, in contrast to mainstreaming, is the practice of providing every support necessary for a disabled student to function successfully in the general education setting. Only when all available methods have failed will the student be pulled from the regular education room for instruction on a temporary basis in another setting. Therefore, integration is not a privilege to be earned, but a constitutional right of all students (Bateman & Bateman, 2002; Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002; Fiedler, 2000; J. D. Smith, 1998; J. O. Smith & Colon, 1998).

Inclusion is the preferred method of educating special education students for three reasons (Bateman & Bateman, 2002). First, students with disabilities are educated with age-level peers. Second, pullout practices, such as mainstreaming, lead to the stigma of being different. Segregated classrooms perpetuate the notion that membership in a school

is based on achievement and that students must earn the right to belong. Special education students who are mainstreamed often learn that they "cannot belong until they learn a prerequisite set of skills. In essence, they must become normal before they can contribute to society" (Pazey, 1995, p. 303). Third, the amount of lost instruction time is minimized in inclusionary practices.

Just as in the early stages of compulsory education, there were no automatic solutions to the growing problems that schools were experiencing. The IEP, which acted as the catalyst for school administrators to work more closely with parents, and the practice of mainstreaming and inclusion were unfamiliar and often controversial (Rabe & Peterson, 1998) for local educational agencies. Schools were required to change their traditional practices drastically in order to meet the mandates and to obtain funding (Rabe & Peterson, 1998). The response of most schools was to create another layer of bureaucracy within the districts. Many schools formed an office of special education to understand and comply with the mandates of IDEIA, the demands of parents, and the appropriate education of disabled students. History has shown that leadership in relation to special education operated from the structural-functionalist and the political-conflict paradigms with business-industrial values, laws, court cases, rules, and regulations. Special education administrators are positioned at the apex of the hierarchy, and these personnel are thought of as "specialized experts who transmit to and communicate with parents/guardians according to rigid, disciplinary rules" (Doyle, 2002). But this solution begs the question if the intended outcome of years of advocacy, litigation, and legislation was to pass the responsibility for the education of disabled learners to a "specialist" in the field. Adding a specific administrator in charge of special education programs, students,

and parents gave building principals another reason not to become involved. It was not until the passage of a federal law aimed at general education and the reauthorization of IDEIA in 2004 that the concept was finally brought home that a school leader is responsible for leading all of his or her charges, regardless of ability.

Accountability

In January 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act,* called the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This bipartisan law in many ways mirrored special education legislation, from increased parental input to accountability. It may, in fact, have acted as the impetus that initiated the current change from a dual system to a unified one. The spirit of NCLB also began with the 1960s civil rights movement's endeavor to cleanse the "stain on our democratic, egalitarian way of life" (Sykes, 2003, p. 4). Our nation attempted to right the wrongs that slavery had engendered generations before. President Lincoln may have abolished the practice of slavery and made all persons equal under the law, but society had continued to perpetuate the habit of segregation of minority, disabled, and disadvantaged learners.

The legislation of NCLB had its roots in the historic report by the Commission on Excellence in Education entitled *A Nation at Risk* (1983). *A Nation at Risk* placed a great deal of emphasis on students' performing to the best of their abilities, regardless of their race, social-economic status, or ability, and it began the evolution of achievement testing and standards-based reform.

NCLB is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. ESEA, a component of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty,

funneled funding to poor schools with low student achievement. Subsequent reauthorization in 1994, known as the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), first legislated the importance of high standards for all students. The 1994 reauthorization had four other premises: (a) focus on teaching and learning; (b) partnership among families, communities, and schools; (c) flexibility and responsibility for student performance; and (d) resources targeted at areas with the greatest needs. These themes still resound in NCLB and IDEIA.

As does IDEIA, NCLB strives for equality, but at different levels of aggregation. Whereas IDEIA targets a smaller aggregate of students, NCLB encompasses all of our nation's K-12 learners. American education has taken productive measures, such as Title I, to help those in disadvantaged settings succeed, but still there remain struggling and failing students. NCLB forces educators to look within their own schools and to realize that they can no longer write off failing students--that they are responsible for those falling between the educational cracks under their own roofs, including those in special education. Accountability for student achievement, more freedom for states and communities, encouragement of proven educational methods, and increased choices for parents are the four pillars supporting the 2000 reform. The intention of NCLB is to help ensure that all students achieve and fulfill the promise of American education articulated by *A Nation at Risk* (1983, p.1): "This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself." The reformers created four avenues through which to fulfill the promise: (a) stronger accountability of schools

and states for student learning, (b) increased flexibility for states and communities with federal dollars, (c) the use of scientifically based research methods, and (d) increased voice of parents in their child's education. The more than 40 references to NCLB in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEIA signal a strong attempt to align the two laws (Cortiella, 2004). IDEIA continues to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in local, district, and state assessments while mirroring the "highly qualified" requirements of NCLB, enabling IDEIA funds to be used for supplemental educational services as defined in NCLB, as well as for scientifically based research. Both laws have sanctions for noncompliance that can be levied at the district and state levels. The history of educating students with disabilities indicates that without such measures, special education would continue to operate in the shadows of general education.

Administrators are now caught at the intersection of historical practices and litigation and legislation, between mandates and implementation. A President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education charged in July 2002 that it is time for a new era for special education, a new era to revitalize special education for children and their families (Jones, 2002). But what does this era look like for administrators? How do those who are wedged between policy and public education effectively lead legislative, litigated, inclusive schooling for both disabled and non-disabled students?

A Dual System and the Principal

The increase in accountability measures brought forth by NCLB and IDEIA 2004 has reshaped school principals' perceptions of their roles with regard to special education programs. Today's principals play a pivotal role in the growth and achievement of students with disabilities (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; DiPaola & Walther-

Thomas, 2003; Katsyannis, Conderman, & Franks, 1996; NAESP, 2001; Williams & Katsiyannis, 1998). Furthermore, inclusion has become a "critical part of the reform effort to improve the delivery of services to students with disabilities" (Praisner, 2003, p. 135) over the past 20 years. Yet Praisner discovered that the majority of principals surveyed (76.6%) harbored an uncertainty with regard to inclusion.

In the current literature, two main principal perceptions emerged and may help explain such ambivalence. First, many principals do not feel adequately prepared by their formal education and training (Burton, 2004; Farley, 2002; Monteith, 1994; Praisner, 2003; Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994). Second, they do not believe that they have the necessary specific knowledge to effectively lead special education (Davidson & Algozzine, 2002; Monteith, 1994).

Preparation

More complex special education requirements brought forth by IDEIA, and girded by NCLB, have amplified principals' need for tacit knowledge (Tucker & Tschannen-Moran, 2002). Institutions of higher education are in a logical position to ensure that principals have such necessary knowledge. However, current principals do not feel that their graduate programs have done that. Burton (2004) randomly sampled 150 elementary principals in Illinois. One hundred-seven of the sampled principals indicated that they did not believe that their administrative course work prepared them to lead special education programs effectively. Instead, they reported that their day-to-day experiences and on-the-job training were most beneficial.

Aspedon (1992) also investigated the preparation of administrators. More than 40% of the principals in the study had no special education course work, whereas more

than 75% of those principals were responsible for supervising and evaluating special education teachers in their schools. More important, more than 85% of the principals thought that formal training in special education is critical for being a successful building principal.

The research that Monteith conducted in 1994 mirrored Aspedon's findings. In 1993, the South Carolina State University Department of Educational Administration set out to determine the amount of necessary special education knowledge that principals currently possessed. Surveys were mailed to graduate students in educational administration throughout South Carolina, southern North Carolina, and northern Georgia, and 120 individuals responded to the survey. Seventy-five percent of the participants said they had no formal training in special education. However, 90% responded that such training was necessary to be an effective school leader, and 89% said they would be willing to take course work in special education.

Sirotnik and Kimball's (1994) meta-analysis of two national studies illuminated a possible reason for why principals perceived themselves as unprepared. In one study, 23 higher education institutions from eight states, 457 graduate students, and more than 200 faculty members were surveyed about the goals of their education programs. Both students and professors ranked special education goals in the bottom half of those goals.

In his doctoral work, Farley (2002) discovered another possible reason for why institutions of higher education often rank special education as a low standing goal of their institution and why they do not adequately prepare principals to deal with special education issues. Farley interviewed faculty members at Tennessee universities and discovered that faculty members were inexperienced, untrained, and disinterested in

special education issues. Often they assumed that responsibility for teaching such courses lay with someone else and believed that faculty members' choices of teaching assignments posed the largest barrier these necessary course offerings. Many professors, therefore, chose not to teach classes that would prepare future principals for special education administration, thinking that someone else in the department or college would do so. These findings indicate that the knowledge and courses provided at many colleges and universities do not keep pace with the changes reflected in the practice of K-12 administrators. Furthermore, few institutions of higher education offer administration certification in special education. Out of the 212 programs that were surveyed by Jones et al. (as cited in Lashley & Boscardin, 2003), 18 offered limited course work in special education administration, 21 offered certification-only programs, and only 11 offered full administrative special education degrees. Out of those 11, the special education department housed seven, two colleges granted a special education degree through the education administration department, and only two were jointly housed (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). In a final report to Department of Education and the Office of Special Education and rehabilitative Services (ED/OSERS) in Washington, D.C., Collins and White (2002) stressed the importance of preparation of principals:

> Preparing future educational leaders in special education issues cannot be an add-on program. The skill and knowledge areas need to be embedded into the curriculum. Otherwise, symbolically we continue to send the message that special education is a separate and exclusionary program. (p. 6)

Knowledge

The second perception of principals that perpetuates the uncertainty about inclusion and special education programs in general is that principals often think they

lack the necessary knowledge to effectively advocate for students with disabilities. With their deficit in preparation, it is not surprising that many current principals lack a firm understanding of special education laws. Osbourne et al. (1993) contended that special education functions as both a legal and an educational process by pointing out that, in the decade following P.L. 94-142, special education litigation outnumbered that of all other school laws combined. Clearly, administrators must possess a working knowledge of the laws.

Davidson and Algozzine (2002) contended that successful management of special education results directly from the principal's knowledge of special education law.

> Effective leadership depends upon the acquired knowledge and understanding that a principal has for law, policies, and regulations governing the system as well as a responsiveness that meets the need of the entire organization. Principals have a significant impact on the delivery of services for students with disabilities as a result of their knowledge of the laws that govern special education. (p. 47)

In their 2002 survey of 264 building principals, assistant principals, interns, and lead teachers, Davidson and Algozzine discovered that 47.5% of the participants had a limited or basic knowledge of special education law. Women in the sample tended to have a better understanding of the law than did men. Of the women polled, 13.6% indicated they had a significant knowledge base, compared to only 3.1% of the men. A slightly larger percentage (43.3%) of women than men (37.5%) had a moderate understanding of special education law. A larger portion of men (50.0%) than women (28.4%) rated themselves as having only a basic knowledge of special education law.

Monteith (1994) referenced previous studies that helped to furnish a possible reason why principals lack vital knowledge. Citing a 1991 study by Hirth and Valesky, Monteith wrote that only 27% of universities across the United States required

knowledge of special education law for regular administrator endorsements and that 57% of the endorsements offered by universities had no requirement that general education leaders possess any knowledge of special education law. The following year, Hirth and Valesky (as cited in Monteith, 1994) examined state requirements for certification endorsements of school administrators and discovered that only 33% of all regular administrator endorsements required a knowledge of special education law. The 1993 South Carolina State University Department of Educational Administration research (Monteith, 1994) indicated that the majority of the 120 participants' knowledge of special education and issues such as law came from "on-the-job" experiences such as memoranda from central offices or state offices or from "making mistakes" (p. 9).

"School principals and superintendents are now front line people and provision of inclusive schooling for children with disabilities takes their best administrative talents, effort, and creativity" (Weir, Hobbs, & Fiascki, 1999, p. 4). Principals' perceptions of lack of preparation and knowledge about a growing population of learners will influence the perceptions of other members of the school system. A critical factor in the success of a program for students with disabilities is the principal's attitude (Patterson et al., 2000; Witt & McLeod, n.d.). Witt and McLeod (n.d.) proposed that when a principal "publicly support[s]" special education, the school culture will mirror that positive attitude as well. Maintaining a positive attitude toward special education can pose a problem when all of the principal's other responsibilities are taken into account. The increased paperwork and additional duties in relation to designing, leading, managing, and implementing programs for special education students as well as being the instructional leader for nontraditional learners place great responsibility in the hands of principals (Praisner, 2003). This

responsibility will impel the research community to apply theoretical lenses to help principals navigate the murky and uncharted waters of special education advocacy, as well as uncover hidden tensions that lie beneath the surface.

Tensions

Two major tensions emerge when principal advocacy for students with disabilities is viewed through two principal dilemmas: human resources and time management. This section provides an abbreviated overview of these dilemmas.

Human resources.

The objective of NCLB and IDEIA may have unintended consequences for special education. Currently, the field of special education is experiencing an increase of pupils three times greater than the general population. At the same time, more teachers leave the special education field than do their general education counterparts, creating a mass teacher exodus that has left 10% of the special education teaching positions filled by uncertified teachers (Muller & Markowitz, 2003). To compound this problem, NCLB and IDEIA have enacted statutes to ensure that highly qualified teachers instruct students with disabilities. Principals not only must wrestle with keeping special education positions filled, but they also must hire highly qualified personnel. Special educators cite the lack of administrative support as one of the reasons for the rapid attrition in their field (Sirk, 1999; Witt & McLeod, n.d.).

In her doctoral study, Sirk investigated the relationship between administrative support and the levels of job satisfaction of special education teachers in West Virginia. "The findings of this study indicated the principals' support does have a significant relationship with the extrinsic job satisfaction levels, or the conditions which surround

the job, of the special education teachers in West Virginia" (p. 173). The data indicated that as perceived principal support increased, the extrinsic job satisfaction of special education teachers increased as well. Witt and McLeod (n.d.) noted that when general education administrators support special education programs, teachers and students tend to perform better. Praisner (2003) conducted a study of principals' attitudes towards inclusion. Her findings indicated that principals' attitudes and values determined the level of support for special education. Principals who valued students with disabilities offered more support to the special education staff.

Time management.

At one time, principals' roles and responsibilities were "quite clearly, although narrowly, defined" (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 7). However, today's principals must act as the instructional leaders for all students in order to meet the high standards set forth in NCLB and IDEIA. The managerial tasks of the principal have also expanded because increased rules and regulations have resulted in more paperwork. Principals must maintain safe school environments, incorporate the demands of increased technology, meet the higher standards imposed by federal legislation, organize, and budget while also retaining highly qualified teachers and staying involved in their communities—all without losing sight of the need for increased student learning (Tucker & Tschannen-Moran, 2002). It is no wonder that principals "report that they lack time to be effective instructional leaders"(Tucker & Tschannen-Moran, 2002, p. 6).

In their 2002 paper for the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute, Tucker and Tschannen-Moran described the perceptions of time management among principals in Virginia. More than half of Virginia's principals reported that they spent more time on

paperwork than they did just five years ago. Thirty percent reported spending more time in special education meetings than in previous years. Two thirds of the principals reported that they did not have the time or the staff to be effective instructional leaders. Ninety percent of Virginia's principals reported special education law and its implementation as a highly significant organizational management problem. Findings from the authors' examination of national studies echoed many of the same problems experienced in Virginia. Eighty-three percent of the nation's principals reported an enormous increase in responsibilities due to federal legislation without having the resources necessary to fulfill them. Nationally, 71% of principals indicated that to free up time, delegating duties and responsibilities is imperative. Finally, 86% of principals nationally agreed that keeping up with federal mandates consumes too much time.

Special education laws and mandates are a fact of life for principals, and they must find a way to effectively instruct and lead their schools. The demands on principals are not likely to subside any time soon. Therefore, future research into this situation should be anchored to two theoretical lenses, one personal and the other structural.

CONCEPTUAL LENS

Because special education remains a knotty conglomeration of individualized education and legislative bureaucracy, it behooves us to examine this phenomenon's underpinnings. One of these underpinnings is at the personal level, addressing the need to balance the human side of special education administration, known as the ethic of care, with the political side, the ethic of justice. The other underpinning of the phenomenon is sensemaking.

Personal Anchor: The Ethics of Care and Justice

The review of literature illustrated perceptions of a personal nature on the part of principals regarding a lack of both knowledge and preparation. Special education presents a conundrum for administrators in that it is highly relationship-oriented (ethic of care), yet highly political (ethic of justice). Applying the theoretical lenses of care and justice will help illuminate the personal anchor of this phenomenon. The following section will look at the ethics of care and justice in their "ideal forms" (Clement, 1996), their individual characteristics without relation to any other ethics, and then look at how these two ethics may function more effectively as an integrated ethic.

The Ethic of Care

The ethic of care emphasizes relationships and connections (Clement, 1996; Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, & Steele, 1996; Pazey, 1995; Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004; Starratt, 1991; Vreeke, 1991). Gilligan (1982) first described the ethic of care as a feminine way of judging situations, a

> morality built upon the recognition of needs, relation, and response. Individuals who are guided by an ethic of care thoughtfully consider the context of each and every situation and refuse to ignore the potential impact of their decision making on others. (Marshall et al.,, 1996, p. 277)

The ethic of care "is fundamentally concerned with how human beings meet and treat one another" (Noddings, 1993, p. 45), is "context-relative" (Vreeke, 1991), and is context specific (Clement, 1996). Clement (1996) cites Nodding's (1984, 86) notion of contextuality be saying that "caring requires real encounters with and responses from individuals" (p.14). All "care judgments are somehow related to the well-being of persons in relationships" (Vreeke, 1991, p. 37) and it "begins with an assumption of human connectedness" (Clement, 1996, p.11). Clement (1996) states that the ethic of care

has "two interrelated priorities: maintaining one's relationships and meeting of the needs of those to whom one is connected" (p. 14). The ethic of care operates within personal relations, omitting the public relations.

For special education, the ethic of care is essential. Pazey (1995) quoted Noddings (1993) as saying: "One of the great strengths of caring as an ethic is that it does not assume that all students should be treated by some impartial standard of fairness. . . . Caregivers, therefore, respond in different ways to the different needs presented by cared-fors" (p. 302). Hence, the ethic of care is "an essential link to the successful administration of just and caring educational programs for students with disabilities" (Pazey, 1995, p. 298). Special education has a very human face. Schools, in essence, collaborate with students and parents to craft a contract that specifies the child's education. The context surrounding the individual child shapes each decision. Devising an individual education plan (IEP) addresses issues such as accommodations and modifications to the general education curriculum, necessary services and therapies, and placement of the student within the school structure. An effective administrator must not only know about each area, but also have built and maintained relationships within each area. However, administrators' past practices often have focused solely on fulfilling laws and mandates in order to avoid sanctions and lawsuits, resulting in the omission of the context and relationships in seeking compliance. Therefore, IEPs often have functioned as checklists and deviated little from one to another (Jones, 2002). Principals need to consider the context of the individual needs of students and their families when making decisions with regard to the education of students with disabilities and work to build such relationships.

The Ethic of Justice

Principals must balance the educational rights of all students with the rights of students with disabilities. In doing so, administrators operate within the constraints of the law while implementing best practice for all students. Administrators, then, must also proceed from the ethic of justice when making decisions regarding students with disabilities. According to Gilligan, justice differs as a form of moral judgment from care (Vreeke, 1991). It stems from Kant's ethics and is referred to as a Kantian ethic, (Clement, 1996; Noddings, 1993) one were actions should be void of feelings. Justice is separate from the context, it takes an abstract approach and aids in impartiality (Clement, 1996). Fissures in a relationship create conflicts in the ethic of care, whereas in the ethic of justice, conflicts are viewed as disparities in rights and duties between individuals. The ethic of justice "begins with an assumption of human separateness" (Clement, 1996, p. 11). Justice is concerned with rules and universality, whereby the problem is removed from the situated context (Vreeke, 1991). Justice involves more abstract concepts, such as fairness, equity, and justice (Clement, 1996: Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004). The ethic of justice operates from public relations sphere and is banned from the personal relation sphere.

Starratt (1991) noted that the ethic of justice develops from two schools of thought: "an individual choice to act justly and justice understood as the community's choice to direct or govern its actions justly. In a school setting, both are required" (p. 193). He asserted that the ethic of justice "demands that the claims of the institution serve both the common good and the rights of the individuals in the school" (p. 194) and

"assumes the ability to perceive injustice in the social order as well as some minimal level of caring about relationships in that social order" (p. 198). While sitting at the IEP table, effective administrators of special education know and understand such issues as allocation of resources, staffing, and discipline, which will affect not only the children across the table from them, but the rest of the students in their building as well. These administrators then must remove themselves enough from the relationships that the ethic of care creates to make the best, yet individually specific, decisions. The ethic of justice demands that principals have a sound understanding of the philosophy and laws that govern special education. They must ensure that the school justly fulfills the mandates of Alternative Ethics or An Integrated Ethic?

Noddings (1993), Vreeke (1991), Starratt (1991), and Clement (1996) distinguish that there are differences between the ethics of care and justice and have "defined them as alternatives to one another" (Clement, 1996, p. 11). These scholars, then, believe that the 2 ethics have distinct fields for application and contend that care is better suited for situations set in the personal sphere and justice for situations set in the public relations sphere. This view leads us to understand that principals, then, must choose which ethic they operate from, forsaking the other. However, Clement (1996) deviates from the "either or" concept because such thinking results in "uncaring forms of justice and unjust forms of care" (p. 2). Clement (1996) contends in her book, *Care, Autonomy, and Justice*, that if the ethic of care alone can lead to exaggerated individual interests while drawing attention away from "the general realities that structure those situations, and which require our attention for any significant change" (p. 112). If justice alone is applied, then only the large good is strived for without consideration of individual needs.

Though Clement (1996) does see the value in understanding the ethic of care or the ethic of justice as separate; she does not believe that they are mutually exclusive or dichotomous. She posits that care should not be consigned only to the personal sphere and justice only to the public because their priorities "over lap" (p. 21). "Properly understood, the ethic of justice requires not just abstract principals but contextual details as well. Likewise, the ethic of care requires not only contextual details but general principles as well" (Clement, 1996, p. 76). Rather, these two ethics should no longer be viewed as alternatives to each other, but rather as "complementary approaches" (p. 4) that creates "an integrated ethic" (p. 121). However, Clement (1996) cautions that the achievement of this integrated ethic is not done by the assimilation of care into justice. If the two ethics are simply assimilated, then care looses its equality with justice. Clement (1996) asserts that creating this integrated ethic or understanding care and justice as complementary approaches "can only be done by interpreting care through the perspective of justice" (p. 5).

In essence, if the ethics of care and justice are integrated, they are no long relegated to their separate spheres, but rather "that they can jointly determined deliberation in public as well as personal context. By integrating them in that we use both ethics instead of merely on in any given situation, we acknowledge their interdependence and their distinctiveness" (Clement, 1996, p. 121). Applying both ethics to any situation allows insights in ways that one ethic alone could not do (Clement, 1996).

Principals who operate from an ethics of care and justice can perceive the context of students with disabilities needs and appropriately design the special education services

that are just and fair. In turn, principals will maintain the integrity of their school, meet the political mandates that constrain them while creating a caring school environment that best meets the needs of all students, disabled and non-disabled. Hence, the ethics of care and justice are "an essential link to the successful administration of just and caring educational programs for students with disabilities" (Pazey, 1995, p. 298). It is through the application of this "integrated ethic" that principals begin to make sense of advocacy.

Sensemaking

Sensemaking is the act of making something sensible (Weick, 1995). It is a process through which unknowns, or "surprises," are "construct[ed], filter[ed], frame[d]...and render[ed] . . . into something more tangible (Weick, 1995, p. 14). Sensemaking has groundings in both individual and social activity and has seven characteristics: grounded in identity construction, retrospectivity, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.

Sensemaking is Grounded in Identity Construction

Identities are fluid and constructed socially by the environment and members of that environment. Our interactions in and among our social environment shape our self-identities, and our self-identities shape our environment. The reaction to and shaping of our environment occurs simultaneously. Our understandings of our selves shift due to various interactions, our definition of which we are changes with what is experienced, and our understanding of experiences shifts depending on our definition of our self. Making sense of a situation or incident must start with a self-conscious sensemaker; individuals must be aware of the environment's influence on them as well as their

influence on the environment. "What the situation means is defined by who I become while dealing with it or what and who I represent" (Weick, 1995, p. 24).

Sensemaking has an Element of Retrospectivity

Much of sensemaking rests on the principle of retrospectivity. This draws from Schultz's (1967) "analysis of 'meaningful lived experience'" (Weick, 1995, p. 24). The past tense of "lived experience" is purposeful because we can know what we are doing only as we are doing it. Retrospect helps answer the question, "How do I know what I've done until I see what I've done?" This examination of our actions entails a lag time because our understanding comes only after we have acted. Factoring into this situation is the fact that what is currently happening will influence our understanding of what just happened. Retrospectivity is complicated by the possibility of analyzing our actions and coming up with too many meanings, not too few. These multiple meanings are generated by the various "projects" that "are under way at the time reflection takes place" (Weick, 1995, p. 27). These projects also influence or bias our understanding and sensemaking. To deflect such bias, Weick (1995) recommended keeping three things in mind. First, there is a short time span between action and reflection, so only a small number of projects will be recalled. Second, recalling the past only clarifies that past; it does not erase the past altogether. Finally, the "feeling of order, clarity, and rationality is an important goal of sensemaking, which means that once this feeling is achieved, further retrospective processing stops" (p. 29). But it is the skill of reflection, while understanding that the present colors our understanding of our past, which aids in making sense of recent actions.

Sensemaking is Enactive of Sensible Environments

Enactment is "the activity of 'making' that which is sensed" (Weick, 1995, p. 30). According to this principle, the environment is not a static, detached unit, but rather something that interacts with the participants in it. In essence, people create their own environment through the process of identity construction and retrospectivity and then, in turn, are constrained by the very same environment. Because of this, people create their own restrictions and opportunities alike. They "create and find what they expect to find" (Weick, 1995, p. 35). A phenomenon of enactment is bracketing, the categorization of things that we give our attention to as a way to create a structural order.

Sensemaking is Social

"Sensemaking is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others" (Weick, 1995, p. 40). People are continuously and actively shaping each other's meanings and sensemaking through talk, discourse, and conversations because language is humans' form of communication and hence our means of making sense of things. Other people influence our environment, which we now know is not static, but fluid. Their shaping of our environment influences how we then perceive it. The interactions between and among people influence our ability to think retrospectively because what is happening now will modify how we reflect on past events. People even have an effect on our identity construction because it is the interactions with others that shape our perceptions of ourselves. Meaning is socially constructed and cannot be achieved in isolation.

Sensemaking is On-going

Weick (1995) argued that sensemaking never truly starts because people are constantly doing; they are continuously engaged in various "projects." Rather, we experience "throwness" (p. 44), in which we are repeatedly thrown into various situations that require sensemaking of us. The "projects" that we are engaged in color our sensemaking because it is the elements particular to a project that we choose to focus on and see. Weick also argued that sensemaking is influenced by emotions and that retrospect is "mood congruent." As a linear equation, sensemaking begins when one is involved in a "project" that is interrupted. This interruption creates an emotional response in the form of arousal. The arousal can be either positive (when outcomes of the interruption accelerate the completion of the project), or negative (when the project is slowed or thwarted). These emotions, then, will color our sensemaking.

Sensemaking is Focused On and By Extracted Cues

Extracted environmental cues can be thought of as seeds, simple and familiar structures that people use to begin to formulate an understanding of what is happening. These seeds can act as the starting point to make sense. What this seed develops into is based largely on the context in which it is found. Building on the social principle, context is critical for sensemaking because the context is social. These cues are what impel action in people, and success is explained by what we do, not what we plan to do. Paying attention to and learning to understand such clues help us slow down sensemaking and see the process, not just the product.

Sensemaking is Driven By Plausibility Rather Than Accuracy

As we come full circle, the accuracy of our sensemaking is a non-issue. Weick (1995) said that it is not how accurate we were in making sense of an event that is important, but rather how plausible our sensemaking is. Weick listed eight reasons why plausibility is the focus of sensemaking. First, making sense of an object or event may be rife with errors. Often misconceptions are beneficial if they lead to action and the pursuit of goals previously thought to be unattainable. Second, "sensemaking is about the embellishment and elaboration of a single point of reference or extracted cue" (Weick, 1995, p. 57). With multiple meanings, understanding **the** issue or **the** event is more than likely impossible. Understanding the issue or event is plausible. Third, actions usually are time sensitive, so speed is traded for accuracy. Fourth, accuracy maintains the spotlight for just a short amount of time. Fifth, organizations and reality are socially constructed, with reliance on interpersonal and interdependent interactions. Focusing on such intangible perceptions makes it difficult to achieve accuracy. Rather, the focus should be on object perception. Sixth, "accuracy is project specific and pragmatic" (Weick, 1995, p. 59). With multiple projects taking place concurrently, accuracy is not the best aim to have. Weick's (1995) seventh reason is based on action and accuracy can immobilize people from acting because those aiming for action tend to simplify rather than elaborate. The eighth reason is that "it is almost impossible to tell, at the time of perception, whether the perceptions will prove accurate or not" (Weick, 1995, p. 60) because our perceptions are based on shifting and changing realities. For these reason, plausibility takes precedence over accuracy.

SUMMARY

History has shown that advocacy for students with disabilities have advanced in the past 100 years. Various legislative and court cases have help establish the foundation from which our current educational policy is built upon. Federal legislations have become more closely aligned than ever before, however, principals still are educational leaders for a dual system: general and special education. Research shows that many principals are not properly prepared and feel that they lack the knowledge in relation to leading special education, resulting in two large tensions: human resources and time management. The theories of the ethic of care, the ethic of justice and sensemaking act as conceptual lenses to view the phenomena at hand.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

"The wisest mind has something yet to learn."
~ George Santayana

INTRODUCTION

My purpose in conducting this study was twofold: (a) to add to a small but growing body of qualitative, in particular phenomenological, inquiry focused on the work of school principals as they address special education needs, and (b) to offer some insight for current school principals who are struggling to do the best for **all** children, special and general education students alike. According to the literature reviewed for this study, lack of preparation explains why principals may find it difficult to advocate for students with disabilities. Missing from the literature are school principals' own stories of advocacy. Their voices, which is considered vital to the success of students with disabilities (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Katsiyannis et al.,; NAESP, 2001; Williams & Katsiyannis, 1998) are eerily silent in the literature.

As a reminder, the exploratory question that drives this study is: How do elementary building-level principals make meaning of and enact special education policies to create caring learning environments for students with disabilities? Sub questions are as follows:

1. How do (if they do) elementary school principals make meaning of "advocacy" ?

2. To what extent and through what concrete forms does "advocacy" translate into practice? Who benefits from "advocacy"?

3. What can we learn that has policy and practice implications? What can higher education learn from these findings?

Methodology and Design

The nature of the exploratory questions and the phenomenon they are intended to elucidate naturally lend themselves to the use of qualitative inquiry methods. Because the qualitative approach focuses on process, it is the best vehicle to identify and describe complexities in understanding how principals engage in their work to support (or not) programs for students with disabilities.

Rationale for a Phenomenological Study

Qualitative inquiry follows a constructivist or interpretivist paradigm (Glesne, 1999). Within this paradigm, both the participants and the researcher socially construct reality. Reality, not a single fact, becomes something built collaboratively and changes due to the various perceptions. Glesne explained that researchers must attempt to access and understand the multiple perspectives held by the participants and culture of the site. As Peshkin (1993) pointed out in his article "The Goodness of Qualitative Research," the aim of such research is not to arrive at "truth" that may derive from a tested hypothesis, but to seek understanding of a given phenomenon.

Within qualitative inquiry, this study is best framed as a phenomenological study. Phenomenology is concerned with the experiences of individuals and the meaning they construct from those experiences. My focus is mainly existential in nature. Through data collection, rich description emerged on how principals shape their existence as leaders of inclusive schools by how they navigate their work that is focused on special education and general education issues. Because phenomenological studies are undertaken in an attempt to accurately portray phenomena from the perspective(s) of those who actually experience them, in this study I will paint a picture of how principals make meaning of

special education policies and how they work to create an educational system that benefits students with disabilities. As such, this study requires the participants to be active and reflective in the research process. Therefore, we need to hear the voices of the principals as they make decisions (or not) on behalf of students with disabilities. The most effective way to give voice to the participants and create a rich description of the phenomenon is by conducting a case study.

Use of Case Study

The majority of studies reviewed for this research used quantitative mail surveys or a combination of personal interviews and surveys (Burton, 2004; Collins & White, 2002; Davidson & Algozzine, 2002; Katsiyannis et al., 1996; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Livingston, Reed, & Good, 2001; Monteith, 1994; Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994). Two studies (DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; Farley, 2002) used multiple case studies, interviews, and documentation, whereas one (Collins & White, 2002) used visits and portfolios to gather data.

In this study, I used a case study format to present the principals' understanding of their work with special education students. To fully comprehend this phenomenon, making sense of principals' work for students with disabilities, a case study approach was appropriate for at least two reasons. First, case studies can act as the middle ground between research strategies (Greene & David, 1981). In the present investigation, the case study approach yielded the necessary insights while filling the void in the literature by providing information on the context in which principals currently are working. It is not enough to merely hear from the principals; we must be transported to the school that they lead to truly understand what advocacy looks like in each of their cases. Second,

case studies work best when used to understand a contemporary issue. As mentioned in the review of literature, Congress and federal, state, and local legislation currently are moving accountability for the social and academic performance of students with disabilities into the hands of the building administrator, something that has begun to take precedent in the 21st century.

Sampling

The primary sampling technique for this study was through a convenience process that began with recommendations from the Special Education Director of the Hampton Intermediate School District (HISD). I asked the director to identify elementary principals in 12 local districts, located geographically convenient to me, whom she considered to be attentive to the needs of student, and in particular the needs of students with disabilities. To help me identify a pool of possible participants, I asked Hampton's ISD special education director the following questions:

- Do you know of elementary principals in your district whom you would consider strong leaders for all students, including those with disabilities?
- Do you consider them to be knowledgeable about special education laws and involved in the special education component of their schools?

In addition, principals had to have (1) held a teaching position before becoming an elementary school principal; and (2) held the principalship for a minimum of three years. These two requirements helped to ensure that these were veteran principals with experience addressing special education needs. Also, principals who had previous classroom experience, I believed, would be aware of the implementation of special education policies in the classroom. Furthermore, participants with a minimum of 3

years of educational leadership experience would be familiar with special education policy demands and the rules and regulations that constrict special education programs.

My dissertation chair, to ensure that I had a strong pool of potential participants, reviewed the list of potential participants given to me by the ISD's director. After contacting each of the principals on the list, 4 originally agreed to participate in the study. Shortly into the research, one principal had to excuse herself from the study due to an increase of central office duties. The 3 principals that remained appeared to be diverse in person and school context while still meeting the lower end of my participant sample. An attempt to recruit an ethnically diverse participant pool was taken, however, the majority of the principals at Hampton ISD are Caucasian. Therefore, there are no minority voices represented in this study. However, the sample population did include 2 males and 1 female principal.

Name	Years as Principal Range	Years teaching	Age Range	Highest Degree
Tracy Showers	15 plus	12	45-60	Ed.S
Jack Smith	5 plus	6	30-40	M.A.
Joe Murchie	3 plus	5	30-40	M.A.

Table 3.1 Principal Demographics

Use of Ethnographic Strategies

To build a deeply rich phenomenological study, ethnographic strategies of data collection and analysis were necessary. The primary data-collection methods used in this study were Photovoice, on-line discussion threads, one-on-one interviews with the school principals, one day of shadowing each principal, and one focus group (with key school stakeholders) at each school. The data collection began in October of 2006 with the submission to UCHRIS for human subject approval. Between January and March of

2007, I conducted the initial principals interviews, Photovoice, and on-line discussion thread.

	One-on-One Interviews	Photovoice Process	Discussion Thread Conversations	Date of Shadowing
Cline	January 10, 2007	January 10 thru March 1, 2007	March 7 thru April 1, 2007	January 10, 2007
Ravenswood	January 18, 2007	January 18 thru March 1, 2007	March 7 thru April 1, 2007	January 18, 2007
Merryvale	February 19, 2007	February thru March 1, 2007	March 7 thru April 1, 2007	February 19, 2007

Table 3.2 Data Collection Dates

During January and February of 2007, I conducted the focus group interviews at each school.

	Focus Group Dates	Number of Participants
Cline	January 22, 2007	4
Ravenswood	February 8, 2007	3
Merryvale	February 26, 2007	4

Table 3.3 Focus Group Dates

In-depth, One-on-One Interviews

In-depth, one-on-one interviews, began the data collection. All interviews were 90 minutes in length, audio taped, transcribed, and manually coded after each session. Notes from each interview were kept in a field-book specific for that school and principal. Conducting the interviews not only allowed me to establish rapport with the participants, it also served as an introduction to and set-up of the Photovoice process. Through the interviews, the context of each of the participants was developed, their voices heard, and their thoughts better understood. Through a series of open-ended questions, I garnered information on the identity of each participant.

I chose to interview and observe because of Weick's (1995) assertion that sensemaking is grounded in identity construction and has a reciprocal relationship with the environment. It is, then, critical to understand the environment in which the principals operated. Sensemaking is social. The interactions and discourses principals have directly affect how they perceive information and how they make decisions. Espoused theories were gathered in the interviews, but the observations also uncovered theories in action and provided first-hand information on principals' reactions to "throwness" (Weick, 1995) discussed in Chapter 2.

Through the interviews data on what the principals knew about special education law and policies, how they initially made sense of what they did and did not do, and where they believed tensions existed when working for the benefit of all students laid a solid foundation on which to build the thick description of what they did and to better understand the data generated through Photovoice. The data helped to triangulate what the principals wrote, reflected, and discussed during the Photovoice process and helped me to better understand the information that the school stakeholders shared.

Day of Shadowing

Coupled with the interview was a day of shadowing each principal. Notes from my day of shadowing were kept in a field-book specific to each principal and school. Spending the day shadowing each principal added to the rich description necessary to construct a complete picture of the context, as well as allowing me to gather artifacts and documentation. Through observations made throughout the day of shadowing, I garnered information on the identity of each participant through their actions and interactions with

those around them. This data helped, as well, to triangulate the data collected in the interviews, focus groups, and through the Photovoice process.

Photovoice

Photovoice was the primary data-collection tool for this study. Originally developed by Dr. Caroline Wang from the University of Michigan, Photovoice is a reflective, narrative tool that "provides a glimpse into [participants'] social realities and provides insights into related broader community and cultural narratives" (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, & McCann, 2005, p. 277) and an avenue for "understanding the meaning and significance behind lived experience" (p. 277). As such, Photovoice projects are credited with bringing breadth and depth to understanding community concerns that would not be achievable with surveys or quantitative data (Wang, 2005).

The strength of Photovoice is that research is conducted by and with the participants instead of *on* them, thus providing a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Photovoice is a powerful, flexible, and reflective tool; it is also complex. The basic steps in the process are as follows:

- Participants take pictures that represent events, activities, and issues around a given topic/subject that they experience in their daily lives.
- Participants select and reflect on pictures that best capture their meaning. Queries are used to help participants probe deeper into their own thinking.
- Participants engage in discourse with other participants in order to share their stories, dive in to underlying meanings, and discover themes and theories generated by the photographs.
- The stories are documented and disseminated.

The steps taken in this study are as follows:

- Framing questions (listed below) were created to serve as guidelines for participants to take photographs, select photographs, and reflect on those photographs.
- Principals took photographs. At an initial interview, participants were given disposable cameras, directions for the project, the framing questions, and subject release forms.
- The cameras were collected; the pictures were then developed and posted to an Internet weblog.
- Principals were given a series of prompts via e-mail to reflect on their pictures and post their responses to the weblog.
- The group discussion thread began with prompts from me (listed below).

Photovoice Framing Questions:

1. What special education programs do I have that meet IDEIA policy?
2. What roles and/or responsibilities do I have in regards to special education?
3. What tensions do I struggle with as an inclusive leader?

Group Discourse Questions:

1. What are gaps or tensions are common to all participants?
2. What things concern you when working with special education and disabled students?
3. What forms does advocacy take?
4. What can we learn from each other?

Focus-Group Discussion

A focus group was held at each school. As a dynamic and reflexive research tool, focus groups not only aid in building a richer, more descriptive case study, they also help to illuminate the social aspects of sensemaking within a specific environment. Each focus-group session consisted of a 60-minute discussion with 2 to 3 general educators

and 1 special education professional. Including these members of the school community in the study helped create a robust understanding of the phenomenon, but most importantly helped to both triangulate as well as challenge my interpretations. Names of possible focus-group participants were gathered from each principal at our first meeting. I then invited all identified professionals to volunteer to participate. Each focus group was video- and audio- taped, and the audiotapes were transcribed. Protocols of all interviews and focus groups may be found in Appendix A.

Organizing, Analyzing, and Synthesizing the Data

In qualitative research, as compared to quantitative studies, data analysis does not have "fixed formulas or cookbook recipes to guide the novice" investigator (Yin, 2003, p. 110). The large amount of data that a phenomenological study can generate often creates difficulty in data management and categorization. However, a solid structure of analysis helps in making sense of the data. Moustakas's (1994) *Phenomenological Research Methods* guided the following sequence of activities for data analysis:

- Field notes of my observations, thoughts, and hypotheses were kept as I interviewed, shadowed, worked with the principals through the Photovoice process, and conducted the focus group interview
- Extraneous responses, e.g., "The ball was dropped on testing those kids," were followed up if they were relevant to the exploratory questions.
- Next, the data were grouped into "meaning units" (Creswell, 1998, p. 150) and coded.
- Finally, a composite of each case was crafted to capture the essence of the experience.

Trustworthiness

The following actions were taken in order to ensure that the data collected and reported where considered to be trustworthy. Guba and Lincoln (1994) believed that

qualitative studies are framed by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These characteristics of trustworthiness have "parallel criteria" (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) in quantitative research of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

Credibility.

I utilized 4 strategies to help ensure that the perceptions of the 3 principals in this study were close to reality; close examination of photographs taken by the participants, observations from times I was in each building, data collected from the members of the focus group, and a panel of reviewers that examined my interpretations. The panel included my committee chair and an outside editor.

Transferability.

Marrow (2005) notes that because of small sample sizes in qualitative research, it is important not to imply generalizability to other populations, rather it is up to the reader to generalize how the findings to his or her own context. " This is achieved when the researcher provides sufficient information about the self (the researcher as instrument) and the research context, processes, participants...to enable the reader to decide how the findings may transfer" (Marrow 2006, p. 252). Through the detailed contextual background of the community and the participants, the carefully thought out methods, a sampling of diverse settings and social-economical status, and a review of my position as researcher in the following section and in Chapter 6, readers could begin to see similarities between these case studies and others.

Dependability.

The quantitative "parallel criteria" for dependability is reliability. Marrow (2005) believes that an "audit trail" that chronicles the research activities develops a study's dependability (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3). For data management, each principal had their own files complete with print outs of transcriptions from individual interviews and focus groups. Pictures and narratives from each principal were kept in the files, as well as field notes and documents gathered at site visits. I used memoing as a form of initial coding. After I transcribed all the conversations myself, I read them aloud, noting common themes. These common themes became my first set of codes from which I viewed the data. The data was then viewed through the conceptual framework. From this, individual statements by participants in the one-on-one interview, focus groups, and narrative pieces were extracted and classified into categories, including tensions, ethic of care, ethic of justice, and sensemaking. Finally, as part of my memoing, directly after each site visit, I described my observations and the context in which I spent my time within my field-book.

Confirmability.

Marrow (2005) states that "confirmability (vs. objectivity) is based on the acknowledgement that research is never objective" (p. 252). It is the goal of confirmability to see that the actual experiences and circumstances are being represented rather than the researchers biases. Many of the same strategies used to show dependability also support the confirmability of a study (Marrow, 2005). In addition to my "audit trail" described in the dependability section, careful cross referencing of claims

I made with the data I have collected has been done by myself, my committee chair, and to some extent, my outside editor.

Role of the Researcher

"Qualitative research is inexorably linked to the human being as researcher" (Meloy, 2002, p. 108). To ensure an unbiased representation of the data, it behooves researchers to understand their "subjective I" (Glesne, 1999). The "subjective I" lens is one through which the researcher looks at the research topic, participants, culture, site, and data. Often it is full of bias and personal sentiment. By being aware of those elements and monitoring any subjectivity or bias, researchers can strengthen their studies by inquiring into their perspectives and interpretations in order to re-examine their assumptions (Glesne, 1999).

Three "subjective I's" came into play in this research: personal, administrative, and change agent. The first "subjective I" field is fairly large and encompassing. It is personal because I work in the special education field and experience some discomfort in relation to NCLB and IDEIA 04. However, from my personal experiences, I am concerned with the fair treatment of special-needs students and the involvement by the general education administration. Second, in pursuing my goal of working as a special education administrator, I wanted to examine the phenomenon through this lens. Understanding my assumption of how principals advocate for students with disabilities now may help in my future interactions with principals. Finally, I believe that a special education director can be a change agent. But to enact effective reform, the change agent must be informed about all sides of the issue/problem at hand. Understanding how principals make sense of their experience, whether they advocate for students with

disabilities, how they advocate, and what limits their advocacy will aid me as a special education administrator.

Looking from my present standpoint, there is one area of ethical concern. Ironically, I believe I could easily fall into the advocate role myself. Glesne (1999) noted that the advocate "champions a cause" and has trouble walking away from the subject while striving for a solution. This inquiry was designed as an exploratory study to better understand principals and their advocacy for students with disabilities. As such, there is no one correct solution to discover or champion.

Limitations

In this study, I aimed to understand how principals navigate tensions that arise from leading a dual system to create caring learning environments and whether any of these actions are a form of advocacy for students with disabilities. The sample size was small, but the richness in understanding came from the participants' own perceptions, using their own words. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) cautioned qualitative researchers about the limitations and weaknesses that interviewing can entail, including bias. Bias could have occurred during the development of the protocols, how participants were asked the questions, or the interviewer's nonverbal reactions to the participants' answers. As with any probing into human subjects' perceptions, participants may have chosen to engage in limited and defensive discourse. In Robert Flumer's "A Conversation with Chris Argyris: The Father of Organizational Learning (1998) Argyris referred to this as Model 1 discourse. In such communication, participants often say only what they think is expected of them and what the culture of their organizations deems appropriate. The communication is guarded, and participants attempt to "save face."

Establishing a strong, trusting rapport with each principal and enlisting their cooperation combated these potential limitations.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA: SPECIAL EDUCATION THROUGH THE LENS OF THREE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Biographical data, even those recorded in the public registers, are the most private things one has, and to declare them openly is rather like facing a psychoanalyst.
~Italo Calvino

INTRODUCTION

My purpose in this study was to explore how elementary principals make sense of special education and to what extent they advocate for students with disabilities within their buildings. From this study I hope to (a) to add to a small but growing body of inquiry focused on the roles and work of school principals as they address special education needs in their settings and (b) to offer insights for current school principals who are struggling to do the best for **all** children, special and general education students alike. One overarching exploratory question and four sub questions grounded this emergent study. The overarching question was: How do elementary building-level principals make meaning of and enact special education policies to create caring learning environments for students with disabilities?

Sub questions were as follows:

1. How do (if they do) elementary school principals make meaning of "advocacy"?

2. To what extent and through what concrete forms does "advocacy" translate into practice? Who benefits from "advocacy"?

3. What can we learn that has policy and practice implications? What can higher education learn from these findings?

In this chapter I describe the setting and present data gathered from the school principals at Cline Elementary, Ravenswood Elementary, and Merryvale Elementary

schools in the Hampton Intermediate School District (HISD). Table 4.1 gives background on each of the principals, their self-rating of their knowledge of special education on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 representing little to no knowledge, and their involvement in special education processes such as IEPs and Child Study Teams. The matrix is intended to be used as a reference of comparisons and contrasts between the principals.

Principals	School	Gender	Degree	Number of years teaching	Number of years as principal	Self-rated knowledge of Special Education (0-10)	Attends IEPs	Participate in Child Study Teams
Tracy Showers	Cline	F	M.A.	12	19	8	Yes	Yes
Jack Smith	Ravenswood	M	M.A.	3	4	7	Yes	Yes
Joe Murchie	Merryvale	M	M.A.	6	4	5	Yes	Yes

Table 4.1 School Principal Matrix
(one-on-one interviews, January 10, 18 and February 19, 2007)

All three principals who participated in the study worked in districts that belonged to Hampton ISD, 1 of 57 in the state. An ISD is a regional educational service agency created by the state legislature in 1962 to provide services and programs, which enhance efficiency and economy for local school districts, as well as compile statistical data about local schools for the state. Over the course of the past decade, the unique roles of ISDs have been adapted to include increased calls for educational accountability. For example, ISDs are taking an active role in helping member districts understand, comply with, and implement the standards required under the complex federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act and the state accreditation system. They also build and sustain local

partnerships and share credible research on the importance of early childhood care and education.

The amount and richness of data generated in a qualitative study require effective organization. Through gradual analysis, which included coding and classification, comparison and contrast, and recoding and revising, particular understanding of how the three school principals defined their approach to special education began to take shape. Bounding the study is key to presenting detailed information; hence, to ensure that the meaning of their perspective is thoroughly presented within the context of their situation, the vignettes are designed as an inverted pyramid. The larger context is funneled down to shape the apex, and it is from the apex, in this case the three principals, that we begin to discover the answers to the research questions. The description and discussion of the setting is organized as follows:

- Introduction and overview of Hampton ISD, to build an understanding of the context in which the principals and their schools operate (FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau).

- A matrix comparing each school's district information to show differences and similarities in ethnic make-up, household income, and the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) scores (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; MDE).

- An overview of special education service models to use as a reference for understanding each school's special education program (personal reflections, conversations with special educators with in the district).

- Context of the specific town in which each school is situated, to begin formulating a picture of the individual schools (day of shadowing, field notes, one-on-one interviews, focus groups).

- Introduction to the schools, including their MEAP scores (MDE).

- Overview of the schools' special education delivery programs, so as to begin learning about the views of students with disabilities in the words of those who service them (day of shadowing, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, field notes). To understand advocacy and tensions, we need to understand the successes

and failures that the school community has experienced with regard to special education programs.

- Finally, at the apex of the inverted pyramid is the principal. More knowledge about the three school leaders, not only through their words, but also through their eyes are offered here. This part includes pictures that the principals took and selected as representative of their thinking and experience with regard to students with disabilities (one-on-one interviews, Photovoice, focus groups, principal reflections, field notes).

Once the context is presented, the voices of the three principals are added creating a symphony of harmony and discord as they pull together the common themes and tensions represented in their photographs and narratives.

THE SHAPE AND FORM OF THE SETTING

The Intermediate School District

Hampton ISD, situated in the middle of a mid-western state, covers 559 square miles and services 12 school districts, ranging from urban to rural. Hampton County is the home to 276, 898 people (FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau). The population of Hampton County is primarily white (81.5%). Only 11% are African American and 5.9% are of Hispanic origin. Sixty percent of the people living in Hampton County own their homes, having a median value of $98,000 (FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The median household income is $40,994, falling about $6,000 below the state's median income (FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). In 2005, roughly 22.6% of Hampton's population was school age (18 and below), and the graduation rate in 2000 was 88.1% (FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In 2006, 43,482 people ages 5 and older residing within the Hampton ISD boundaries had a disability (FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

The staff at Hampton ISD, 350 in all, service 12 schools, including public school academies, within the Hampton County limits. They offer specialists in curriculum development, technology, and a host of professional development areas, as well as a speech and language therapist, school social workers, and visual- and hearing- impaired students. It also houses and runs the vocational programs that are partnered with the local university and community college, as well as an alternative high school for students with serious behavioral disorders.

The Three Schools' Contexts

The three Hampton ISD schools included in this study were Cline Elementary, part of Paris Public Schools; Ravenswood Elementary, part of Madrid Public Schools; and Merryvale, part of Essex Community Schools. Pseudonyms are used for all schools and the principals. Staff and students are not referred to by name, but rather by title, either their job title or disability designation. The following table (Table 4.2) compares and contrasts the three towns' contexts as taken from census data, the state assessment scores from 2006, and the special education services that each school offers. The three schools' demographics, educational achievements, and special education service models are compared and contrasted in Table 4.2. A more complete description of special education service styles is provided in Figure 4.1

School	Town Population	Median Income	% White	% African American	% Hispanic	% Asian	Reading	Writing	English	Math	Science	Students taking MI-Access	Teacher Consultant	Resource Room
Cline	11,283	50,994	92	2	2	3	3 4 5	3 4 5	3 4 5	3 4 5	5	9	x	x
Ravens-wood	22,805	62,810	84	.4	2	9	3 4 5	3 4 5	3 4 5	3 4 5	5	6	x	x
Merry-vale	1,260	38,456	98	0	1	.2	3 4 5	3 4 5	3 4 5	3 4 5	5	3	x	x

Table 4.2 Town Context, Assessment Scores, and Special Education Services (FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau, one-on-one interviews, focus groups)

Special Education Service Delivery Continuum

If one were to put the typical special education service delivery methods within the state that this study took place in on a continuum, with the most restrictive on the left and the least restrictive on the right, it would resemble Figure 4.1. This continuum, developed by my personal knowledge of delivery models within Hampton Intermediate School District via teaching in a school in HISD and conversations with other special educators in HISD, is a rough guideline of the most common service delivery models; each school district tailors its special education programs to meet the students' needs. The typical youngsters who are serviced on such a continuum are those with speech and language disabilities, learning disabilities, cognitive impairment, and emotional impairment. In all three schools, students with physical impairments, health impairments, and autism also were educated in one or more of these service deliveries.

As such, the following data for the schools do not separate out the types of students with disabilities, but rather encompass youngsters with all of these types of disabilities and refer to them as students with disabilities or disabled students. For example, the data will not distinguish between students with cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, or speech and language needs.

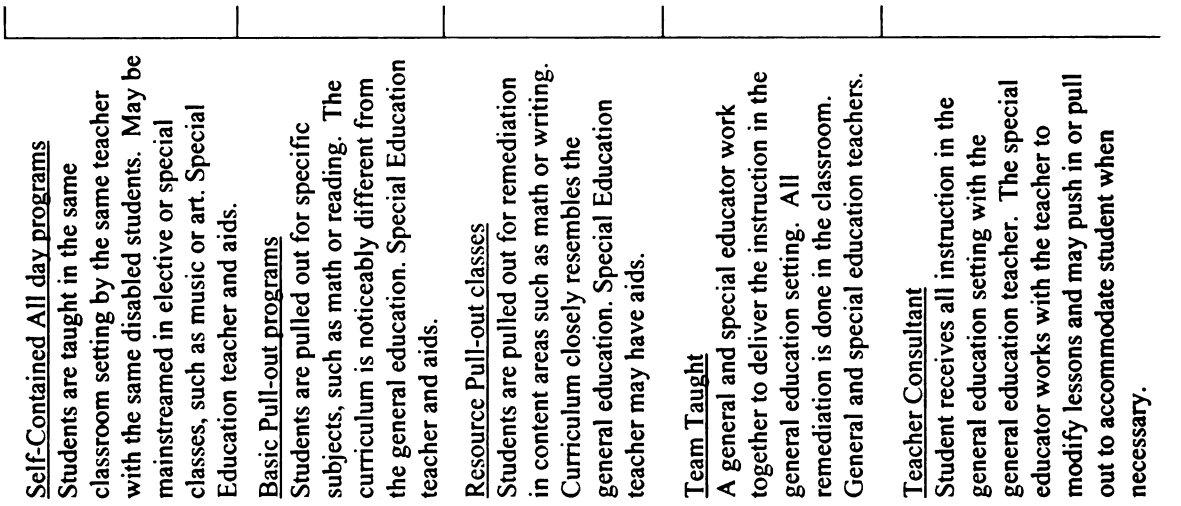


Figure 4.1 Special Education Service Delivery Continuum
(Personal reflections and conversations with special educators)

In the next section, this chart will serve as a guide to help understand the special education programs and staff roles in each of the schools included in the study.

CLINE ELEMENTARY

Town Context

There are no town markers for the village of Paris. It is one of those areas that acts as a last frontier of development, coexisting with suburban sprawl and country spreads. Flanking the south and west sides are shopping malls and gas stations. To the north and east are wider open areas of land and farms. A post office, a yoga and dance studio, a barber, and a used-furniture store make up the heart of downtown. The 11,283 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) living in Paris are tucked away in secluded

subdivisions and condominium communities. Although lacking a downtown, Paris is considered a place of relative affluence. The median household income is $10,000 above the county's, and the town is overwhelmingly white (92%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). A highly trafficked railroad track cuts across the main street and runs behind Cline Elementary, one of the town's two 2nd-through 5th-grade schools.

School Context

Cline Elementary School, the town's oldest standing building, has been lovingly kept up, renovated, and added on to. The bright-blue trim on the doors and the entryway tile is lively and welcoming. The narrow halls, carpeted and lined with inspirational slogans and student work, and the low ceilings are the only reminders of a long-ago era. The rooms are all equipped with sound fields, many with SmartBoards, and fairly new furniture. The library, built only 2 years ago, the jewel in Cline's crown, stands at the opposite end of the main entrance. Four hundred ten students attend Cline. Of that number, 45 receive special education services (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007). Their MEAP scores for 2006 far surpassed the state's average in all areas (Reading, Writing, Math, and Science) for all the grades assessed (3rd, 4th, and 5th). The writing score was the weakest for students in all three grades. See Figure 4.2.

	Math	State Average	Reading	State Average	Writing	State Average	ELA	State Average	Science	State Average
3rd Grade	98%	88%	94%	87%	75%	52%	94%	79%		
4th Grade	93.8%	85%	93.7%	85%	66.3%	45%	92.6%	78%		
5th Grade	93.5%	76%	94.4%	84%	73.8%	57%	93.5%	78%	94.4%	83%

Figure 4.2 Cline's 2006 MEAP Scores: Percentage Met or Exceeded Standards (Department of Education, 2007)

Special Education Service Delivery

Of the 410 students who attend Cline, 11% have disabilities. One special education resource teacher and one teacher consultant (TC) work at Cline full time. Cline shares a school social worker (SSW) with the other two elementary schools in the district, as well as a speech and language therapist, who is in the building 3 days a week. The resource teacher and the TC split duties in assessment of students and often work in tandem with one another on various students. For the most part, the students with disabilities are serviced in their natural setting, the classroom, as much as possible. However, roughly 20 students are pulled from the general education setting for specific instruction in either math or English language arts (ELA). Cline does not run any self-contained or basic programs (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007; focus group January 22, 2007).

A review of data, data reveals that Cline has made some structural changes to better accommodate the various disabilities represented. For example, the Speech and Language Impaired (SLI) provider's office has been moved next to the main office to

maximize student therapy time. The SLI therapists in each of the 3 schools have small amounts of time and large numbers of students to see in multiple buildings (focus groups, January 22, 2007; one-on-one interviews, January 10, 2007). Cline's principal had made it a priority to carve out space for the SLI teacher so that she could keep her materials in one place and the students had a definite place where they knew they were going to meet (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007).

Another structural change that shows how Cline, lead by the principal, responds to the needs of its students is the addition of an autistic child to the school. A 4th-grade boy with a host of behavioral and educational needs transferred to Cline from a Chicago school. Seeing the need for a space that was free from distracters, where this student and others could "cool down" and work through behavior modifications, space was again carved out within the school's limited floor plan. Although space is limited and highly sought after at Cline, the principal had prioritized these two services and was committed to keeping those spaces (one-on one interview, January 10, 2007; field notes; focus group, January 22, 2007).

Through the site observation, one-on-one interview, and focus group interview we learned that a majority of the disabled students at Cline were educated within the general education classroom and received as much special education support in that setting as possible. Although they had enough staff and resources to run more pullout classes, it was a conscious decision on the behalf of the majority of the teachers and the principal, to educate students in an inclusive setting (focus group, January 22, 2007; one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007). For the most part, the staff viewed inclusion as a strength, and the culture of the school had benefited. One general education teacher noted:

> And I think too it's [inclusion] so valuable. Our schedules, it's so hard because [the resource teacher] is stretched so thin, but how good it was when she could be in the room with us and it wasn't just them [special education students] always having to leave to go. It was "Oh, Mrs. Pena's here for math and she's going meet with you four back here, and so and so will always be with her." The class starts to realize that "Oh, she's just another teacher" and some of that stigma is taken away (focus group, January 22, 2007).

Fellow general education teachers agreed with this:

> The good thing about when she [the resource teacher or TC] is in there [the general education room], other kids do see her as just another teacher, she helps everybody. I do think that sometimes when you pull those kids out, not everybody knows you [the special education teacher] and you don't have the same respect; they don't listen to you in the same way because you're not their teacher, but the more they see you in there, the more acceptance of both that teacher and the special education kids (focus group, January 22, 2007).

> My class is right outside the time-away room, where that's when they're the most worked up, you know, so we [class] had a long conversation about why they are being carried in, why they would be upset, why they are going to that place. I think just keeping the kids informed; I think that everyone does a good job of that, and that helps with the climate of the building, when the kids can look and go, "Oh, it's okay." (focus group, January 22, 2007).

An interesting phenomenon had occurred at Cline in the staff's perceptions with regard to students with disabilities. Due to the increased numbers of students with severe disabilities, special education students were now seen as falling into two camps: "those with more serve disabilities and then your regular caseload students," noted a general education teacher (focus group, January 22, 2007). As a result of inclusion, general education teachers did not perceive students with higher-incident disabilities as "special ed." Rather, students with learning disabilities (LD) or speech and language impairments (SLI) simply were considered other members of their class. However, it was the more severely impaired students whom the staff considered "special ed." These more

challenging students with autism or Down's syndrome caused the staff frustration because they required more time and energy. This frustration was reflected in a dialogue between two general education teachers:

> I think the issue of frustration comes on a couple different levels. One, people are frustrated that these kids are in the building and are taking time. And then there are the people that have these students and are sometimes frustrated, wishing they could do more. You already know that you're doing a lot, maybe more than for some other kids (focus group, January 22, 2007).

> Those people that are frustrated that those students are in the building make it frustrating for the people trying to support those students, to have that kind of negative response. You think about all that time you put in, all that work and effort and everything that you're trying to help this child be successful, and then you have someone else say, "Oh, why are they here?" (focus group, January 22, 2007).

An example of why such students require more time is the weekly meeting concerning students who have more complex learning profiles. One 5th-grade teacher summarized the collective feeling about these students:

> Sometimes having the high-needs kids, it is more time consuming, like the kids we meet for team meeting on. You meet at 7:45, well my contract says I don't have to be here until 8:15, but we're willing, you come because that's the right thing to do, you want to help that child, but it is half an hour more that you could certainly be doing something that needs to be done for the whole class (focus group, January 22, 2007).

The 4th-grade teacher acknowledged that these types of students do require more from a teacher, but the time and effort benefit the entire class, not just the student with a disability:

> Being a teacher with students with those real high needs in your classroom, you want to put the time in talking to those parents, because [it] doesn't just affect them and their family. It affects the other 25 kids in your classroom, too. As a teacher trying to create a community within your classroom, you're going to do everything you can so that, not only that child is comfortable, but by making them comfortable, then everyone else can have that, too. I think you put that time in because it's worth it

> for everyone, including yourself as a teacher (focus group, January 22, 2007).

The resource teacher agreed with the 4th-grade teacher. "And you see the payoff, when you work so hard, it doesn't just help those students, it helps all students," the special educator affirmed (focus group, January 22, 2007).

It appeared that to overcome differences in perceptions, teachers had implemented a "responsive classroom" program. Further probing during the focus group discussion uncovered this definition of the program: ADD quote here or more description of the program ach morning began with a group meeting in which academics were blended with social skills. In the end, the goal was to ensure that even the most severely challenged student was capable of being a contributing member of the class. "It really levels the playing field for everyone; there's not the pressure of paper and pencil," (focus group, January 22, 2007) noted a general education teacher who saw the power of this approach with a severely autistic student.

Tracy Showers' View of Her Roles and Responsibilities

Tracy Showers, the principal of Cline for the past 9 years, had the ability to command attention. This was noticed as I waited for our appointment for the interview when the activity of the front office naturally gravitated towards her as she entered the office. Her gentle spirit was reflected in her eyes and in her smile. A sparkle lit up her eyes when she talked of her school and the plans she had for it. Her office was a hub of activity with parents, students, and teachers coming and going, and Tracy had time and a kind word for everyone she encountered. She spoke freely and comfortably with even the youngest of her students. She was always at the ready with a grandmotherly smile and hug.

Tracy explained, during her interview, that as a young teacher in Florida, she had not imagined that she would be a school leader in a Midwestern state, but years of experience were fine-tuning her skills as a teacher leader until one day the opportunity to act as an interim principal in a different school district led her to her true calling. Tracy had a B.A. in elementary education and a master's degree in early childhood education, and her administrators encouraged her to pursue an educational specialist degree in educational leadership. This journey had taught her about herself as an educator and a student and led her to her current position, a "perfect fit" as she called it.

According to Tucker and Tschannen-Moran (2002), principals "report that they lack time to be effective instructional leaders" (p. 6). Tracy's days were not the exception. They were full and active, most of them starting long before the first teacher or student arrived at school. During our interview and reflected in her Photovoice narratives she recognized that time management was a struggle for her, so she actively worked on carving out time for collaboration for herself and her teachers, while working within the constraints of the teachers' contract. Meeting the needs of special education students required Tracy to spend a minimum of three mornings a week before school began, meeting with teachers and service providers for students with disabilities. Two of the three mornings were set-aside for specific students already identified as special education, whereas child study meetings were conducted on the third morning. The majority of staff members thought that this time for collaboration was crucial and were thankful for it (focus group, January 22, 2007). But they also realized that it might not be enough, as one general education teacher pointed out:

> I think for as much as we do talk, I think still, "Gosh, I've got to find the time to talk to the resource teacher about this." And some days, I feel like

> that is the last thing I do well here. I didn't tell her this, I didn't tell her that, but I mean there are a lot of things that we do to overcome that, but I feel like it's something that I work on all the time. (focus group, January 22, 2007)

In response to this need, Tracy continuously was on the lookout for ways to build more collaboration, not only between general and special educators, but between grade levels as well. She noted the difficulties of this pointing out that collaboration and planning time was especially hard to find for her special education staff.

> I have to force them [the special education teachers] to take a planning time and a lunch. They are just so dedicated and wonderful and I don't think they really take a planning time much, I'm lucky if they take a full lunch. They have it [a planning time] from 6 o'clock at night until, well, let's just say that they are both here rather late preparing. And everything is individually planned for. It's just amazing. We turn our lesson plans in at the end of the year, all the teachers, for the whole year. My resource teacher, actually, this year her lesson plans came down in a crate because she had her individual lesson plan for each child and then she had her group lesson plans, if she was able to put a little group together and today's lesson plan is based on what happened yesterday. We are in the age of accountability for the federal government, for the state government (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007).

Tracy called herself a hands-on principal. She did not lock herself away in her office; rather, she was an ever-present feature in the halls and rooms of Cline (field notes, day of shadowing). The students waved to her as they filed past her office for recess or gym, they ran to her with books and papers when she walked into their rooms (day of shadowing, January 10, 2007), and she found time to sit with students at lunch, cultivating what she considered the most important component of a successful school: relationships (day of shadowing, January 10, 2007). This hands-on relationship was evident among her staff members. Tracy and her teachers were on a first-name basis and were intimately involved in one another's lives (day of shadowing, January 10, 2007; one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007; focus group, January 22, 2007). She operated

an "open door policy," and teachers freely came to her for advice or to share new ideas (day of shadowing, January 10, 2007; field notes; focus group, January 22, 2007). Her computer's screen saver was a pictorial montage of her staff, a gift for Boss's Day the previous year (day of shadowing, one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007).

The importance of relationships was evident than in one of Tracy's biggest struggles, that is, with the process of "placing" children in classes.

> Classroom placement is a struggle when it comes to placing a general education student or a special needs child. It is a process that needs to be well thought out so that all students' learning needs are met during a school year. As an elementary principal, it is my responsibility to get to know all of the students that are in our building. I need to look at their learning needs and the teaching styles of the teachers to determine classroom placement (Photovoice picture reflection: *Classroom Space and Programs, February 2007*).

By building relationships with her students, Tracy came to know all of the students with disabilities as individuals and recognized their educational needs. One of her general education teachers pointed out:

> I think she gets to know all of, [a] variety of special education students we have in the building, from one extreme to the other. She knows those kids. She knows their families; I mean, she's involved. She doesn't have to say, "Oh, who is that?" She knows who you're talking about and she has background on those kids; she takes the time to do that, and it makes a huge difference (focus group, January 22, 2007).

The relationships she had established with her teachers enabled Tracy to effectively match learners with teachers. Sometimes she asked the general education teachers to step out of their comfort zones. "I think because she does know those students, she can match them up with teachers that work with that style," said a general education teacher (focus group, January 22, 2007). The special education teacher concurred: "Yes, I think Tracy does a really nice job understanding our staff and who

would work well with different students. I think that helps our students and our staff as a whole" (focus group, January 22, 2007). As a result, the general education teachers reported that they were more willing to take on students with unique or more severe disabilities (focus group, January 22, 2007). However, Tracy pointed out that things "aren't always smooth sailing at Cline" (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007). Although Tracy's staff was willing to take on new challenges, she did face the divide among her staff members in regards to their perceptions of students with disabilities (discussed in a previous section). She also recognized that her staff sometimes had difficulty understanding the different educational roles and expectations in general and special education.

> And the other piece, for the classroom teacher, is [that] understanding what the IEP goals say and what the resource or TC teacher's responsibilities are is difficult because I believe that sometimes classroom teachers think that their [special education teacher] role is to help their student get through whatever assignment is in the general education classroom. And that is not the role, but that's a norm that we are working on slowly to get rid of, but it's tough. Or the child is pulled out during this time for TC, and the child has to make up the work that they missed when they were gone [from the general education classroom]. I only have a couple of people that still require that, but it's a hard norm to break. Because they [special education students] are working hard in there, when they are out of the room, even though it may not be what the rest of the class learned. And then the new content expectations and the MEAP, there is so much pressure with that, that I think it is adding to people's conflict as to what each other do (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007).

One way that Tracy thought she was helping bridge this gap was by continuously increasing her understanding of special education and those who work with disabled students. She thought, "If I can understand it, then I can help my [general education] teachers understand it better, too" (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007). For example, a point of pride for Tracy was her level of involvement with disabled students

and her knowledge of the laws governing special education. Not only did she attend every IEP, she was also an integral part of devising a suitable education plan for the student (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007; focus group, January 22, 2007). She told the story of a young mother whose husband was serving in the military in Iraq and the difficult time she was having getting her sons to school on time. At the last IEP, after probing into the cause of the boys' frequent tardiness, Tracy created "before-school jobs" for the boys to do in the front office, complete with pay to use at the school store, as a way to develop pride and responsibility. Since the inception of these jobs, neither boy had had a tardy, and their mother said that the mornings at home were "a thousand times easier" (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007).

Tracy had also been active in district-level special education programs, such as Focus Monitoring, for the past 3 years (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007). Not only had this on-going experience helped Tracy make sense of special education in her district and understand the mandates "a bit more," but also it had given the rest of the district a chance to experience the level of involvement Tracy had in special education in her school.

> I've been involved in the new monitoring, the IEP process where you're evaluating the IEPS, the new monitoring system. I did that, 2 years ago I was on the team that reviewed the IEPs that were picked for monitoring. And last year I was on the district team, which we reviewed, we went through and reviewed what the team did the previous year that I was on. So I worked really closely with that, and so that has really helped me understand a lot of the law. And then I helped develop the school improvement plans for special ed. It's quite a process, quite a detailed process. It's intriguing, just the differences. What's the most enlightening, when we were doing this for our middle school, and special ed. teachers that were a part of the team were amazed at how much knowledge I had about what was going on in special ed. because that's not the situation at secondary, which I find all the time. Secondary tends to believe that is the director's job. And in both of my districts that was the

> case. They were surprised by the amount of knowledge and experience I had with actually completing the forms, just my involvement with knowing each of the kids, so that was very surprising to them (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007).

Although the level of involvement Tracy had in special education may have surprised secondary staff members, it came as no surprise to Tracy's teachers. They knew her as a continuous learner, willing to take time to learn more about issues facing her school, especially around the complex issues of students with disabilities. A general education teacher related:

> She came up to me and said, "I read this really great book on autism; you should read it, I'll just leave it in your box." You know, for a principal there's so many issues out there . . . there's so many other things that she could be reading about, spending her time learning about, she's that concerned with this other population that she learns about them (focus group, January 22, 2007).

A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words: Cline Elementary

As a way to understand the issues, successes, and inner workings of Cline, I asked Tracy to consider three questions:

1. *What programs do I have that meet special education (IDEIA) policy?*
2. *What roles and responsibilities do I have with regard to special education?*
3. *What tensions do I struggle with as an inclusive leader?*

Tracy took photographs in her school that she thought best represented her answers to these prompts. To help expand our learning, Tracy also titled each picture and wrote a brief descriptive narrative of the contents. In the following paragraphs, we will not only view her pictures and her words, but also dig into the meaning behind each photograph.

Photograph 4.1: *Reversed mainstreaming*
(Photovoice picture taken by Tracy, February 2007)

This picture shows a 5th-grade autistic student, the young boy, who was new to Cline. The girls shown are the ones in his general education class who volunteered their time during recess to work with the boy on socialization. Tracy chose this picture as her best representation for the question, *What programs do I have that meet special education (IDEIA) policy?* Below is the description that Tracy wrote about this photograph.

> This autistic student is part of the peer-to-peer support program. Students from his general ed homeroom spend periods of time in his resource classroom. They work with him in the academic core areas such as math; they help him with his sensory activities and provide him with playmates for social play.
>
> This gives the students the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with our special needs students and to see that their classroom has similar and different kinds of materials for their instructional needs. The general ed students now know that when he leaves their classroom he is also participating in learning, not just leaving for a recess. They also help us problem-solve difficulties a student may have that they [general education students] observed in their monthly support meetings with our school social worker and LDTC (Photovoice narrative for *Reversed Mainstreaming*, February 2007).

Through this description, we begin to see that Tracy did not separate the various legislations: NCLB for general education students and the IDEIA for special education

students. Rather, they were interwoven, each supporting the other, just as the students were doing in the picture above. According to Cortiella (2004), there are more than 40 references to NCLB in the recent 2004 reauthorization of IDEIA, in an attempt to align the two laws. The federal legislature-is moving away from separate rules for separate populations of students. The history of educating students with disabilities indicates that without such forward legal movements, special education would continue to operate in the shadows of general education. Mirroring this same trend, Tracy's action did not appear to follow the "letter" of the law, but more its "spirit" in an effort to craft learning experiences with the focus on the individual child.

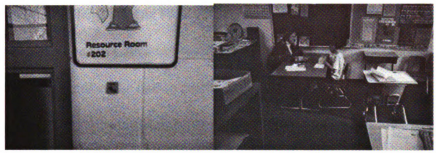
Photograph 4.2: *Lunch with friends*
(Photovoice photo taken by Tracy, February 2007)

This picture also includes the autistic student from the first picture. However, the setting is at lunch with a different group of girls from his general education room. Tracy chose this picture to answer the question, *What roles and responsibilities do I have with regard to special education?* Her explanation shows that she believed it was her responsibility to help prepare all students for the lives they will lead outside of her school.

> This is a picture of the peer-to-peer support students helping STUDENT X join the rest of the 5th grade in the lunchroom for lunch. When he first entered our school, he would not go into any activities that were loud or with large groups. We feel it is our responsibility to teach all students how to respond in social situations such as a restaurant, store, etc. This is one step closer for STUDENT X to venture out into the community with others and know that it is ok to be there (Photovoice narrative for *Lunch with Friends*, February 2007).

Praisner's 2003 study of principals' attitudes toward inclusion indicated that principals' attitudes and values determined the level of support for special education. Principals who valued inclusionary ideas offered more support to the special education staff than those who did not value such ideas. This assertion is illustrated in this photo as it reveals the core value of collaboration at Cline. It is clear that one person cannot do all the work alone; therefore, it becomes a community effort, for example, the images of general education students supporting a special education student. Furthermore, Tracy's use of the words *we* and *our responsibility* (Photovoice reflection, February 2007; field notes; one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007) indicate that she, and the students and teachers at Cline, value inclusion and work to offer a high level of support for special education.

Left unsaid in the picture is the difficulty in organizing something as simple of having lunch together. Collaboration, even among students, takes time and willingness on the parts of the participants.



Photograph 4.3: *Classroom space and programs*
(Photovoice photo taken by Tracy, February 2007)

The last question that Tracy was asked to capture on film was, *What tensions do I struggle with as an inclusive leader?* Her picture is actually two photographs placed side by side. Although the pictures focuses on the special education room and the people who populate it, Tracy's narrative reveals that one of her biggest tensions stemmed from her responsibility of placing students with disabilities in the appropriate general education room.

> Classroom placement is a struggle when it comes to placing a general education student or a special needs child. It is a process that needs to be well thought out so that all students' learning needs are met during a school year. As an elementary principal it is my responsibility to get to know all of the students that are in our building. I need to look at their learning needs and the teaching styles of the teachers to determine classroom placement. Questions to ask: Is it appropriate for the special needs students to spend the entire day in a general education classroom with parapro assistance? Or should there be time in the schedule for specialized instruction for the special needs child? Is it creating a safe, positive productive learning environment for the special needs child and the general education child? Is each child being provided with the appropriate resources for quality education? When do the behaviors of a special needs child intervene with the learning of the general population? (Photovoice narrative for *Classroom Space and Programs*, February 2007).

Tracy supplied a glimpse into the questions she wrestled with as an educational leader for both general and special educational systems. Although it may appear to an outsider to be a simple task, Tracy helped us understand the complexities involved in scheduling. Although her dialogue focused primarily on the student, she did include a picture of one of her special education teachers, indicating that scheduling and placement of staff was another tension she had to confront on a regular basis.

The underlying current of this tension that Tracy touched on in her narrative is the interaction between NCLB and IDEIA. Although more closely aligned than ever, each piece of legislation has specific goals and outcomes for general and special education students. When Tracy said that she was wrestling with the idea of each child having the appropriate resources for a quality education, it is evident that the mandates of each act were pulling her focus, time, and resources in various and often competing directions.

Summary

Tracy wrestled with three large issues: (1) placement of students, (2) the understanding of various stakeholder roles, and (3) interests of general and special education competing in her decision making and for the school's focus and resources. To best navigate these tensions, Tracy relied on the belief that she was a co-learner as well as a leader, therefore, spent a good deal of her time building respectful relationships with the staff and students. We will begin to see these same themes, as well as new points of learning, emerging in the second school in the study, Ravenswood.

RAVENSWOOD ELEMENTARY

Town context

Nestled at the edge of a subdivision is Ravenswood Elementary School, one of six elementary schools for the unincorporated community of Madrid. Not having its own town government, Madrid is part of London, as is Paris. Although small in size, only 16.8 square miles, Madrid is home to 22,805 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Madrid's racial composition is 84% white, .4% African American, 8.7% Asian, and 2% of Hispanic origin. The slight increase in diversity over the other two communities could be attributed to the town's proximity to a large university. Madrid is known in the area for its affluence. The median household income ($62,810) exceeds the county and state medians (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

School Context

Ravenswood Elementary School is housed in a 51-year-old building, reflecting the era in which it was erected. The whitewashed cinderblock walls form narrow hallways that are covered with students' artwork. Two rooms of each grade level are scattered throughout the building, creating an integrated effect. Even the special education rooms are scattered rather than clumped in a separate wing, isolated from the rest of the building, a conscious decision. The center hub of Ravenswood is the school's library. Two hundred-fifty students attend Ravenswood, the smallest of the district's six elementary schools. Ravenswood's unique location of being on the edge of two towns and close to the local university draws a diverse population. Roughly 18% of the students are English as a Second Language (ESL) learners (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). Many of these students are Korean and have parents attending or

teaching at the local university. Fifteen percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch, the second highest rate in the district (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). Yet, Ravenswood's state assessment scores are above the state average in all grades and on all subject areas. *See Figure 4.3*

	Math	State Average	Reading	State Average	Writing	State Average	ELA	State Average	Science	State Average
3rd Grade	93.9%	88%	93.2%	87%	68.2%	52%	90.9%	79%		
4th Grade	95.3%	85%	97.3%	85%	81.1%	45%	94.6%	78%		
5th Grade	89.6%	76%	95.6%	84%	75.6%	57%	91.1%	78%	89.4%	83%

Figure 4.3 Ravenswood's 2006 MEAP Scores
(Department of Education, 2007)

Special Education Service Delivery

While Ravenswood is the third smallest school in the district, it has the second highest free and reduced-cost lunch population and the highest number of ESL speakers (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). Roughly 10% of the 250 students qualify for special education services. The varieties of disabilities serviced include LD, SLI, EI, PI, health impairments (OHI), and traumatic brain injury (TBI). There is one full-time resource teacher, a SSW is in the building half a day every week, and a SLI therapist—shared among the elementary buildings—is at Ravenswood 2 days a week. There are no self-contained classes and the sole service model is pullout with the resource teacher, SLI therapist, or SSW. A large majority of students receiving special education are also on

behavior intervention plans (BIPs) (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007; focus group, February 8, 2007).

The fact that more than half of the special education service providers "travel," meaning they are shared among multiple schools within the district, adds strain to the personnel and types of services offered at Ravenswood. For example, during the focus group interview, the resource teacher and the school social worker discussed the difficulties that it places on themselves when they are responsible for multiple students in multiple buildings. They both agreed that finding time to schedule services is difficult as well as attending to a "crisis" in a timely manner (focus group, February 8, 2007). Even though the resource is not traveling this school year as she had done the previous year, most of the math and ELA instruction for students with disabilities is carried out in the resource room, which necessitates pulling students from the natural general education setting.

Yet Ravenswood strives to offer a solid and inclusive education for students with disabilities. On the day of my site observation, I noted that students with physical and learning disabilities were integrated in the general education classrooms. I viewed such students participating in music, recess, and lunch with their non-disabled peers (day of shadowing, January 18, 2007). During the focus group, the resource teacher noted that Ravenswood was the third building she had worked in within the district and that it was the best at working with special education students and issues (focus group, February 8, 2007). During the focus group discussion, the general education teacher shared that the school's strategy of helping students with disabilities relied on early intervention,

accommodating students with disabilities in the general education setting, and creating an environment of acceptance.

The teachers attributed the effectiveness of their interventions in part to the staff's ability to identify students who require help and then come together to aid that student. For example, a general education teacher participating in the focus group interview discussed how teachers at the school came together to "wrap around" a child who had not yet been assigned to a special education program. In particular, a plan that would eliminate many of his disruptive behaviors in the hall was determined. Because teachers are able to view the hallway between classrooms clearly, they could all intervene when the student exhibited inappropriate behaviors. The general education teacher pointed out:

> I think even the physical layout of the building helps that happen. . . . The other buildings I've been at are pods, and they're tucked back in their own little place and you don't see kids in the hallways. It makes a huge difference; it may be loud for us, but you get to know the kids (focus group, February 8, 2007).

Teachers working together, with the guidance and support of the principal, value the referral process as a form of early intervention. The resource teacher noted, "Our staff wants to identify early on so if the children qualify for services they can get them immediately instead of waiting 3 years into elementary school . . . you know they're getting help" (focus group, February 8, 2007). This is essential to this notion of advocacy for students in need of support, and in particular students with special needs. A further example of this is that every Thursday morning time is designated for teachers to meet about students suspected of having a disability, to hold child study meetings, and to conduct IEPs and review BIPs. The teachers at Ravenswood who participated in these weekly meetings with the special education professionals worked to ensure that they were

implementing as many strategies as they could to help students be successful. These meetings were also important because the principal at Ravenswood believed that special education programs alone was not the "cure all" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007), but a part of a more holistic process.

Reviewing the data from the Photovoice and focus group discussion coupled with my observation at the school, it appeared that the prevailing custom at the school was that of teacher collaboration in ways that benefit the students and, teacher confidence that the principal would be supportive of this effort. An example of this is the structure of the school day. To minimize the stigma that often accompanies pulling children from the general education classroom for direct services, the teachers and service providers had purposefully crafted the day in such a way that students appeared to move fluidly to and from their classrooms. At any given time of day (as I observed and the general education teacher discussed during the focus group), students were leaving for advanced reading lessons, or joining a higher-grades science class, or participating in peer tutoring, or going to the resource room. Although all this coming and going may have appeared chaotic, it had reduced the attention on disabled students' standing out for leaving the classroom. The general education teacher noted:

> I think that it's [the structure of the day] just good for the students. The pullouts, we have so many specialists, so many things going on in a classroom at one time so students don't know who's going where for what at any time. The kids just respect what everyone is doing (focus group, February 8, 2007).

Another example of this climate of collaboration and mutual support, is a palpable sense of community that connected classroom teacher to classroom teach, student and student (general education student and special education students), and teachers—staff—

administration—and special education specialists. Because so many of the itinerant personnel were shared among schools in the district and were at Ravenswood only a limited amount of time, the staff relied on one another, and on the administration, to ensure that students were receiving a quality education. The resource teacher noted, "I think the teachers in our building do a very nice job accommodating for SE [special education] students in their classrooms, making things work for them when they're in the GE classroom as opposed to when they are in here [resource room]" (focus group, February 8, 2007).

Jack Smith's View of His Roles and Responsibilities

I found Jack Smith to be a serious and soft-spoken young man, epitomized professionalism. Wearing a tie every day, Jack made it his mission to interact with all who entered his building, from teachers to parents to itinerant staff. On my day of observation, Jack was conducting an IEP. During this meeting, he conversed with both the speech and language therapist and the parent in a way that demonstrated that this was not their first interaction and that he knew them as individuals by asking after other family members and laughing at their stories. Even so, it was the children who were the true focus of Jack's school, especially those with disabilities. During the day of observation and during the one-on-one interview, Jack stopped students in the hall to ask after homework assignments, to inquire about parents' health and to listen to a young student share an art project. During the interview, Jack showed me his procedures for knowing which students were on behavior plans, had food allergies or had medical concerns. He shared in the one-on-one interview that two of his proudest moments as a principal. First, was when a 5th grade student came down after the state writing

assessment and told Jack that he wrote about Jack as the person he admired the most. The second was crafting a "very large and lengthy" IEP for a 5th grader that transition to the middle school

> " that was probably 15 pages long of accommodations that we did, or strategies that worked and ones that didn't work, what his behavioral issues were. I mean that IEP is rock solid. We're really proud of it because it's a result of what the kid needs and what we've learned" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

Jack explained that his advocacy for special education students was rooted in his life story. As a young boy growing up in upstate New York, he watched his older sister struggle with dyslexia throughout her academic career and witnessed the difficulties she encountered, including being unable to fulfill her dream to become a teacher. This experience shaped his "philosophy that everybody has a special need of some sort and sometimes you can see it . . . or sometimes you can't tell what it is" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007) as a young junior high teacher. As an intern and then a 6th-grade teacher in his current district, Madrid Public Schools, Jack was quick to try new approaches and modify assignments in order to "level the playing field," as he put it, for these students. He recalled fondly, during the one-on-one interview, the time he was able to find a way to help an LD student read in front of the class for the first time.

The 6 years Jack spent in the classroom crafted this philosophy, the one with which he still operated as a principal. During the one-on-one interview, Jack shared that he had the "gamut" of disabilities as a classroom teacher, from spinal bifida to emotional impairments. As the Language Arts and social studies teacher, he would have these students in class as they were pulled from elective classes for special education instruction. Jack realized as a teachers that

> "it's not easy having all students share with you what their weaknesses are, but as a teacher you really get to know the student in a very unique way and it's your job to figure out what those weaknesses and what the areas of growth are and grow with that student" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

Knowing the students as individuals, what their weaknesses are and where they require support under girds his position that "to treat you fairly is to treat you differently" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). "I guess my philosophy is that everybody has a special need of some sort and sometimes you can see it because they might look different and sometimes you can hear it because they talk different or a lot of times you can't tell what it is" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). This is a view that not only with his students. As the principal at Ravenswood for the past 5 years, Jack said that he did not "want all teacher candidates that are straight-A students or get learning. I want teachers that struggle with learning so that they can understand their learners that struggle" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

One of the student issues that Jack took personally, and seriously, was students' with health problems. At the end of his tenure as a teacher, Jack suffered from Crone's disease. He said that this was the most difficult time for him as a teacher, but it also helped give him further insight into students with disabilities.

> I would say to my wife, "I think I do a pretty good job teaching now, but imagine what I could do if I felt good." Kind of the same with special education kids again. Imagine what I could do if I had a different strategy or if someone understood how I learned, imagine what I could do. (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

Meeting the needs of students was Jack's true focus as a teacher. This difficult time in Jack's professional career gave Jack a personal insight into what he thought students with disabilities must experience. He stated, "I had to evolve my teaching style

to meet my own needs, and it's not much different than special ed kids evolving their learning style to meet their own needs" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). Because of his life and family experiences he believed strongly that it was his duty to act as an advocate for the families he served, "I mean, parents send us the best kids they have; they don't keep the good ones at home, you know, they send us kids that they love, the apple of their eye, and they need someone to advocate for them." (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

To ensure that the needs of children were being met, I noted on my day of shadowing, the one-on-one and focus group interviews that there were documents and artifacts visibly placed in the school that alerted students, teachers, staff, and others to the health needs of students. For example, hanging outside various rooms were signs designating various foods that were not welcome in the room. Hanging in the principal's office were files of all the students with medical issues. With the help of quick reference sheets on those students, including their pictures, Jack knew each student's needs and concerns. He took pride in the fact that he knew each of the students by name and was involved with many of the Ravenswood families.

Jack felt that he was attentive and involved with the learning processes of students with disabilities. He reported attending every IEP meeting, where he was responsible for recording the proceedings and filing this paperwork for these meetings.

> Writing out the IEP to me is important because I'm responsible, ultimately, for all the kids and their learning, and I need to know what's on those plans. . . . It's my expectation that the teachers know what's in the IEP; I mean, it's a legal document, it's not an optional thing. And I'm pretty proud. I think we write pretty good IEPs (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

Jack also reported that he worked hard to support the success of BIPs. Each student on a BIP had time with Jack built into the rewards section. He kept a copy of each BIP in his office and routinely reviewed them.

> I feel like I need to check in along the way so that three months down the road we don't have "Oh well, it stopped working so I stopped keeping track of any of the data." Well, the data that isn't working is data, so keep taking the data, ya know? And that takes a lot of time. Or if the plan needs to be tweaked because the teacher doesn't feel like it's working, sitting down and coming up with a plan that the teacher feels is feasible is a challenge sometimes, too (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

Transitioning from the classroom to the principal's desk had been an exciting challenge for Jack. He viewed his current position still as a teacher, "I'm a teacher of teachers. I just teach more people now" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). During the one-on-on interview, Jack said that, for the most part, the principalship was not all that different from the classroom, but his biggest challenge was to effectively handle the constant interruptions throughout the day.

> It's really hard to stay on top of coordinating everybody's individual needs. It gets very overwhelming. . . . It gets really hectic, and it's not necessarily a bad thing. . . . It's just like a million things going on at once and you have to focus on them all and give them the attention that they deserve. As a principal, you could have a fight happen and then you spend your day dealing with that when you were supposed to review Billy's plan. Dealing with everything that comes up, I guess it's just the best part of the job, but it's the worst, too. The most challenging part of the job is that it changes on a dime. You're doing one thing and boom, you gotta do another thing. A teacher asks you for the math GLECS [grade level education content standards], and then you gotta do this and you gotta do that. I pride myself on doing things and doing them well, and it's hard when you are in the middle of something and then you have this distraction--you don't want to really call it a distraction because it's your job, but coming back and picking up where you left off without making mistakes. But I make a lot of mistakes and my staff is very nice in the way they point them out and we kind of learn together. I mean, I'm a learner too, just like I expect my teachers to be (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

As a result, Jack often had to make what he considered snap decisions that required action first and reflection second.

> I'm always on my computer researching and figuring out what I should have done, how I could have handled that better. So much of the time, I just don't have that luxury of consulting other people for input. I'm the one they look to for the answer, but I don't always know it. I have to find it later. It just has to work (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

Jack believed that the success of Ravenswood to attend to the needs of students, and special education students, was a team effort. "It's a really family affair here," he noted in the one-on-one interview. As a manager, he was the one who organized time for meetings and collaboration, but he said, "It's tough when everybody is going a million directions and they are shared between schools. It's hard to ask them to do one more thing" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). As such, he was sensitive to the demands on his teachers' time before, during, and after school when asking them to meet. The resource teacher summarizes some of these demands when she addresses the pulls that both general and special education teachers fell when trying to serve students with disabilities effectively.

> I think the biggest tension is scheduling. Student needs to see me, needs to see school social worker, needs to see at-risk reading. I feel bad for the general education teachers because they're juggling me coming and taking students, counselor coming, the reading specialist coming, at-risk aides coming, and they have to get all of their curriculum in . . . juggle all of that... That is huge, and the classrooms have their priorities, too. There are lessons that they don't want the kids to miss, and I certainly understand that, too. Special events that they don't want them to miss. We just don't have enough time in the day (focus group, February 8, 2007).

To help minimize this pull for his teachers, Jack had set aside every Thursday morning for Child Study Team meetings and IEPs.

Jack was concerned with not only the effect scheduling had on the student, but also the added stress it placed on the general education teachers. His special education staff also shared this concern. The special education teacher pointed out that because of scheduling demands, many of the services that would be best offered by trained professionals, like herself, were delegated to the general education teachers. She shared this concern with a general education teacher:

> It's not like in college you guys [general education teachers] have to take a class on special ed. I mean, special education has to be trained in as a general education teacher and certified in general education, but the reverse doesn't happen. There's no requirement for learning anything about special education. And that's a huge part of teaching now. No matter what, you're going to deal with it [students with disabilities]. But as a school district, I think schools need to recognize that you guys [general education teachers] don't know what everything is and the processes, and it shouldn't be assumed that you do (focus group, February 8, 2007).

Jack saw this situation spilling over into his staff's perceptions of one another. "Sometimes a general ed teacher will tell me that they think the resource teacher isn't doing enough because she's not in the building as much or she doesn't have to do the same things for the district that the general education teacher does." Jack worried about how to help bridge this gap in perceptions while staying true to his "treating you fairly means treating you differently" aphorism.

A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words: Ravenswood Elementary

Jack was asked the same three questions that Tracy was— as a vehicle to view students with disabilities at Ravenswood the way Jack did.

1. *What programs do I have that meet special education (IDEIA) policy?*
2. *What roles and responsibilities do I have with regard to special education?*

3. *What tensions do I struggle with as an inclusive leader?*

Jack also took photographs and wrote narratives about his school that he thought best represented his answers to these prompts.

Special Education Through My Lens: Jack

Photograph 4.4: *TEAM: We are in this together*
(Photovoice picture taken by Jack, February 2007)

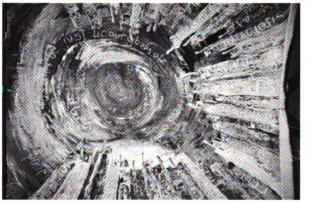
This picture is of a mural painted on the wall just inside the front doors of Ravenswood. It is one of the first images that greet those who enter the school. For Jack, this painting symbolized his answer to *What programs do I have that meet special education (IDEIA) policy?* The image of figures of different colors all connected represented not only the diversity found at Ravenswood, but also the spirit of collaboration. Jack explained,

> This picture represents why our special education programs function well. At our school, teachers, parents, and special education staff work together to create educational plans that meet the diverse needs of our learners. The different colors signify the different perspective of each group and how we must respect what the others bring to the table. We must join hands, even if we disagree, and forge a plan that meets the needs of the child (Photovoice narrative for *TEAM: We are in this together,* February 2007).

Jack talked about the various people who must come to the table when formulating IEPs for students with disabilities. For me, his picture reminds me of special education's roots in the civil rights movement and the progress achieved by advocacy groups like the

Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Council for Retarded Children, established in 1933 by five mothers. Jack's picture illustrates how this ring of unity must continue to operate, especially now in the era of accountability.

What is not mentioned here is the amount of work that it takes to foster a diverse community and the effort it requires to bring these different people to the table. Jack acknowledged that finding time for collaboration and working with various schedules made this process difficult. And like the principals in Burton's 2004 study, Jack did not think it was his administration course work that had helped him cultivate this circle of unity. Rather, it was his day-to-day experiences and on-the-job training that were most beneficial to Jack when he was wrestling with collaboration of professionals.



Photograph 4.5: *Art from a learning-disabled student*
(Photovoice picture taken by Jack, February 2007)

This picture, though titled as student crafted is actually painted by the art teacher who is learning disabled, hangs in one of the halls at Ravenswood. Scratched into the paint are pleadings like "Wood [sic] sombody plees [sic] help me?" with fingers pointing in the middle labeled *stupid, fake, and parasitic.* This powerful, yet disturbing picture helped Jack best answer the question, *What roles and/or responsibilities do I have with regard to special education*? He wrote about this picture:

> This picture represents the roles and responsibilities administrators and special education teams have in regards to children. In the midst of many responsibilities and demands, it is easy for staff to become frustrated and even desensitized to the reality of our struggling learners. Looking carefully at this painting (painted by my art teacher who is LD) reminds me of the reality of what students feel each and every day at school. This helps me focus on meeting their needs both academically and socially (Photovoice voice reflection for *Art from a Learning Disabled Student*, February 2007).

Through his description, Jack revealed his sensitivity to the various roles and responsibilities placed on teachers. For example, in the one-on-one interview he talked about coordinating schedules for meeting dates and times with the knowledge of the demands on his staff. Other responsibilities placed on his teachers related to students with disabilities that Jack discussed in the one-on-one interview included taking and reporting data for behavior intervention plans, monitoring foods that come in and out of classrooms, and "differentiating their lessons and doing those accommodations" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). He freely admitted that frustration often resulted because of these demands.

Indeed, this picture captures the messiness and the complexity of an inclusive school. The chaos and the sense of hopelessness and blame can stem from a variety of reasons, however, one that came up in conversation with Jack was a lack of understanding the laws that govern public schools today. When asked to rate his knowledge of special education laws on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being little to no knowledge of the laws, Jack rated himself a 7, equivalent to a C, meaning average. This rating was in accord with the findings from Davidson and Algozzine's 2002 study, in which 47.5% of the participants thought they had a limited or basic knowledge of special education laws. The authors contended that successful management of special education

directly results from the principal's knowledge of special education laws. I had to wonder if Jack felt that he was trapped in the spiral asking, "Wood sombody plees help me?"

Photograph 4.6: Flutter by mosaic
(Photovoice photo taken by Jack, February 2007)

Although the details of this picture are hard to see, it is a vibrant butterfly mosaic that hangs in Ravenswood's library. The mosaic was an undertaking of the art department and PTA a few years back. Jack took this photo and shared it because he thought that it illustrated the *tensions that he struggled with as an inclusive leader.* The picture and his narrative begin to show the intricacies of a leading an inclusive school.

> This picture was chosen due to all of the tiny pieces that make up the mosaic. Each has the name of a student, parent, or teacher on it. While a butterfly does not often bring tension to mind, it represents the awesome responsibility that is takes to meet the needs of each tile in the mosaic. As an administrator I struggle with taking the time to see each tile and often just see the big picture. I want to enjoy the bigger picture, but also know that the individual tiles each require care to make the school work, and the picture so beautiful. Balancing the needs of teachers, parents, and students is a daily struggle (Photovoice reflection by Jack for *Flutter by Mosaic,* February 2007).

In his interview, Jack discussed these various needs that he tried to balance in a "fair way." "I don't want anyone to think that I favor people. I try to give my time equally, and especially resources. I don't want one teacher asking why so and so got that I didn't get what I asked for" (day of shadowing field notes, January 18, 2007). Like Tracy, Jack appears to work hard to not separate general and special education; rather, looking to address a particular problem while looking at the "big picture." However, he stressed that to fully see the big picture, one must notice the little pieces that create it. In essence, it appeared from the photos and our discussion that Jack was a walking a tightrope—performing a balancing act: balancing the whole with the parts, the overall need with the roles of individuals, and the importance of an individual with the common good.

Returning to the photo, balancing diverse people and organizational needs meant that Jack had to understand the role each tile or stakeholder/participant played. From interviews with Jack and then the focus group, I learned that Jack and his staff thought there was often a lack of understanding regarding the work done by the various stakeholders. For example, during the focus group, the school counselor recalls the frustration she felt as a general education teacher when looking at the testing done by special educators. "I remember when I was teaching. That would really bother me because we would go to these meeting and sit there and talk about all the things that are happening for this child but then they don't transfer that into 'Okay what's the teacher supposed to do to help?'" (focus group, February 8, 2007). The resource teacher and general education teacher agrees with the social worker. "And I think it's real helpful when the team can tell a teacher how that data transfers into, how it takes place in the

classroom. Tell me what this means, tell me what I need to do." says the general education teacher (focus group, February 8, 2007). The resource teacher acknowledges where part of the problem of not understanding various aspect to different jobs may occur. "That [test data] is always in our reports that go to the parent, but not to you [general education teachers]. They're in the CA-60. That's a good point because the school psychologist report has all these recommendations that you can do, but you teachers never see it" (focus group, February 8, 2007).

Summary

Jack's photographs illustrated the importance of unity when running an inclusive school. People must be able to put aside differences and come to a common table when educating students with disabilities, especially because it is a complicated and confusing process. Jack also believed that, in order to keep the big picture in sight, there must be an understanding of the pieces that make up that larger view

MERRYVALE ELEMENTARY

Town Context

A 20-minute drive through open farmlands intermittently dotted with homes takes you to the small rural village of Essex. Although the town itself covers only 1.5 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), the school district spans a sprawling amount of land. Essex is unique because it sits at the far southeastern corner of the Hampton ISD, and only about 1,260 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) live within its boundaries. Merryvale schools educate students from three consolidated towns in four different counties and five townships. Obviously rural, Merryvale's population is almost

completely white (97.7%) and poor, with a median household income of $38,456 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

School Context

Tucked behind the main road leading into the small downtown district is Merryvale Elementary School, a building that was opened only four years ago. Nearly 400 3rd- through 5th-grade students attend Merryvale. A large rotunda with a domed ceiling serves as the entrance to the building and the center of activity (day of shadowing, February 19, 2007). The common areas, such as the office, computer lab, media center, and music rooms, line one arc of the rotunda. Branching off in three distinct spokes are the grade-level hallways (day of shadowing, February 19, 2007). Each hallway, color-coded, houses three to four sections of one grade and empties into a large, open playground ringed by fields and forests (day of shadowing, February 19, 2007; field notes). The cafeteria doubles as the school's assembly room, complete with a spacious stage and walls that collapse into the gym to provide additional seating for community events. Numerous times throughout the year, the room is packed to capacity with family and friends for plays and musicals (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). Because the town is so small, the schools act as central attractions, and every event is well attended (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007).

Merryvale's students come to them as 3rd graders functioning just below the state's average in writing and English Language Arts, as seen in Figure 4.4. By the time they become 5th graders, they are performing above the state's average in writing, reading, math, English, and science (MDE, 2007). However, as the chart shows, writing continues to be an area of weakness assessed by the state test for 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders.

	Math	State Average	Reading	State Average	Writing	State Average	ELA	State Average	Science	State Average
3rd Grade	90.3%	88%	87%	87%	41.1%	52%	76.4%	79%		
4th Grade	88%	85%	82.8%	85%	44%	45%	75.8%	78%		
5th Grade	77.9%	76%	89.3%	84%	64.9%	57%	85.5%	78%	90.8%	83%

Figure 4.4 Merryvale's 2006 MEAP Scores
(Department of Education, 2007)

Special Education Service Delivery

According to the principal, Merryvale has the highest percentage of special education students of the three schools in the district (day of shadowing, February 19, 2007; field notes). Close to 30% of the students receive some form of special education support (day of shadowing, February 19, 2007; field notes). The majority of these students are on the SLI therapist's caseload, with the rest serviced through the resource room (focus group, February 26, 2007). Merryvale students with disabilities include LD, SLI, EI, and CI. The school offers no self-contained classrooms, and most services are provided through the pullout model. Students might be in the resource room between 45 minutes and 2 hours, depending on their needs (focus group, February 26, 2007; one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). Unlike Cline and Ravenswood, Merryvale organizes its pullout programs according to student ability, rather than grade level (focus group, February 26, 2007; one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). This means that the resource teacher might have students from grades 4 and 5 at the same time, but they are all working at the same level in math. Merryvale shares the only SSW with the other

elementary schools, as well as the middle and high schools. There are two full-time resource teachers. Being a smaller school forces them to contract TC, SLI, and AI services from the ISD; hence, these service providers are not at Merryvale on a daily basis (focus group, February 26, 2007). This places much of the education for students with disabilities in the hands of the general education teachers. The success of Merryvale's educational programs hinges on the community and collaboration built among the staff. The resource teacher described the sense of collaboration:

> From my perspective, the strength of working in a small community is building really strong relationships with the general education teacher; I feel there's a real team approach. We look out for each other; nobody is looking at the special education population and saying, "Your kid did this, your kid did that." I think as a school, we care about kids. I also think we try to quickly get them the services that they need (focus group, February 26, 2007).

According to the resource teacher and principal, child study team meetings and days for IEPs were set aside to help foster and support this collaboration (focus group, February 26, 2007; one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). The special education teacher reported during the focus group that one day a week was for general education and special education teacher to collaborate about students already on caseload as well as those who were being brought up for referrals (focus group, February 26, 2007). These meetings aided the instructional staff in the creation of student centered IEPs. "We have cooperative IEPs that are very beneficial for our students, very suited to their needs in an ongoing way," noted the music teacher (focus group, February 26, 2007). For example, the art teacher shared that if a particular student excelled in the arts, that child's school day was designed to capitalize on this strength. Such a student might have more art or

music time than the rest of the class. Being part of a smaller school district had forced the staff to become creative and rely on one another rather than the special education system.

A 3rd-grade teacher shared another example of the collaborative work that teachers do to support special education students during our focus group discussion. S/he told a story of a particularly difficult class with an "explosive" EI student. At the beginning of the year, Merryvale staff came together brainstorming strategies to help this one child and the teacher, and, in the end, provide a better learning environment for the class. For example, the SSW created friendship groups in which the class worked on problem-solving skills and how to navigate conflict. Teachers and aides were taught how to respond to the EI student so as not to escalate the undesirable behaviors and also how to appropriately handle "meltdowns, even on the playground" (focus group, February 26, 2007). Additionally, specialty teachers, e.g., music and art, followed the classroom expectations. In the end, all of the teachers in classrooms near to the student's classroom as well as cafeteria workers and custodial staff who had contact with the students were able to interact in appropriate ways that supported the child's learning. Because of this collaborative effort among teachers, staff, and specialists, special education students were able to stay in the regular education classroom.

Joe Murchie's View of His Roles and Responsibilities

With coffee in hand, Joe was quick with a smile and joke as he stood in the middle of the rotunda greeting students, staff, and parents. A young and energetic principal, Joe looked more like a novice teacher than the principal. Aside from his goatee and two-foot height advantage, Joe fit right in with his students. He was well versed in the interests of 4th- and 5th-grade boys, using the appropriate vernacular and heartily

laughing at their jokes. He enjoyed this age group because "you can still have the potty humor, but they aren't hardened" (day of shadowing, February 19, 2007; one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007; field notes).

As a 7th-grade teacher in the eastern part of the state, Joe had been part of a two-person team teaching math and science. He classified the 60 students that he had shared with his partner as those who "couldn't handle being in a traditional five-period rotation" (one-on-one interview). Joe was eager to share in the one-on-one interview that his favorite part of the teaming experience was working with students with disabilities, as well as ones considered at-risk. He credited his success in this position to the close working relationship he established with the special education teacher. Joe thoroughly enjoyed his position and had no intentions of transitioning to the principalship as soon as he did, but a series of changes in the school set the stage for this move. His partner went on maternity leave, the special education teacher with whom he had worked closely moved to an 8th-grade team, and his principal became superintendent. For Joe, this seemed like the natural time for him to seek a change, as well. When the position at Merryvale opened, Joe knew that it was a perfect fit for him. "I had the opportunity to build a new school building and have the former principal staying on as my mentor; he went to central office. How could I say no?" he laughed (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007).

Joe was a fit with the small-town community and the young staff at Merryvale (focus group, February 26, 2007; day of shadowing, February 19, 2007). He quickly bonded with his staff and tried to make sure each day was full of fun and laughter, for both his students and himself (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). His staff

meetings tended to be informal and were full of inside jokes (day of shadowing, February 19, 2007). He allowed his staff to express their creativity in their programs, ideas, and lesson plans (focus group, February 26, 2007). However, despite Joe's easygoing and laid-back manner, he was intent on providing a quality education for all of his students (focus group, February 26, 2007; one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007).

As a school leader, Joe was closely involved with the educational programs in his school, from the kick-off of March Is Reading Month to the programs for his students with disabilities. "I want to be involved in everything that is happening here. Nothing is too small for my attention," he stressed (day of shadowing field notes, February 19, 2007).

Joe was in the unique situation of being familiar with both sides of special education, as a school administrator and as a parent. His son qualified for speech and language services at the preschool level. Being situated on both sides of the IEP table had given Joe a unique stance when advocating for students with disabilities.

> I see the frustrations I have as a parent, and I try my hardest not to put my parents through those same things. I hate bureaucracy so much. So whatever I can do to bust down barriers, I will. And special education, as I see it, has so many barriers and it infuriates me (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007).

Even though bureaucracy was an obvious frustration for Joe, he structured his school so that all students were successful and were not viewed as "outcasts" (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). Often he worked outside the system to "bust down barriers." For example, he shared a story of a student with severe physical disabilities who moved from a center-based program to Merryvale. Joe spent his own time and money equipping the school with special chairs and materials to help accommodate that

student (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). He also had established team meetings before school for teachers to collaborate on specific students with disabilities (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007; focus group, February 26, 2007). He was not merely a presence at all of the IEP and child study meetings; he was an active part of the team. "I make sure that I get in there and give my input. I tend to know the students on a different level than the teachers may. I think it gives us the whole picture of the student" (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007).

Just as Joe did not hide his disdain for the bureaucracy surrounding special education, he freely admitted that his knowledge of the laws that govern special education was "just enough to be dangerous, but it's enough to be proficient" (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). He credited part of his knowledge of special education legislation to the fact that he had to navigate it as a parent as well, and the other part to his close working relationship with the special education director (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). What Joe considered "dangerous" was that his knowledge was translated into action for students with disabilities. As a result, he perceived that his actions may have angered other administrators in the district because he would find the necessary loopholes to accomplish what was best for his students, with or without disabilities (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007).

Some of Joe's largest frustrations in operating an inclusive school were the rules and legislation that acted as constraints. It was not just IDEIA policies with which he took issue; he was equally frustrated with the general education mandates.

> The laws are bunk. Why do you need a 14-page document to get what's best for the kid; why do the [IEP] meetings have to be an hour? It seems like such a waste of resources and time. But I think of the general ed laws in the same way. We had three kids this year that had to take the MEAP

> test. They had no reason to take this test at all; it wasn't best for them, but it's law, so therefore we had to give them this test. They started crying. They were shutting down, and of course they failed the test. We knew that they were going to fail it in the front end, but you had to give it to them because they didn't qualify for MI-Access even though that would have been a way better assessment, but if we would have done it [given the MI-Access], we would have gotten nailed on our AYP (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007).

In response, the following year he added test preparation, breakfast on test days, and frequent breaks for such students, which helped youngsters do well on the tests and not "break down."

Joe's staff shared this frustration with procedures and regulations that form from legislation. Although they acknowledged discontent with the federal and state regulations, staff members' frustrations involved procedures that were closer to home. One of the special education teachers stated, "I think procedures all across the board are a weakness of Merryvale" (focus group, February 26, 2007). During the focus group, s/he indicated that the procedures that were in place at Merryvale were important ones, but there seemed to be a lack of procedural follow-through.

> We need somebody checking, double-checking the routine and the procedures. I think that the Child Study Team meetings are good and I enjoy them, but I walk out of there sometimes and I'm like, "Did we just accomplish anything?" And if so, who's going to follow up on that? There's not always follow-up. And for me, the classroom teachers shouldn't have to do the follow-up. They've got a lot already. They have 20-some other kids to follow up with, and so do the case managers. I would just like to see that the system in place work better. And I can't change that, administration must (focus group, February 26, 2007).

Joe recognized this as an issue that demanded his attention. Although he did not use it as an excuse, he believed that part of this frustration stemmed from the fact that the rules and regulations that define special education were continuously changing, "just

when I get a handle on [them]" (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). Joe's special education teacher confirmed this belief:

> There just seems to be a lot of evolution in special education . . . and so much room for interpretation. I've been here for five years, and every year I've been on the learning curve. Whether it's the state that is mandating a new procedural format or the district piloting a study, there is always something that you have to unlearn, relearn, or learn for the first time (focus group, February 26, 2007).

Working as a resource teacher forces a person to operate in two different, and sometimes conflicting, educational streams. This can be puzzling and problematic for everyone. In fact, the special education teacher explained this frustration:

> I'm not looking for accolades, there's just a gap in the perception on the part of other teachers. I feel like I have to justify myself because it may not look like I'm not working as hard as others [general education teachers] because I have no recess duties, but I'm burdened with the intricacies of my job. I work under two departments, have double the meetings and double the accountability as they [general education teachers] do (focus group, February 26, 2007).

Because the general and special education teachers' job expectations often were not known or understood by one another, Joe believed that the more the teachers could collaborate and attend child study meetings, the more likely they were to understand the responsibilities that each other faced (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007).

A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words: Merryvale Elementary

Joe participated in the Photovoice process to capture the mages to help us see into his school and the policies, roles and responsibilities, and tensions that he faced as an inclusive leader. Joe was asked the same three questions as Tracy and Jack:

1. *What programs do I have that meet special education (IDEIA) policy?*
2. *What roles and responsibilities do I have with regard to special education?*
3. *What tensions do I struggle with as an inclusive leader?*

The following are Joe's images and narratives that act as an avenue to further explore his understanding of special education within the halls of Merryvale.

Special Education Through My Lens: Joe

Photograph 4.7: *This is us*
(Photovoice photo taken by Joe, February 2007)

This picture is of a 4th-grade class lining up to come in from a chilly outdoor recess. It shows different heights, colors, and styles of jackets, as well as a semblance of order. Joe chose this picture as his best answer to the question, *What programs do I have that meet special education (IDEIA) policy?* His narrative shows that the programs at Merryvale were orderly, but varied because they were designed to fit the students within the constraints of the law.

> The students represent the programming that takes place at our school. Within the programming, there are unique programs, policies, adaptations, and experiences that compose the line. The line is somewhat orderly and open for all to examine and contribute (Photovoice reflection on *This is Us*, February 2007).

A possible cause of Joe's "somewhat orderly" line may be Joe's self-professed "dangerous" yet "proficient" knowledge of the laws. That is Joe is capable of meeting the diverse needs of all students while upholding, in spirit, the letter of the law. Joe's

"dangerous" knowledge may be because of the creative and resourceful ways that may fall in the gray area of the law, but in the end, he attends to the unique needs of the students "proficient[ly]."

Photograph 4.8: *Service for all*
(Photovoice photo taken by Joe, February 2007)

Although this picture may seem barren and vague, Joe's description quickly brings into focus how this picture answers the question, *What roles and responsibilities do I have with regard to special education?*

> I see my role similar to that of the trees. I provide a boundary for students that is clear and easily recognizable. This boundary is always there for them, and it helps to keep kids safe. The perimeter and protection is important, regardless of the number of students it may currently be serving (Photovoice reflection on *Service For All*, February 2007).

Because Joe saw himself as a principal of a dual educational system, i.e., general education and special education, the territory he served was large, but there were boundaries to reach as he captured in the photograph. Through this picture, narrative and dialogue with Joe during the day of shadowing and one-on-one interview, 3 sets of boundaries appear: physical, cognitive, and professional boundaries.

First, the trees represent a physical boundary for his playground, however they can also represent a physical boundary of time. In his narrative that accompanies this

picture, Joe discusses creating a safe place for students. This refers to the hours that Joe is responsible for the care of his students. During the day of shadowing, Joe was the first one to greet the students at the start of the day and to usher them out the doors at the end of it. He is responsible for what goes on within the hours of the school day. Second, in the one-one-one interview, Joe talked about his "dangerous, but proficient" knowledge of special education law. This knowledge acts as a cognitive boundary from which Joe operates. As previously discussed, this "dangerous but proficient" knowledge can both serve and hinder how Joe can meet the needs of his students. Finally, Joe has professional boundaries that he must manage from. As a professional, Joe shows in his narrative of this picture that crafting caring environments that are safe and are clearly defined for students is part of his professional duty. As a result of his professionalism, the space may seem clearly defined for those in it, but for those who were creating the boundaries, it may be more difficult. According to DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003), at one time, principals' roles and responsibilities were "quite clearly, although narrowly, defined" (p. 7). This is no longer the case. In Tucker and Tschannen-Moran's 2002 study of principals in Virginia, 90% of principals reported that special education law and its implementation was a highly significant organizational management problem. For Joe, collaboration with his staff and with other administrators helped him establish and maintain the "boundary."

Photograph 4.9: Do you see what I see?
(Photovoice photo taken by Joe, February 2007)

Similar to Jack, Joe wrestled with the tension of seeing the big picture clearly. Whereas Jack was concerned with the pieces that made up the big picture, Joe took issue with obstructions to the realization of the big picture. As such, Joe used this picture to answer the question, *What tensions do I struggle with as an inclusive leader?*

> Sometimes it is difficult to see the picture clearly. There may be something great students are a part of, but for outsiders it can appear as fuzzy and out of focus, resulting in an obstruction that gets in the way and blocks the program (Photovoice reflection on *Do You See What I See?*, February 2007).

Here, Joe began to touch on the tension of understanding roles and responsibilities and the idea of "outsiders." What looks and feels right for a specific learner may seem odd and fuzzy to an outsider, causing a misunderstanding of the programs and the roles of those leading such programs. Joe noted that these misunderstandings and misconceptions often acted as barriers to successful programs for students with disabilities. During the one-on-one interview, Joe discussed the collaboration time as meeting not only student needs, but also as meeting the need to understand the various roles his teachers play in the education of students with disabilities. As mentioned previously, Joe believed that more collaboration would equal a greater understanding of responsibilities. The resource

teacher also discussed at the focus group the misperceptions s/he encounters about his/her responsibilities. Again, s/he noted, "I feel like I have to justify myself because it may not look like I'm not working as hard as others [general education teachers] because I have no recess duties, but I'm burdened with the intricacies of my job" (focus group, February 26, 2007). The resource teacher's statement touches on the idea of "outsiders" (Photovoice reflection for *Service for All*) and such perceptions could act as obstructions that block programs.

This picture supports Weick's (1995) notion of plausibility rather than accuracy in sensemaking. He believed that misconceptions are beneficial because they lead to action and the pursuit of goals previously thought to be unattainable. Perhaps it was Joe's or his staff's misconceptions of a program that led to an effective program or strategy now in place at Merryvale. If so, then these obstructions, or misconceptions, should be viewed in a positive light rather than a negative one.

Summary

Through Joe's pictures, we saw the complexity that legislation adds the implementation of special education programs. He addressed the ideas of the big picture and who or what shapes that. From Joe's narratives, a sense of confusion when operating inclusive schools emerged and leads us to look at how principals made sense of each other's photographs.

MAKING SENSE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS: THE ANALYTICAL DISCOURSE AMONG THREE PRINCIPALS

The Photovoice process (*see* Chapter 3) is a highly interactive process that engages participants in group discussions with other participants to share stories elicited by the photographs. These discussions offer participants an opportunity to view each

other's pictures and narratives, and through dialogue with one another and the researcher probe underlying meanings and identify issues, themes, and theories across photos and stories. The following section presents the principals' thinking and discussions on the topics of policies, roles and responsibilities, and tensions of enacting special education law. The subheadings are the three prompts given to the participants, which led them to take pictures of images that best captured their thinking about the questions. Using a weblog, principals viewed one another's pictures and narratives and engaged in an online discussion in the form of posted comments. In this section, readers will see the three pictures, one from each principal, and then view portions of the dialogue they had with one another concerning these pictures. The principals' comments in their entirety may be found in Appendix VII.

What Programs Do I Have That Meet Special Education (IDEIA) Policy?

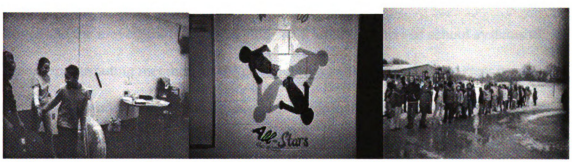


Photo 4.10 *Programs that meet IDEIA policy*
Tracy Shower Jack Smith Joe Murchie

IDEIA 2004 is the current federal legislation that governs the education of disabled students in American schools. Resulting from this piece of legislation is a set of rules and regulations that ensure that students with disabilities are afforded free and appropriate education. It is important to understand principals' understanding of such laws because, according to Davidson and Algozzine (2002), successful management of

special education results directly from the principal's knowledge of special education law.

> Effective leadership depends upon the acquired knowledge and understanding that a principal has for law, policies, and regulations governing the system as well as a responsiveness that meets the need of the entire organization. Principals have a significant impact on the delivery of services for students with disabilities as a result of their knowledge of the laws that govern special education. (p. 47)

In Chapter 2, the three waves in which improvement in disability education has come, (1) access (1900-1959), (2) acceptance (1960-1999), and (3) accountability (2000-present). It is mentioned here because it is important to remember that each era produced several important court cases and federal legislation that moved special education further to the forefront of the educational focus. The legal journey, if not well known by principals, has impacted how they think and act on special education legislation. For example, Tracy, who has been in education long enough to experience each one of the waves and the movement of disabled students from the corners of school systems to become contributing members of the community saw this historical progress regarding education of students with disabilities represented in all three pictures, stating. Tracy stated in her reflection after viewing all of the pictures, "The pictures denote how far we have come over the years. Special-needs students are no longer looked upon as mysterious. They are active participants in each of these schools" (March 2007).

The historical conversation revealed that all the principals believed that schools today are operating in the third wave: accountability. During her one-on-one interview, Tracy expressed that, "We are in the age of accountability for the federal government, for the state government." Jack demonstrated this attention to accountability in his personal responsibility for what was written in students' IEPs, "Writing out the IEP to me is

important because I'm responsible, ultimately, for all the kids and their learning, and I need to know what's on those plans," (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). Jack not only held himself accountable, but he also stated that he held all stakeholders accountable for the process, stating that it was his "expectation that the teachers know what's in the IEP" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

This view that responsibility is shared was something he spoke about and an element that was mutually viewed as important to all the school principals. For example, when Jack viewed these three pictures (Photo *What Programs Do I Have That Meet Special Education (IDEIA) Policy?*), he discussed the idea of coordination in the form of collaboration:

> If you look closely, the children in them are all linked to each other. I think this is telltale of the types of programs we have in my school. We are as successful with special education as we are because as a staff, we are connected to one another (March 2007).

Although Jack perceived himself to be the one "ultimately responsible" for the education of students with disabilities, he noted that at Ravenswood, as did Cline and Merryvale, operated in a state of constant collaboration with various stakeholders within the school (e.g, teachers, staff), external to the school (e.g., ISD), and families in order to be successful.

Joe's comments about these three pictures brought this discussion full circle. He stated that successful programs, in this case special education programs, are the result of understanding and acting to meet the needs of individual students. He argued passionately in his responses that schools, and therefore principals, should not think of students with disabilities "that group of students" but as individual learners requiring the best services available. He stated on the blog after viewing all the pictures, "I think it is

also about the individuality. Each student in the pictures has individual personalities and individual needs. I like to think that the programs that we have are tailored to the individual needs of the student. We don't take the 'one size fits all' approach" (March 2007).

In fact, IDEIA mandates that schools look at the *individual* learner's needs and the types of educational programs that will best suit the child. Jointly with NCLB, IDEIA policy has moved the focus of education of disabled students from mere access and acceptance to accountability. The discussion about these three photos (Photo 4.10 *What Programs Meet IDEIA Policy?*), revealed that the principals were inherently aware of this and proposed that coordinated programs that are based on collaboration and on the individual needs of students are the programs in their schools that best meet IDEIA's policies.

What Roles and/or Responsibilities Do I Have With Regard to Special Education?

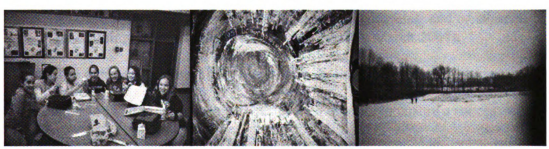


Photo 4.11 *Roles and Responsibilities*
Tracy Showers Jack Smith Joe Murchie

According to the review of literature, principals' roles and responsibilities were "quite clearly, although narrowly, defined" (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 7). However, today's principals must act as instructional leaders, managers of paper work, maintainers of safe environments, and creators and keepers of budgets. They must also be technologically savvy, in full command of their test scores, highly qualified teachers,

and active in the community—all without losing sight of the need for increased student learning (Tucker & Tschannen-Moran, 2002). These responsibilities, however, create tensions with regard to human resources and time management. While all the principals talked about their increased workloads and the lack of time to attend to everything, the interesting part of the conversation focused on the three pictures in set Photo 4.11 *Roles and/or Responsibilities* added two challenges that resulted from their decision to be involved in the special education process and to include all stakeholders in the process. The two dilemmas are (1) student placement and (2) understanding and clarifying roles.

Tracy addressed the first new tension, student placement, in her reflection of these three pictures. She believed that one of her most important responsibilities was the thoughtful placement of students in her school.

> This set of pictures shows how much responsibility an administrator has to promote an open-minded social-emotional learning environment. All students' needs need to be considered when making decisions about room placements, student placements with teachers, [and] how much time should special needs students be integrated for learning and/or separated for learning (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007).

The optimal placement of students with disabilities is not only a responsibility; it is also a tension that principals must wrestle with in order to ensure a successful school environment for all students. The three principals in this study showed not only through their pictures, but also through their interviews, that to accomplish appropriate student placement, they must have established relationships with the various stakeholders, possess an intimate knowledge of these stakeholders, and work in collaboration. The issue of collaboration solidifies the previously researched tensions of human resources and time management. As Tracy pointed out, to fulfill this responsibility and navigate

this tension, a leader must also promote an "open-minded social- emotional learning environment" (Photovoice reflection, blog post, March 2007).

Creating a dynamic and compassionate learning environment leads into the second tension that Jack raised, understanding and clarifying one another's roles. Jack saw that each picture broached the issue of understanding roles and responsibilities.

> The lines of my responsibilities are blurred and bleed into one another as the painting does. I serve many roles and have many expectations placed upon me, but at the center of all these lines radiating out from what is expected from me is the fact that I must educate every kid to the best of my ability (Photovoice reflection, blog post, March 2007).

In interviews with all three principals and the focus group interview of their staff members, this element of role clarification was discussed. Here Jack noted that he had many roles and that the responsibilities inherent in those roles "are blurred and bleed into one another" (Photovoice reflection, blog post, March 2007). The special education teacher at Merryvale said that she was "not looking for accolades" (focus group, February 26, 2007) for what she did, but rather an understanding of what her job as a special education teacher consisted of and the understanding that she, in fact, "works under two departments," (focus group, February 26, 2007) general and special education. The special education teacher at Ravenswood believed that teacher preparation programs are one sided and are at fault for this lack of understanding on the part of general educators. "I mean, special education has to be trained in as a general education teacher and certified in general education, but the reverse doesn't happen," she stated. "There's no requirement for learning anything about special education. And that's a huge part of teaching now" (focus group, February 8, 2007).

To create a school that has a caring environment, principals must wrestle with the tensions of student placement and the understanding of various stakeholder roles. The placement of students is a serious endeavor that these 3 principals undertake in a collaborative fashion that is built on relationships. Working collaboratively requires an understanding of the various roles and responsibilities each member of the team has in regards to students with disabilities.

What Tensions Do I Struggle With as an Inclusive Leader?

Photo 4.12 *Tensions for Inclusive Leaders*
Tracy Showers Jack Smith Joe Murchie

The literature review indicated that, during the past 20 years, inclusion has become a "critical part of the reform effort to improve the delivery of services to students with disabilities" (Praisner, 2003, p. 135). Yet Praisner discovered that the majority of principals surveyed (76.6%) harbored uncertainty with regard to inclusion. This uncertainty stemmed from two main perceptions by principals: (1) they did not feel adequately prepared to lead special education (Burton, 2004; Farley, 2002; Monteith, 1994; Praisner, 2003; Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994), and (2) they believed they did not have the necessary specific knowledge to lead special education effectively (Davidson & Algozzine, 2002; Monteith, 1994). According to current literature, these perceptions lead to two large tensions that principals wrestle with: human resources and time management. Again, principals spoke to both tensions; however, this set of pictures (Photo 4.12 *Tensions for Inclusive Leaders*) raised new, multipronged dimensions of their

practice of looking at the big picture as it is shaped by the constraints of the law while at the same time trying to balance the needs of general and special education. As the principal's conversation progressed, Tracy puzzled over the big picture and how it has been constrained by legislation:

> We evaluate our decisions on what might be good for the big picture. Sometimes the big picture doesn't always work for the individual child, and we need to figure out (with lots of assistance) how to meet their needs also. It is our role to help others see how this new challenge can help all of us grow and become better educators (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007).

The legislation that governs special education lays out what might be considered the "big picture" for the education of disabled learners. But as Tracy pointed out, this may be problematic for individual students. Like Jack's picture of the mosaic butterfly, individuals are not perfect pieces that fit naturally into the larger picture. Rather, they must be manipulated in terms of size, orientation, or placement within the bigger picture in order to find where they best add to the "big picture." According to Tracy, finding the places where disabled students best fit might create yet another tension, but it was also her role and responsibility to know where best to place every tile in that mosaic.

Joe took Tracy's thinking on the big picture further. He queried, who defines the big picture?

> These photographs and their descriptions make me ask, "Whose big picture is it?" . . . Does the legislation obscure the vision, or does it help define it? I also wonder how to best enact the rules, to create effective systems for my parents, teachers, and students (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007).

In his original narrative (February 2007), Joe referred to his picture as representing programs that may seem "fuzzy or out of focus for outsiders." Here, prompted by the thinking of Tracy and Jack, he considered that perhaps the laws, such as NCLB and

IDEIA, created the obstruction in the picture. Is it conceivable that these environment-shaping pieces of legislation make the big picture "fuzzy or out of focus" for principals to work in? If so, it makes balancing general education and special education more difficult to accomplish. Indeed, Jack's conversation revealed his thinking that each picture and narrative brought forth the idea that balancing the needs of general and special education adds a layer of stress to the position of principal.

> As a principal, I struggle with how much time should my staff and I spend on one student with a disability? Why is this child more important than the next? Where do I spend the money? How do I justify that to the parents of the nondisabled student? I think my caring for my students as individuals often creates the tensions that I face (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007).

It became clear from Jack's interview and his discussion with the other participating principals that he considered each student to be as important as the next. Like Tracy, the need to maintain a balance between general and special education was at the forefront of his thinking. In Tracy's original narrative (February 2007) about this picture, she asked questions similar to those Jack did here, questions like "Is it [the placement of the child] creating a safe, positive, productive learning environment for the special-needs child and the general education child?" and "Is each child being provided with the appropriate resources for quality education?" as well as "When do the behaviors of a special- needs child interfere with the learning of the general population?" In essence, Tracy and Jack articulated the fact that no matter how much they might have wanted to best educate students with disabilities; they could not do it at the expense of other students.

Taking the Discourse Further: Four Questions and the Principals' Voices

After reviewing the Photovoice data and the principals' comments on each other's photographs, to probe more deeply into the principals' thinking four questions were posed by the me (researcher) to further understand their work as principals:

1. What things concern you when working with special education and disabled students?
2. What gaps/tensions are common to all participants?
3. What forms does advocacy take?
4. What can we learn from each other?

The principals shared their answers as comments on the weblog. The discourse generated by these probes brings out several common themes, but also takes us deeper into the tangled web of running a school that educates general and special education students side by side. The comments in their entirety may be found in Appendix VIII. The first two questions, dealing with concerns and tensions, generated similar responses and are presented under the subheading, *What gaps or tensions are common to all participants?* The responses to the final two questions are presented under separate headings.

What Gaps or Tensions Are Common to All Participants?

The literature review indicated, and the three principals concurred, that the job of an inclusive leader is a difficult and complex one. The roles and responsibilities of the position are numerous and often give rise to new tensions. The number-one tension that concerned all three principals in this study falls under the umbrella of "responsibly" meeting the needs of students. Tracy succinctly summarized the collective feeling of all three principals writing:

> The gaps or tensions expressed by each of these pictures and narratives is the concern to meet all students' needs responsibly. . . . As administrators, we must use those [our daily] observations to determine whether we need to change something in the learning environment, provide professional development to create an opportunity for better staff understanding, or have conversations with students and/or parents to see if they have concerns or ideas. Are we making the right decisions for our special-needs students? How do we meet state mandates and still meet the social/emotional and learning needs of our students? (Photovoice reflection probe 1, blog posting, March 2007)

Jack, too, believed that for all of the principals there was "a genuine concern to meet the needs of special learners." In Tracy's response, she mentioned not only the students but the teachers and parents, as well. This shows that principals must meet the needs not only of the students, but also of these other two groups of stakeholders.

Complicating this tension were the varying perceptions brought to the table by each member of this puzzle, or mosaic, as Jack's picture depicted. Jack noted, "Often, each member of a referral team will have slightly, or very, different perspectives on what is needed" (Photovoice reflection probe 1, blog posting, March 2007). These perspectives dictate what course of action is considered to be the one best suited to a particular student. Adding another layer to this tension is the lack of a full understanding of one another's roles, a common issue that the participants pointed out, as reported in the previous section. If staff members do not fully understand each other's roles, they may have a skewed perception of their responsibilities and perhaps of the needs to be met.

Joe raised an interesting point for principals to ponder in relation to perceptions. He posited that labels, such as LD or special education, also color individuals' perceptions. "Often people fear a negative stigma being attached to them when they are working with special education."(Photovoice reflection probe 1, blog posting, March 2007) This broad statement covers not only the perceptions of students, but also of

teachers and parents from both the general and special education stream. The perceptions held by various people will more than likely influence the perceived needs that must be met. Jack comments add to this idea that individual perceptions may alter the perceived needs, thus complicating the principal's task even further.

> Often, tension arises when teachers feel they are giving their all and not making progress. Students also experience tension through their everyday learning struggles and relationships with peers. . . . To meet the needs of the child is key, and keeps the adults focused on what is truly important--the child (Photovoice reflection probe 1, blog posting).

From this dialogue, we learn that a common tension is the responsible meeting of needs: the needs of students, staff, and parents. Complicating this, though, are the various individual perceptions. These individual perceptions, whether accurate or not, may result from not understanding each other's responsibilities or from the stigma that various labels carry.

What Forms Does Advocacy Take?

History has shown that special education advocacy has taken two large forms, the court system and federal legislation. However, we learned from these three principals that advocacy can be effective in small forms, as well. From this messy web of concerns and tensions that flowed in and out of one another, the principals helped create an understanding of what advocacy for students with disabilities looks like in the smaller context.

A portion of the review of literature for this study focused on the idea that the principal's knowledge of special education law is key to effective advocacy. Tracy, though, indicated that advocacy is more than just knowing the law, it is knowing those for whom the law is intended. "Advocacy," she said, "looks like learning as much as we

can about student learning styles and strengths" (Photovoice reflection probe 2, blog posting, March 2007). All of the principals in this study excelled at knowing their students with disabilities, both as learners and as individuals. This intimate knowledge acted as a form of advocacy when Jack wrote out the IEPs or Tracy created a student-specific program or Joe helped group resource classes by abilities, rather than disabilities. This form of advocacy aided the principals in navigating the tensions that were discovered in this study, such as student placement and meeting needs.

Although large-scale forms of advocacy, such as the court case *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,* which challenged the practice of denying students with limited cognitive functioning an education, or federal legislation like IDEIA, shape the environment in which principals operate today, they are far removed from the classroom and disregard the individual person. Jack explained that advocacy as a principal comes in the form in personal connections:

> At times it means being honest with parents . . . having the teacher try the behavior plan that takes extra time and effort . . . Treating each student differently is the key to treating them fairly . . . never giving up on the child, and the hopes and dreams the parent has invested in that child's future (Photovoice reflection probe 2, blog posting, March 2007).

To advocate in the ways that Tracy and Jack discussed here, the principals must have established a strong relationship with not only the students, but also the teachers and parents. Each principal has his or her own unique way of cultivating these relationships, but they are present and act as the backbone for each school.

Joe pushed the thinking about what advocacy looks like by removing it from the principal's office and situating it with other members of the school. He stated that

advocacy can look like "the parent trying to understand the system and help their child, the administrator providing and supporting programs, the teacher facilitating programs, and ultimately the student advocating for what they need to be successful" (Photovoice reflection probe 2, blog posting, March 2007). This view of advocacy moves it from the abstract to the concrete. It places power in the hands of not only the principal, but also the teachers, parents, and the students themselves. Advocacy, as described by Joe, is representative of Jack's picture *TEAM: We Are in This Together.* The image depicts a ring of individuals clasped in unity. The circle represents a solid and coherent chain of advocacy that is dependent on each individual in the circle.

What Can We Learn From Each Other?

As if the principals in this study were becoming synchronized with each other, the parting words of advice they offered one another were gentle reiterations of three of the important points made through their pictures, narratives, and dialogue: the importance of individuality, relationships, and being willing to learn. In essence, they were encouraging one another to continue on the track they currently were following.

Tracy and Joe emphasized the importance of child-centeredness in order to meet the needs of and know the individual students they serviced. Tracy stated, "We can learn that each child who walks through our doors is an individual and special. We need to look at their individual needs to help them become successful students in our learning environments" (Photovoice reflection probe 3, blog posting, March 2007). Joe continued in this vein, emphasizing the notion of acceptance in order to build a better community, "Ideally, we are learning to accept each other as individuals and, at the same time, to collectively improve who we are as a community" (Photovoice reflection probe 3, blog

posting, March 2007). It is evident from their photographs and words that the principals had a working knowledge of their students with disabilities and used this knowledge to shape the environment in which these students learned, as seen from the peer lunches with the autistic student at Cline to the personalized behavior intervention plans at Ravenswood.

A common trait of each of these participants that emerged as a hallmark of principal advocates was the conviction that they, too, were learners. Jack summarized it by saying:

> Hopefully, we learn that each of us is a student and a teacher. It does not matter what our role is (teacher or student), and successful intervention relies on the development of a positive and interactive relationship between the two. Trust and respect are crucial in the learning environment (Photovoice reflection probe 3, blog posting, March 2007).

Clearly, these principals did not consider themselves as authorities or experts with regard to special education. We have seen each one act as a learner. During the focus group, a general education teacher at Cline told about the time that Tracy suggested a book on autism that she recently had read and thought the teacher would find helpful. Jack freely shared in the one-on-one interview that he often made snap decisions because the moment required swift action, but he then spent time researching the issue to learn whether he had made the right decision and to rectify it if he had not. Joe openly admitted during his one-on-one interview that his knowledge of special education was "dangerous" and that he took on the student role with his special education director.

SUMMARY

From the rich data gathered in this study, answers to the exploratory questions that guided this study have begun to take shape. Through the pictures supplied by and

the voices of the participants, keys ideas that comprise advocacy came into focus. These principals demonstrated that advocacy requires more than just a working knowledge of special education law, as Davidson and Algozzine (2002) posited. Rather, an intimate knowledge of students with disabilities helps principals meet the individual needs of their students. From this knowledge, principals can forge relationships with the various stakeholders in order to effectively navigate the tensions that arise. These findings corroborate the tensions of human resource and time management that were discussed in Chapter2, but they also introduce new tensions, such as the ability to view the bigger picture as it is shaped by the constraints of the law while trying to balance the needs of general and special education, meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities, the need for understanding the various responsibilities that come with the different educational roles that people fulfill, and the continuing need for collaboration among participants in an inclusive educational setting.

In the following chapter, the conceptual lenses of the ethics of care and justice and sensemaking are applied to these findings in order to fully understand the rich data generated in this study. I will attempt not only to make sense of these data, but also to fashion them in such a way that we find answers to the exploratory questions.

CHAPTER 5

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE: EXPLORING THE DATA

"There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something. You certainly usually find something, if you look, but it is not always quite the something you were after."
~J. R. R. Tolkien

INTRODUCTION

The review of literature and the words from the principals who participated in this study make it clear that the education of students with disabilities is complex. The crucial element to understanding how principals practice advocacy for students with disabilities is to understand how they make sense of special education and what that looks like in their schools. In this chapter, I will begin to make sense of the rich data gathered, carefully combing through it so that tensions and ideas emerge easily. In this chapter, the data are examined through three lenses: the ethic of care, the ethic of justice, and sensemaking. The chapter is divided into four major sections: (1) Finding the Balance: The Ethics of Care and Justice, (2) Principals Making Sense of Advocacy in an Integrated AND Unbalanced Ethical System, (3) Integration of the Ethics—What the Ethic of Care and the Ethic of Justice Suggest, and (4) Keeping the Tensions From Toppling Over—Expecting the Unexpected.

Finding the Balance: The Ethics of Care and Justice

From the data presented in Chapter 4, a central tenet of principal practice emerged, that is, although policy and policy enactment favors maintaining a "just" system—common good—for all students, the principals appear to approach special education delivery with a "caring" ethic. The principal's application of the ethic of care creates a perceived imbalance, the either/or decision with which the principals struggle. Indeed, their actions cannot be defined by one or the other, but as I will argue here, when elements of care and justice are

used in tandem, both/and, to meet the needs of individual students within the context of the whole school, we come to learn that the pressures of balancing the individual needs (the ethic of care) and the common good in an environment shaped by legislation, rules, and regulations (the ethic of justice) best represents the work of the 3 school principals as they work to create an inclusive school. In the end, unlike Nodding (1993), Vreeke (1991), and Starratt's (1991) contention that the ethics of care and justice are opposing, this study finds in support of Clement's (1996) study that the theories, in practice, complement one another and suggests that principals can effectively use both the ethic of care and the ethic of justice to meet the needs of special education and all learners in their school.

The Ethic of Care

According to Clement (1996), the ethic of care has "two interrelated priorities: maintaining one's relationships and meeting of the needs of those to whom one is connected" (p. 14). When this lens is used to examine the data, we see that all three principals acted from the ethic of care insomuch that they valued the relationships with the students and teachers as they attempted to meet their special needs. For example, during his interview, Joe believed himself to be a strong leader for disabled students because of the "close working relationships" he had built with the current resource teacher at Merryvale, the ISD's itinerant staff, and the district's special education director (one-on-one interview, February 8, 2007). Joe did not pretend to be the sole authority on special education in his school and recognized that if he was to craft a quality education for the disabled students at Merryvale, he had to open avenues to those who did posses the required knowledge or skill set.

The ethic of care is not a moral stance from which only principals operate. During the focus group discussions, it was evident that the special education teachers at Cline,

Ravenswood, and Merryvale attributed their success in meeting the needs of students with disabilities to their working relationships with administrators as well as colleagues, both special education and general education. At Merryvale, the resource teacher noted that the fact that the community was fairly small aided in the creation of relationships and that they took a "team approach" (focus group, February 26, 2007). The resource teacher at Ravenswood referred to the lack of special education preparation for general education teachers as another reason that relationships between general and special education are important in meeting the needs of individual students (focus group, February 8, 2007).

Jack agreed that building effective relations with colleagues and specialists was needed but added that it was also vital to build relations with parents/guardians so that they might have the difficult conversations needed to meet student needs. Often these conversations bring about issues that parents may not want to hear or discuss, but as Jack pointed out, it is essential to be honest (Photovoice reflection probe 2, blog posting, March 2007). Without an established relationship with parents, conversations in which principals are required by the ethic of care to be honest would not be fruitful.

Care was most often illustrated in the manner in which the principals talked about the students. Their photos were student-centered and their interviews and group discussion often focused on individual students. For example, Joe was always the first and last person whom students saw when they started and ended their school day, and he always was ready with a joke (day of shadowing, February 19, 2007). Jack was intimately involved with the creation of BIPs because an effective BIP has rewards that are tailor made for the student (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007; focus group, February 8, 2007). Tracy knew many of her students as she worked to include them in a variety of school activities as peer

assistance for the autistic child, LD students working in the office before school, and she offered lunch in the office for a girl with food issues (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007). This personal knowledge of students allowed the principals to make better educational decisions on behalf of students with disabilities.

The principals also recognized that relationships among students were integral to the culture of respect for children with disabilities. In describing her picture titled 4.2 *Lunch with Friends*, Tracy said she saw part of her role as helping to cultivate these relationships. She captured a group of six young 5th-grade girls eating lunch with a high-needs autistic student. The goal of this "peer-to-peer" program was to help incorporate the autistic student into various aspects of school activities, including lunch. Through this picture and her write-up, we learn that Tracy believed that meeting this young boy's social and academic needs could not have been possible without first establishing relationships between him and the general student population.

Pazey (1995) quoted Noddings as saying, "One of the great strengths of caring as an ethic is that it does not assume that all students should be treated by some impartial standard of fairness" (p. 302). The experience that the participating principals shared in the Photovoice and interviews revealed that they innately understood and behaved in a manner that demonstrated this element of the ethic of care, which according to Vreeke (1991) is context specific. Their decisions were based on the individual child's context and learning style. For example, at Merryvale, pullout programs were organized by student abilities rather than by grade level. Joe and his staff recognized that not all LD 4th-grade students have learning deficits in the same areas; therefore, they should be educated with other students

with the same deficits, regardless of their age or grade level (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007; focus group, February 26, 2007).

Examples of distinctive attention based on the needs of the individual child were shared by the principals as well as the teachers (focus group interviews). At Ravenswood, students with disabilities received a wide range of services, depending on their individual context. The general education teacher noted that they "have so many specialists, so many things going on in a classroom at one time" (focus group, February 8, 2007). Disabled students spent as little as half an hour to as much as 3 hours in the resource room, depending on their needs. The resource rooms at Ravenswood not only had a variety of grades represented at any given time, but also a range of disabilities. Teachers, too, understood that the individual context of the student, not the disability label, should dictate the educational plan.

Clement (1996) argues that the ethic of care is a natural form of advocacy because it is concerned with human connectedness and meeting the needs of those who are connected. During our one-on-one interview (January 18, 2007), Jack stated that, "treating you [student with disabilities] fairly means treating you differently." While all the principals and teachers appeared to agree with this, in spirit, it raised an important dilemma about differentiating learning experiences. That is, everyone seemed to recognize the value of individual care (and it is mandated through the IEP process); however, the cost in human resources, time, and physical space challenges the follow-through. For example, all three schools had established regular meeting times so that the discourse around student needs could take place. The general education teacher at Cline noted during the focus group discussion that it was sometimes difficult to rationalize this "extra time" spent every week for a small number of

students, "when that half hour could be spent doing something that needs to be done for the whole class" (January 22, 2007).

Principals operated from the ethic of care—that is, they established relationships in order to meet the needs of individual students—is student scheduling or student placement. Tracy articulated the pressure that student placement exerted, in both her interview and photographs. In the interview, Tracy told me that student placement was one of her greatest struggles (January 10, 2007). In her narrative of the picture 4.3 *Classroom Space and Programs*, Tracy explained that student placement is a "process that needs to be well thought out so that all students' learning needs are met during a school year" (Photovoice narrative for *Classroom Space and Programs*, February 2007). To do this, Tracy said, it was her responsibility to know the students in her building in order to effectively place them, and having relationships with the students allowed her to do this (Photovoice narrative for *Classroom Space and Programs*, February 2007; one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007). Like Jack and Joe, Tracy created relationships with her students as she undertook learning about their needs. What is unclear, however, is whether the relationships were a result of the knowledge seeking that the principals did in order to effectively place students, or whether the relationships were the avenue through which they learned about their students' individual needs.

The Ethic of Justice

In addition to actions that demonstrated a strong ethic of care, stories presented through the Photovoice and interviews also revealed that the principals employed elements of the ethic of justice. To review, the ethic of justice is concerned with human separateness (Clement, 1996) and universal abstract concepts, such as fairness, equity, and justice

(Clement, 1996; Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004; Vreeke, 1991), in order to maintain impartiality when making a decision. Furthermore, different from the ethic of care it operates separate from context and aims to be void of emotions (Clement, 1996). As the ethic of care is focused on the private/personal realm, the ethic of justice governs the public relations sphere because, according to Staratt (1991), it aims to serve the common good and the rights of all individuals within the school. In the end, school laws and policies serve to define and direct practitioners to be just in their actions.

When the lens of the ethic of justice is used to view the data generated in this study, however, we are struck by the observation that the principals, who admittedly operate from an ethic of care, become frustrated when trying to work within the constraints of special education law and national/state school standards. For example, during Joe's interview he talked openly about his frustration with the practice of deciding who was and was not eligible for the alternative state assessment, the MI-Access (February 19, 2007). Enacting the mandate of only allowing 2% of students to take the alternative assessment forced three students to take the MEAP test, a test that was not suited to their learning abilities. The students, in turn, "shut down," began crying, and failed the test (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). If the students had not taken the test, Merryvale would have been in jeopardy of not making "adequate yearly progress (AYP)," a factor that might have had ramifications on the school as a whole, and thus the common good of all Merryvale students.

This theme of choosing to act with care between the lines of the law to ensure fairness to the individual and at the same time not jeopardize the whole was an action that both the principals as well as the teachers participating in the focus group participated. For example, in Jack's picture, 4.6 *Flutter by Mosaic*, he spoke about the common good or the "big

picture" as he called it (Photovoice reflection by Jack for *Flutter by Mosaic,* February 2007). Jack wrote in his narrative (February 2007) and described in his interview that the school is made up of the individuals he served—students, teachers, parents—and each individual piece required individual needs. It was his responsibility to meet and "balance" those needs in a way that was just and fair to the other parts of the picture. He tried not to favor one teacher or student over others. He worried about dividing the resources equally so that no one felt "slighted." This he called a "daily struggle" (Photovoice reflection by Jack for *Flutter by Mosaic,* February 2007).

Tracy added to importance the of the common good in her comments about Jack's picture by indicating that principals evaluate their decisions based on what is good for the whole (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007). It appears that the principals were using, intuitively and strategically, the ethic of justice as a ruler, or a defining boundary (Tracy, Jack, and Joe), with which they could define and measure their decisions for students with disabilities. Tracy demonstrated using the common good as a tool to evaluate her decisions in the narrative about her picture titled 4.3 *Classroom Space and Programs* (Photovoice Reflection, February 2007). Prior to making decisions, she asked herself questions regarding the impact her decision would have on special education students as well as general education students. Questions as: Would the outcome detracting from the education of nondisabled students? Does it do harm, and to whom? Would this action benefit students who need services but are currently without IEPs? Who will this benefit? Will this action be appropriate under current policies, standards, and contracts? This process of self-questioning demonstrated Tracy's concern for both/and the individual need (care) and common good (justice).

Joe found the conversation (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007) about the ruler interesting and challenged the principals and myself to think more about the metaphor. He asked the group, "Whose big picture is it?" He questioned whether existing legislation and the rules and regulations that accompany the laws serve clarify or obscure the big picture, thereby problemmatizing the notion that it is even possible to achieve actions that serve the common good. The discussion began to illuminate the constraints that federal legislation imposes at the local level. Joe pointed out the shaping force of each of the principals' big pictures. He offered his view during the one-on-one interview (February 19, 2007) that the pictures spoke to the complexities that federal legislation, e.g., NCLB and IDEIA has created for school principals. Essentially, the policies have different aims and focuses that principals must attend to in order to manage inclusive schools, thus, for Joe, laws and policies constrained and shaped the work for the common good.

Viewing the data solely through the lens of the ethic of justice does begin to answer the research question: *What can we learn that has policy and practice implications?* A shaping force in the principals' perception of the common good is current educational legislation, such as NCLB and IDEIA. These laws help remove the context of each school or learner; schools and their leaders are free from the constraints of relationships and aim to create an equal and effective education for all students. NCLB does not distinguish rural from urban areas or poor from affluent communities; rather it charges that all students will be progressing and achieving at the same rate. IDEIA, too, removes the individual context by addressing student disabilities in broad terms like learning disabled or autistic and does not attempt to tackle various levels of severity within each category. However, allowing the laws to shape the understanding of the common good can be "dangerous," as Joe classified

his own understanding (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). The literature review and the average rating that the principals gave themselves indicate that principals do indeed lack knowledge of the laws governing special education. We can speculate that a limited knowledge of the laws will result in a limited view of the common good, or the big picture. The implication of this view for policy, as it is written, is that it is not user-friendly and its intended purposes and outcomes are unclear.

Principals Making Sense of Advocacy in an Integrated AND Unbalanced System

Clement (1996) made the case for integrating the ethics of care and justice for situations in both the personal and public relations spheres. The stories shared by the principals supported this claim that both the ethics of care and justice are utilized in their decision making process, in particular when special education students are impacted. The lens of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) helps to unpack how the principals employ the two ethics.

Sensemaking Is Retrospective and On-going

The notion of retrospection is a complex aspect of sensemaking. It entails the analysis of past decisions and actions so that future actions best fit the situation. Influencing analysis is what Weick (1995) termed "throwness." "Throwness" is the act of being "thrown" into projects or situations that interrupt a current project or situation and requires decision-making. The reaction to being interrupted and "thrown" into a new situation will color sensemaking.

The issue that Joe faced regarding three students who had to take, and subsequently failed, the MEAP assessment illustrates retrospection and "throwness." The negative reactions by the 3 students "interrupted" Joe's understanding of how the days of testing were

to run. In essence, though he was not surprised by it, he did not expect the students to "shut down" and start crying. This "throwness" of dealing with upset students on an important day influenced his sensemaking of what happened and why. During the following year's assessment window, Joe reflected on what it had been like for these three students and took action to ensure that the situation would not be repeated. They offered test preparation for these students, breakfast at school the days of the test, and frequent scheduled breaks so that the students would not become overwhelmed (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007; focus group, February 26, 2007). The following year, the students felt better about the test and themselves (focus group, February 26, 2007), and Merryvale's state assessment scores reflected this in 3rd grade Math, writing, English Language Arts; 4th grade math and English Language arts; 5th grade reading, writing, and English Language Arts (MDE, 2007). "Thank God I learned from that first year," Joe reflected (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). This reflection and subsequent actions illustrate the use of care and justice by establishing practice to eliminate stress and test anxiety for the students while helping increase overall test scores in attempt to meet state progress goals.

In her picture 4.3 *Classroom Space and Programs*, Tracy used retrospection to help ensure that she is meeting the needs of the students and the staff. During one of the site visits, Tracy pointed out that the speech and language therapist's room had been moved closer to the office to maximize instructional time because the previous placement forced the therapist to spend much of the allotted time in student transitions (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007). Tracy's understanding of how her school was functioning was "interrupted" by the speech therapist's need. Tracy, in essence, was "thrown" into a new project that required her to look at classroom placement and make adjustments.

Jack used retrospection as a result of "throwness" in making sense of advocacy when he regularly reviewed the BIPs that he helped craft. When a behavior intervention plan is crafted and is not working, this can create an "interruption" of how staff interacts with the student. The reaction to this "throwness" not only suggests that the BIP be revisited, it may color how the plan is altered. Jack stated in the interview that retrospection helped ensure that the BIPs were effective and working (January 18, 2007). If they were not effective, then the team, comprised of Jack, teachers, and special education support staff, would reconvene to determine what the data indicated and made the necessary changes (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007; focus group, February 8, 2007).

From the principals' stories that illustrated retrospection and sensemaking as on-going, we can see that the ethic of care drove both the reflection and the correction. Joe offered test preparation for those students who would have difficulty with the test (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007), Tracy moved the therapist's room to maximize therapy time (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007), and Jack reviewed existing student behavior plans (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). The underlying factor was an assurance that the needs of students with disabilities were being meet. We also see that retrospective sensemaking continuously altering one's environment and, subsequently, the way one operates in that environment. This component of sensemaking is referred to as enacting sensible environments.

Sensemaking Is Social Process that is Enactive of Sensible Environments

Environments are not static; that is, it is ever changing and therefore ever shaping how identities are constructed, influencing retrospection and sensemaking. Weick (1995) stated that perceptions are shaped by interactions in various social environments.

"Sensemaking is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others," Weick (1995) asserted (p. 40). Principals work in numerous educational environments, from a central office environment to a student-centered environment (field notes, one-on-one interviews January 10, 18 and February 19). Other social interactions that shape not only the construction of identity include discussions with other administrators (one-on-one interviews, January 10, 18 and February 19, 2007), off-hand remarks made by a teacher (focus-groups, January 22, February 8 and 26, 2007), interactions with the students, or book they have read (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007).

Weick (1995) believes that in attempt to make decisions and sense of events, we extract cues from our environment that align with the identity we have constructed for ourselves. The data from these 3 principals support this supposition. Jack's Photovoice pictures taken in March of 2007 shows Ravenswood's halls lined with images that promoted the individual, the ethic of care, as well as the whole, the ethic of justice. The pieces of mosaic butterfly, the various colors of ring of people holding hands, and the unique colors and words in the abstract painting from the art teacher demonstrate the human connectedness that girds the ethic of care as it creates a larger picture of the common good. In addition, each of these pictures also address the social nature of sensemaking. Metaphorically, the placement of the individual title, the different color of the people joined in the circle, and emotions scratched into the paint represents the ethic of justice—an insurance of fairness requiring that stakeholders have voice in the decisions and actions. These images may act as a medium for making sense of advocacy for students with disabilities because they exude the concepts of relationships and teamwork as a venue to meet the common good. Since sensemaking is attributed to extracting the clues from the environment, it is not surprising

that Jack views himself as a team player and that Ravenswood acts as a family (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

Using the environment to help make sense of advocacy in relation to the policies that surround special education is also seen in the programs that are included in the schools. In the picture 4.7 *This Is Us* (February 2007), Joe equated the variety of students in the picture to the variety of programs the school had as a way to meet the policy requirements of individualized education for disabled students. During his interview (February 19, 2007), Joe talked about his reliance on his teachers and special education director to meet both policy and student needs. The social aspect of Joe's sensemaking influenced how he crafted his environment, which in turn, continued to strengthen the identity of advocate that he constructed. Merryvale, Ravenswood, and Cline all had not only a continuum of services (one-on one interviews, January 10, 18 and February 19; focus groups January 22, February 8 and 26), but also "unique . . . adaptations" (Photovoice reflection on *This is Us*, February 2007) of the programs and polices to meet students' needs, like the peer-to-peer program illustrated in Tracy's *Lunch With Friends* and *Reversed Mainstreaming*. The creation of this program, that required the input of all stakeholders (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007) met the young Autistic boy's need while crafting an inclusive environment that Tracy in turn extracted team work and inclusive clues that continued to build her identity as an advocate for individuals and the larger common good.

All three schools had structured their environments to establish set meeting times, both for general and special education concerns (one-on one interviews, January 10, 18 and February 19; focus groups January 22, February 8 and 26). As such, the extracted cues from each school are ones of valuing teamwork, early interventions, and meeting needs (one-on

one interviews, January 10, 18 and February 19; focus groups January 22, February 8 and 26). During these meetings, teachers shared their concerns and successes with disabled students. From these regular meetings, they gained empowerment to continue doing difficult things "because it's worth it for everyone, including yourself as a teacher," said a general education teacher at Cline (focus group, January 22, 2007). The social nature of these meetings also led to greater sensemaking on the part of the principals. "I learn more about the students and the programs that are happening during these meetings," noted Joe in his interview (February 19, 2007). The systems in place at Cline for the autistic child in Tracy's pictures are strong, "but it took us a while to get there" she contended (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007). Tracy noted, "Sometimes the big picture doesn't always work for the individual child, and we need to figure out (with lots of assistance) how to meet their needs also" (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007). Tracy and her teachers arrived at the now-effective programs through dialogue and discourse at these meetings and because her staff felt empowered to tell Tracy which decisions she had made were effective and which ones were not (focus group, January 22, 2007).

The social component of how Tracy, Jack and Joe made decisions stemmed from the ethic of justice so that voice each member of the community is heard and the needs of the common good are balanced with the needs of the individuals while continuously reaffirming their identity of part of the team, not the leader. Meeting the needs of both the common good and the individuals, then, functions from the ethic of care and, too, reinforces the principals' identities as advocates.

Sensemaking Is Driven by Plausibility: The "Reasonable-ness" of a Decision

As we come full circle, the plausibility of sensemaking is called to task. Weick (1995) said that it is not how accurate we are in making sense of an event, but rather how plausible our sensemaking is that matters. Sensemaking is quick and complex, and we see through the data that these principals were focused on plausibility rather than accuracy while first attempting to meet the needs of individuals within the constraints of outside forces of justice. Such constraining factors include federal and state law, local policies, time and ability of resources such as time and money (one-on one interviews, January 10, 18 and February 19; focus groups January 22, February 8 and 26). Though the data does not yield a specific example of decision-making in action, applying Weick's (1995) theory of sensemaking to the data demonstrates the complexity of it. Principals are "thrown" into a situation that requires them to make a decision, such as placement of students (Photovoice narrative for *Classroom Space and Programs*, February 2007; Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007), intervention in fights or teacher needs (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007), or alteration of programs (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). The decision that the principals arrive at are influenced by their own constructed identity, the interactions with others, such as teachers and students, and the environment cues in which they choose to extract.

Justice bounds such decision making by creating constraints of meeting the needs of the common good, the larger school community, and the notion of fairness. At that moment, the principals are making the best decision, as they see it. Through retrospection, they are able then to evaluate the decision and make necessary adjustments. Jack used technology and the Internet to evaluate what he "should have done, how I could have handled that better"

(one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007). Tracy used "daily observations to determine whether we need to change something in the learning environment" (Photovoice reflection probe 1, blog posting, March 2007). Jack shared that his job "changes on a dime," (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007) and many of his action needed to be immediate, are the result of "throwness," and used the resource readily available to him. The data does not indicate that Jack's, nor the other 2 principals', actions are the accurate decision, rather that they are the best decision for that moment. The voices of the teachers, principals, and pictures illustrate that the majority of decision-making operates from the ethic of care.

Weick (1995) noted specific reasons for plausibility over accuracy in decision-making. The eight reasons were discussed in Chapter 2. Weick said that often there is a "time sensitivity" to the issue at hand, and speed is traded for accuracy. Weick contended that accuracy only holds the "spotlight" for a short time, so the amount of work and time that it takes for an accurate action may not be equal to the duration of the action. As a result, the principals draw upon their past experiences and knowledge and opt for the decisions that meet the needs in a way that is fair an just to the larger community. Joe demonstrates this in the state assessment example and Tracy with the placement of students.

Tracy's discourse with the other principals about the big picture (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007) illustrates another of Weick's (1995) reasons for plausibility: "It is almost impossible to tell, at the time of perception, whether the perceptions will prove accurate or not" (p. 60). The data shows that the 3 principals made decisions that they believed were the best "plausible" decision for the student based on their knowledge and experiences with the student. These decisions are aligned with the identity that they have constructed and with the environment that supports not only the individual but the

community as well. However, Tracy noted in this discourse that the decisions that crafted the big picture may not work for the individual child and meeting their needs may take assistance (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007). In this posting, we see that the utilization of care requires the ethic of justice by including other stakeholders' input; showing the social aspect of decision-making as a component of justice.

Integration of Ethics: What the Ethic of Care and the Ethic of Justice Suggest

Clement (1996) posited in her book *Care, Autonomy, and Justice* that the ethics of care and justice are not alternative approaches to a situation; rather, they are both relative to a single situation and yield insights that alone would not have emerged. She believed that the ethic of care and the ethic of justice best serve when they are integrated and care is interpreted "through the perspective of justice" (Clement, 1996, p. 5). In light of how the principals made sense of the decisions they made, we observe that the principals' brought a care for the individual, the human spirit, to their work, which helped them to navigate and make the most reasonable decision that would benefit multiple stakeholders. To ensure that the big picture, the organization, was always in view, the principals employed, sometimes creatively, elements of the ethic of justice to make plausible decisions. So, the BOTH/AND and not the EITHER/OR is implicated here.

Examples of the BOTH/AND use of the ethics of care and justice is noticed in the narrative that accompanied Tracy's picture, 4.3 *Classroom Placement and Space* (Photovoice picture reflection: *Classroom Space and Programs,* February 2007). We saw her weighing the needs of students with disabilities with the needs of the general education population. She raised the points that programming for special- needs students often has consequences for the resources for general education students and that disabled students' behaviors can

interfere with the learning of the general population. The principals continued to calculate their alternative choices through the sensemaking process while always keeping in mind the various elements of people, time, resources, and service to the whole school community. Again, Jack shared, in his comments about the three different pictures representing tensions the principals face, that he tried to balance the time he and his staff spent on one student questioning why one student is more deserving or more important than the next (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007). And, in his individual interview (February 19, 2007), Joe discussed the balance of meeting individual students' needs with the rules and regulations. He shared not only his open hostility toward the laws, but how he and his staff must balance what is asked of him for the MEAP test with the needs of students with disabilities.

This balance between the individual and the community was felt and wrestled with not only by the administrators; the teachers felt it too. During the focus-group interview at Ravenswood, the resource teacher openly talked about the pressure that general education teachers faced when they were responsible for teaching an inclusive class. The general education teachers had to balance the curriculum mandated for all students with the curriculum that numerous service providers, such as the reading specialist, school social worker, or resource teacher, must teach to students with disabilities. It is not easy, Ravenswood's resource teacher contended, to structure an effective learning environment for all students with the amount of "juggling" going on.

The Personal and Public Relations Spheres

It is worthy to note that each of the principals appear to be using both the ethic of care and the ethic of justice in both the personal AND the public sphere. As a reminder, theorists

have suggested that care is the purview of the personal sphere and that justice is applied in the public sphere. While this phenomenon is supported by the data in this study, we are also struck by the notion that the principals, in order to make the most reasonable decision for students with disabilities, do not separate the personal and public and hence merge the ethics of care and justice.

In her picture 4.1 *Reversed Mainstreaming* (February 2007), Tracy showed an autistic boy interacting with two general education peers. This picture and the accompanying narrative demonstrate how the ethic of justice is present in the personal and public relations spheres and why the ethic of care should be interpreted through justice. At first, it appears that this photograph really addresses only the relationships and needs of the disabled student (personal relation sphere); however, a deeper consideration of the words shows that the concepts of fairness, equity, and common good are also present (public relation sphere). The reasoning behind having nondisabled students work with this one disabled student, Tracy explained, was to help integrate him into his assigned general education classroom (Photovoice narrative for *Reversed Mainstreaming*, February 2007). The notion that he is part of a general education classroom speaks to fairness. It appears that at Cline it would not be considered fair for the autistic student to be kept from his nondisabled peers, nor would it be fair for the general education class and the common good of that classroom simply to place the autistic student in there with no help in transitioning. It also would not serve the common good of that classroom if the disabled student was isolated all day because they would be missing the "different perspective," as Jack called it (Photovoice reflection probe 1, blog posting, March 2007), that the student brought to the group as a whole.

The picture 4.5 *Art from a Learning Disabled Student* (February 2007) submitted by Jack also demonstrates that the ethic of care should be interpreted through the ethic of justice for both personal and public relation spheres. From this picture, Jack saw how easy it is for staff to become "desensitized to the reality of our struggling learners" (Photovoice voice reflection for *Art from a Learning Disabled Student*, February 2007). Without the ethic of justice, Jack and his staff would not be able to understand that, although this "desensitization" is real, if allowed to continued unchecked, it would not be fair or be positive for the common good of the school. From Jack, we learn that understanding the "reality of struggling learners" helps ensure that fairness for those students is achieved. In achieving fairness, the common good of the school is also met because the needs of all learners are being met, not just the ones who are easy to teach and do not lead to frustration.

The story of the three children at Merryvale who were forced to take the MEAP (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007), although Jack believe that the alternative testing was best suited to their need serves as another example of how both the ethic of care and the ethic of justice must be utilized in the personal and public relations sphere. We learn from this story that the policy was crafted from the ethic of justice for the public relation spheres, but when Joe acted out of care at the personal relation sphere, the public common good was impacted as well. Once Joe made sense of the situation, he was able to enact changes that not only reduced stress for future students with disabilities that may have to take the general state assessment (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007), they also impacted the test score which had implications for the entire school's community (MDE 2006).

Keeping the Tension from Toppling Over: Expecting the Unexpected

From the stories of the principals in this study, we learn that principals employ the ethics of care and justice in both the personal and public relations spheres. The principals tend to begin with the ethic of care while drawing on elements of the ethic of justice as they made reasonable decisions to advocate for students with disabilities. However, operating more from the ethic of care raised some unexpected tensions; the dark side. That is, running an inclusive school forced the principals to wrestle a complex, multi-pronged tension of seeing the big picture as it was shaped by the need to serve common good of the school organization and meet the spirit of the law (ethic of justice) while at the same time meeting the needs of both general and special education (ethic of care). Further tensions surfaced to include the dilemma of student placement and fuzzy clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders. Examining these tensions further reveals how the school principals employed both care and justice in their work to advocate for the need of both students with disabilities and general education while meeting the needs and requirements of the school organization

The Dark Side: Multipronged Tensions

Through the review of literature and the data presented in Chapter 4, we see that being a principal in an inclusive school is a complex task. The 3 principals in this raised the tension of viewing the big picture as it was shaped by the common good of the school organization in effort to meet the spirit of the law (ethic of justice) while at the same time meeting the needs of both general and special education (ethic of care) after they viewed one another's pictures, narratives, and comments. Jack's picture of the butterfly mosaic spurred discourse on the importance of balancing the common good with individual needs

(Photovoice reflection by Jack for *Flutter by Mosaic,* February 2007). Tracy stated that principals use the big picture to evaluate their decisions, but that the big picture does not always meet the needs of the individual (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007). To further complicate this, Joe brought in the reality of legislation as a form of the common good to ensure equity and fairness and the imprint it has on the big picture when balancing the needs of general and special education (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007). If a principal's big picture of special education is obscured or defined by federal, state, and local mandates, it is plausible to believe that how he or she views the individuals who comprise the big picture and how these individuals fit into the big picture will be altered in some way, influencing what needs must be met and how to best do so. The laws of public education strive for fairness for all students; then principals must understand the big picture as the common good, and they must practice advocacy in a way that meets the needs of both disabled and nondisabled students so that each student is being treated fairly and equitably. As Jack stated in his interview (January 18, 2007), this treatment does not mean that advocacy looks the same for all students because "being treated fairly means being treated differently."

The studies of Osbourne et al. (1993), Davidson and Algozzine (2002), Monteith (1994), and Hirth and Valesky (1992) indicated that principals think that they lack the proper amount of knowledge of special education and, thus, may add to the complexity of meeting the legislation in such a way that individual needs are met. Using a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 representing little to no knowledge of special education, the principals in this study ranked themselves a 5, a 7, and an 8. These data indicate that the principals did not think they had a complete understanding of special education law, the rules, or the regulations that surround

them. This means that their big picture or understanding of the common good, and how the met the needs of individuals, was shaped by an incomplete knowledge set. As Joe admitted, his knowledge was just enough to be "dangerous," yet he still thought he was "proficient" (one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007) to meet the demands of legislation and individual students.

The Tension of Student Placement

The issue of student placement has ramifications in both the personal relations sphere and the public relations sphere while utilizing the ethics of care and justice simultaneously. Which students, with and without disabilities, are taught by which teacher affects not only the individuals involved—the students, the teachers, and the parents; it also affects the overall culture and flow of the school itself. The complexity of this tension illustrates the dark side of running an inclusive school.

Using Jack's picture of the butterfly mosaic (February 2007) as a metaphor for this dark tension, we see that the big picture (the larger school community) is composed of individual tiles (individual stakeholders). Federal and state legislation dictate to final shape of the larger picture, but the individual principals in this study felt responsible for the placement of each tiles so that each tile not only fits in with, but also contributes to the larger picture. Just as the placement of the tiles is important; so too is the placement of individuals with disabilities in a school. In essence, the 3 principals interpreted how best to meet the needs of the individuals (ethic of care) so that they are representative of the common good (the big picture) in a fair and equitable way (ethic of justice).

Tracy, Cline's principal, best summarized the participants' thought on this issue in her commentary on her picture titled 4.3 *Classroom Space and Programs*. She stated that it

was her responsibility to know the learning styles of the students in her building in order to best pair them up with teachers whose instructional styles would complement the students' learning styles (Photovoice narrative for *Classroom Space and Programs*, February 2007). Joe's picture, titled *This Is Us* (February 2007), pictorially represented the tension of student placement. Each student in a class has unique needs as a learner. The variety of heights and colors in the picture is a metaphor for the variety of needs in just one classroom. In his narrative about the picture, Joe addressed what is required to navigate this tension successfully. He represented all three schools when he said that within an effective inclusive school, there are "unique programs, policies, adaptations, and experiences" (Photovoice reflection on *This is Us*, February 2007) to ensure that students are placed correctly and receive the education that is afforded to them.

It becomes clear that the ethics of care and justice should not work in isolation when approaching this tension. Tracy demonstrated the use of both ethics in the personal and public relations spheres when she questioned whether it is fair to have a disabled student spend the entire day in the general education classroom or whether an equitable education might include specialized education. In the public sphere, she wondered whether having a student with disabilities fully integrated into a general education classroom would meet the needs of the rest of the class (Photovoice narrative for *Classroom Space and Programs*, February 2007).

The lessons drawn from this particular tension that arises from the dark side of inclusive education are ones of balancing individual needs with the common good at both relation spheres. The principals in this study, primarily Tracy, show us that the ethic of care is best utilized when it is filtered through the concept of fairness for all students. This means,

then, that no one person or need is more important than the next or at the expense of the common good, but that there are individuals that require more time and focus as part of the larger community. Crafting a caring learning environment for some students may require more thought and resources than others, but because that student is a member of the larger community they needs are one of priority within the scope of the common good.

The Tension of Roles

The literature review discusses the increase in expectations of principals (Tucker & Tschannen-Moran, 2002). The study participants mentioned the fact that special educators' responsibilities have become more complex, as well (Tucker & Tschannen-Moran, 2002). In each school setting, a fuzzy understanding about the role of special educators and their responsibilities surfaced. This lack of clarity leads to misconceptions and skewed perceptions, a product of the dark side of inclusive education. This tension of misconceptions acts as a cycle. Educators' perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of the other education staff are shaped by their own observations, their constructed identity and the cues that they extract from the environment, as well as their understanding of federal and state legislation. These perceptions, in turn, shape how special education staff and the students they service fit into the bigger picture.

Through the individual interviews and focus groups, a fuzzy understanding of roles and responsibilities was expressed by participants from all three schools. During the focus group (February 26, 2007), Merryvale's resource teacher articulated this complex tension when she said she felt she had to justify herself because she did not have the same responsibilities that a general education teacher did, such as recess duties. What the general educator does not see, she pointed out, are the "intricacies of my job," intricacies such as

working in both the general and special education departments, which results in double accountability structures. The resource teacher at Merryvale alludes to misconceptions about her job on the part of general education teachers. The misconceptions of the special educator's role has ramifications in both the personal and public relations spheres and cause the principals to utilize the ethics of care and justice concurrently.

During her individual interview (January 10, 2007), Tracy stated that some general education teachers at Cline still did not understand the responsibilities of the teacher consultant. She believed that many of these general education teachers thought that special education teachers were there merely to help students get through their assignments, not realizing that special educators had their own set of goals and objectives mandated by the IEP that they must teach. She also reported that some general education teachers still requires students with disabilities to make up the work they missed when they were working with the special education teacher, thereby adding to the workload of an already struggling learner. Tracy saw this misconception of special education as a "hard norm to break" (one-on-one interview, January 10, 2007). As such she worked to meet the needs of the individual teachers by things such as establishing meeting time for collaborations, reading and sharing of books, and careful student placement so fairness to both general and special staff and students was created.

Although the data did not fully reveal how principals navigated the tension of roles, we learn that teachers and principals would do well to have a clear understanding of the various roles and responsibilities that accompany a general and special educator. Burton (2004), Aspedon (1992), Monteith (1994), Sirotnik and Kimball (1994), Farley (2002), and Lashley and Boscardin (2003) discussed the lack of special education preparation for

principals, but not the lack of such preparation for general education teachers. However, the resource teacher at Ravenswood believed the lack of understanding of special education and the responsibilities it entails should be addressed during general education teachers training (focus group, February 8, 2007). She stated that, as a special education teacher, she was also trained as a general education teacher. However, general education teachers are not required to take classes that teach them about students with disabilities or the responsibilities of educating them. She went on to say that schools should not assume that general education teachers understand the special education stream (focus group, February 8, 2007).

Through my training as a general education teacher, I know that I did take one class that addressed different types of disabilities, but it did not address effective teaching strategies for each disability or the laws surrounding the IEP process. This begins to show that teachers in inclusive educational settings may perceive the ideas found in the ethic of justice in different lights and, therefore, make sense of the ethic of care differently. A lack of a general understanding of how a school meets the needs of individuals may add to the dark side of inclusive education. Training in the laws, the responsibilities, and the education that surround students with disabilities would help ensure that not only the principals, but their staff integrate the ethics of care and justice at both the personal and private relation spheres. Doing so may help alleviate the tensions that are associated with the dark side of inclusive education.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

We learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding it than we do from learning the answer itself. ~Lloyd Alexander

INTRODUCTION

This final chapter synthesizes the findings in the hope of contributing to what we know about how school administrators advocate for special needs students through the lenses of the ethics of care and justice. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section sets the common ground by addressing the importance of and offering common understandings that address the exploratory question. The second section examines the interplay between the theories of care, justice, and sensemaking; thereby, illuminating how these ideas redefined my assumptions. The third section suggests implications for practicing principals and preparation programs. This chapter concludes with areas of further study.

COMMON GROUND

Often at the end of an educational journey, the student is best served by reflecting back on their beginning. As I come to the end of my journey, I look to my exploratory questions to guide me toward a deeper understanding of the nebulous terms—advocacy and fairness, which I address at the end of this section, in an effort to better understand the work of advocacy for students with disabilities. I entitle this section, common ground, because this appears to be the place where all my ideas seem to converge, and where I am best able to respond to the overarching question: How do elementary building-level

principals make meaning of and enact special education policies to create caring learning environments for students with disabilities?

This study of how elementary principals advocated for students with disabilities was important for two reasons: one scholarly and one personally. In terms of its relevance to scholarship, this work adds a qualitative study that focuses on the voices of school principals to a review of literature that is mostly quantitative, primarily surveys, in approach (see literature review). The extant studies, however, yielded important data for my study. For instance, work done by Burton (2004), Farley (2002), Monteith (1994), Praisner (2003), and Sirotnik & Kimball (1994) indicated that principals do not feel adequately prepared by their formal education to address issues as an administrator that revolve around special education. Davidson & Algozzine (2002) and Monteith (1994) uncovered that principals do not believe that they have that they have the necessary specific knowledge to effectively lead special education. While the prior work provided me with a good glimpse of the field and the differences in what researchers were seeing, the work appeared to be missing a vital component—the voice of the principal. Therefore, this research study aimed to add a qualitative voice to the existing research in a way that allowed the principals to share their experiences.

Another worthwhile finding of this study was the description of tensions that principals wrestle with when acting as educational leaders for both general and special education students. For example, in attempt to align general and special education legislation, there are more than 40 references to NCLB in the recent 2004 reauthorization of IDEIA (Cortiella, 2004), which indicates that federal legislation is moving in an integrated direction. The reality, however, is that for most schools general and special

education are treated as two different systems with specific administrators for each stream. The structure of role—responsibilities-tasks creates tensions that the school principals, in this study, found challenging when they worked to craft caring environments for all students. Indeed, knowing the professional preparation dilemmas and the organizational tensions that both inhibit and enhance the principal's work are important findings that would encourage further study.

As the exploratory question states, another scholarly implication is the understanding of how principals make sense of advocacy and how they enact advocacy in their natural setting. The term advocacy has various meanings and applications for a variety of settings. From this study, I come to understand advocacy as a way to meet the needs of individual that are context specific but are also fair to both the individual and the larger common good. This beginning definition of advocacy for students with disabilities viewed within the school setting contributes to new ways of thinking about how principals do their work.

Finally, this study is valuable to the scholar-practitioner, like myself, and to researchers because it supports and extends Clement's (1996) theory that the ethics of care and justice are integrated and are applicable in both the private and public relational spheres. Whereas Clement talks more in abstract terms and uses the hypothetical Heinz dilemma to illustrate this idea, this study demonstrates the same principles in action in a real live educational setting.

In addition to contributing to our scholarly understanding of this phenomenon, this study has had personal importance for two reasons. First, as a special education teacher at both the elementary and secondary settings I have viewed the ideas of

advocacy through my own perspective. Conducting this study allowed me to observe and understand advocacy through the eyes of principals; seeing special education and general education from a macro-perspective. The ability to begin to understand advocacy from these principals' position will help me as I move from the classroom to administration. I aim to be a special education director for a school district and as such, I see my future position as a resource for students with disabilities, their families and the teachers that work with them, but also as a resource for principals. As a result of this project, I have a better understanding of how I can support the principals that I will one day work with. Second, I chose to focus on the elementary level for a specific reason. Moving from the elementary to secondary level, I am able to see the importance of the work done at the early grades. In my experience, most disabled students either enter the school system already with a label or are found to have a disability before they leave the elementary. I have seen that the educational foundation for students with a disability is set in the early years and influences their success at the secondary levels. Also, in my experience, elementary principals tend to me more active with special education through the child study find meetings and IEPs and as such, will benefit greatly as the focus of research.

Finding common ground, finally leads me to the key ideas of advocacy and fairness that appear to be at the core of how the three principals made meaning of their work. To be honest, these ideas can have multiple meanings to different people and for numerous situations. I had high aspirations to be able to provide a concrete definition of each idea at the end of this study. However, what I can offer are working definitions that have concrete underpinnings, but are also malleable to meet various needs and contexts.

What we learn from these working definitions, I believe, is helpful to how building-level principals construct their daily work as well as how we prepare school principals.

I have come to define advocacy, in this particular situation, as the work that a principal engages that strives to build trusting relationships among people who serve children with disabilities and to create a respectful, loving learning environment that does no harm to the individual or the common good. It is the meeting of needs of individuals that are context specific. Therefore, these 3 principals, as advocate, act as an intercessor between the laws, policies and practice of policies, and the teacher and students so that caring environments are crafted to meet the their needs. At the same time that the building principal works to create a dynamic and caring environment for the student with disability(ies), s/he works in a just manner to ensure that actions also impact, in a good way, the work of general education teachers and general education students. A "holistic" view of enacting care and justice characterizes the work of advocacy. This study helps broaden the idea of advocacy to include students with learning disabilities and those without.

Fairness

After studying and analyzing the data, I began to grasp the concept of fairness. It was not until I read *Leadership for Social Justice: Making Revolutions in Education* (Marshall & Oliva, 2006) that my understanding became clear and focused and I was able to answer my overarching question of how elementary principals make meaning of and create caring learning environments for students with disabilities.

In their chapter in Marshall and Oliva's book, *Leadership for Social Justice: Making Revolutions in Education* (2006), Lopez, Gonzalez, and Fierro discussed the

ability of one principal, Phil Jones, to remove his "blinders and recognize the multiple needs of the children and families he serve[d]" (p.69). In doing so, Jones challenged himself to step out of his comfort level in order to advocate for the variety of students, families, and needs he serviced. Jones placed emphasis on meeting such needs in a way that held him "accountable, not to state education agencies or accrediting institutions, but to parents and the larger community of the school" (p. 75). Lopez, Gonzalez, and Fierro (2006) believe that principals must be reflective in nature in order to remove the blinders and look the needs of the individuals that comprise their school.

The 3 principals in this story have also "removed their blinders" and were not only able to see the needs of the individuals that create their community, but they were proactive, and often creative, in their approaches to meet such needs fairly. We saw through their pictures and heard it in their own voices that they recognized that the needs of students with disabilities, but those of the rest of the larger community as well. Though they did not address is specifically, through their interviews, conversations with each other, and the schools' context, we were able to see that these 3 principals realized that their school community consisted of more than just general and special education. There were students that were at-risk, of different ethic backgrounds, from varying social-economical status, and from a range of unique family situations. The 3 principals in this study appear to be aware of the multiple needs of all their children and being fair to all—in a loving and respectful manner—appears to be prominent in their decisions.

The data showed us that fairness is the result of a team effort. Tracy, Jack and Joe did not wear their "Principal Badge" and acted in isolation. Rather, they actively sought out multiple voices in order to level the playing field so that each student had a fair and

caring education. Often the strategies they used to level the field, so to speak, were creative, such as establishing jobs for students before school, and were the result multiple of attempts. As Tracy said in her Photovoice reflection, (blog posting, March 2007) "sometimes the big picture doesn't always work for the individual child, and we need to figure out (with lots of assistance) how to meet their needs also" (blog posting, March 2007).

The ability to use input from a variety of sources and create creative approaches to level the playing field first required the principals to "remove their blinders" and acknowledge that there was work to be done. Merchant and Shoho (2006) refers to this as the work of "Bridge People." Included in Marshall and Oliva's (2006) book *Leadership for Social Justice: Making Revolutions in Education*, Merchant and Shoho's chapter discusses the idea of principals acting as " 'Bridge People'...[who are] committed to creating a bridge between themselves and other, for the purposes of improving the lives of all those with whom they worked" (p.86). The university president that Merchant and Shoho interviewed said that the accountability factor of "Bridge People" is "whether or not we care about the success of our student. And if the answer is yes, then we gotta take some steps and we have to get to know our students, we have to interact with them..." (p. 96). I believe that each of the 3 principals in this study do act as "Bridge People" insomuch that they believe themselves to be the link, or "bridge" between students' needs and the caring educational environment that will meet those needs and improve their life in some way. Jack summarized it best during his interview when he said, "I'm responsible, ultimately, for all the kids and their learning" (one-on-one interview, January 18, 2007).

Close examination of the data of Tracy, Jack and Joe reveled that being fair "Bridge People" is a difficult task. Throughout their pictures, interviews and narratives, you see them constantly questioning themselves and their decisions, such as Tracy in her Photovoice narrative for *Classroom Space and Programs* (February 2007) when she questioned the appropriateness of her placement of students, or when Jack questioned the fair amount of time to spend staffing on a student with a disability (Photovoice reflection, blog posting, March 2007). From this data we learn, too, that fairness may force the principals to make changes to programs that require more time and energy from the staff, like Joe's solution to the state assessment problem. Compounding the difficultly of being fair and acting as "Bridge People" is the fact that these 3 principals were "Bridge People" for all children, not just a select few. As such, they appeared to be always challenging themselves to learn more (Cline; focus group, January 22, 2007) and to do more (Joe; one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007).

In the end, fairness is a process that engaged these 3 principals to embrace the tensions that they faced, cross barriers, and step-out of traditional practices to ensure they were advocates for all their children. They not only held themselves only accountable to "state education agencies or accrediting institutions, but to parents and the larger community of the school" (Lopez, Gonzalez, Ferrio p. 75). It required them to be able to remove their "blinders" in order to fully see the diversity of students that they served and to work as a team with the other stakeholders within their school. Fairness demanded much from Tracy, Jack and Joe as professionals, and they readily gave.

THE INTERPLAY OF THEORIES

You have learned something.
That always feels at first as if you had lost something
(H.G. Wells, n.d.)

I assumed at the start of this study that the ethic of care, and the ethic of justice, and the theory of sensemaking would interact with one another when a school principal advocated for students with disabilities. With this hunch in mind, I proposed a relationship between the 3 theories as a beginning step on this journey. Over time, as I collected and analyzed the data, and as I thought more deeply about what it means to advocate for students with disabilities, I found that the original framework did not quite capture the complexities of this work. Hence, arriving at this new learning felt as if I had indeed lost something, as Wells suggests. Having to rethink my initial premises pressed me to redefine the original conceptual framework.

At the beginning of this study, I saw the ethics of care and justice much like other scholars (e.g., Noddings , 1993) as dichotomous and, thereby, two separate ideas that the principals must balance when advocating for students with disabilities. In essence, I envisioned a scale with the ethic of care on one side and the ethic of justice on the other, separate entities from each other, but both necessary (see Figure 6.1, Original Conceptual Framework).

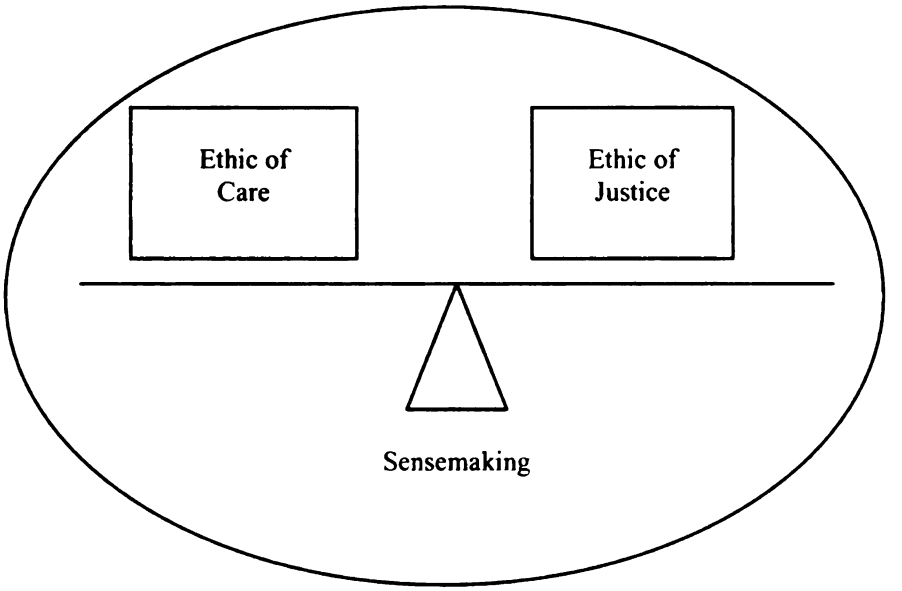


Figure 6.1. Original Conceptual Framework

With this mental framework, I struggled to understand how sensemaking fit and eventually placed sensemaking as the fulcrum on which the two ethics balanced. This first way of viewing care, justice, and sensemaking was alluded to a "ping-pong" effect of principals bouncing from one ethic to the other in order to make sense of their own advocacy. In this original model, I believed that principals used either the ethic of care or the ethic of justice in isolation of one another.

As I pushed on the data utilizing this original framework, I realized that it was messy and confusing, and reminded me of the picture Jack took of the artwork done by his art teacher (*Art from a Learning Disabled Student, February 2007*). Soon I found myself asking, "Wood somebody plees help me?" just like the words scratched into the paint. The more I thought about the data and what it was showing about care, justice, and sensemaking, I began to see that these were not isolated theories. Rather, these 3 theories had a sense of connectedness, much like Jack's picture titled 4.4 *TEAM: We're in this together* (February 2007). The picture shows blue, white, and black bodies touching and

connected in a circle. The interaction between care, justice, and sensemaking are connected with no beginning or end. The picture began to represent the continuous cycle of advocacy rather than the linear quality I original believed.

Further careful consideration of the data also revealed that the 3 theories are integrated and part of a larger picture, like the picture of the mosaic butterfly that hangs in Jack's library (February 2007). The ethic of care, the ethic of justice, and the theory of sensemaking all have their own unique characteristics and attributes that help school principals in different ways. The points at which these theories meet appear to burst into a mosaic of practices that reveal principals' advocacy for students with disabilities. I began to understand the model as a set of spheres in which to view the theories interplay (see Figures 6.2: Nested Conceptual Framework).

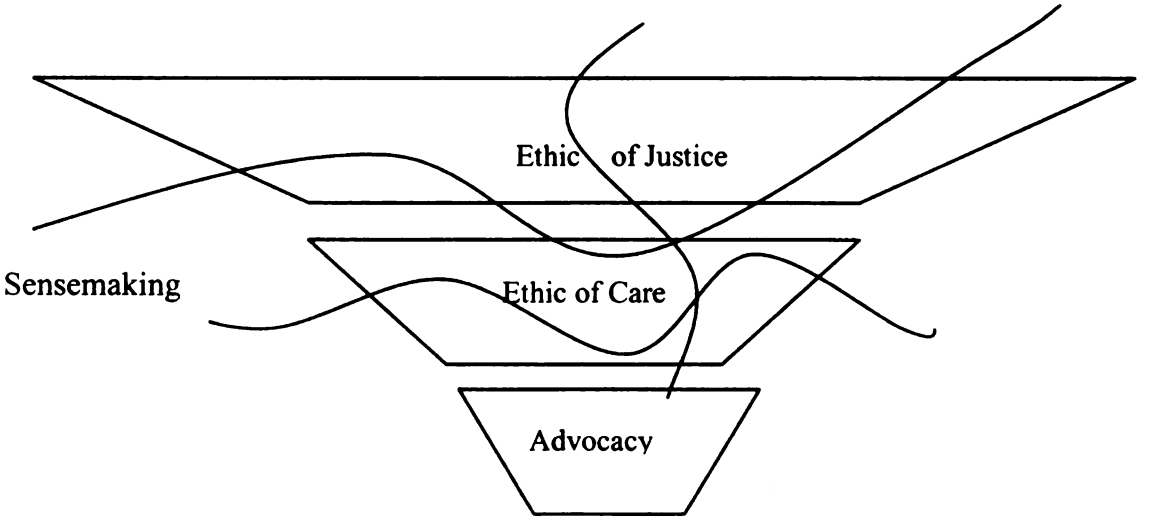


Figure 6.2 Nested Conceptual Framework

Rather than having sensemaking be the central resting point that these 3 principals used to balance the ethics of care and justice, the data showed that advocacy is at the heart of their actions. This inverted cone-shape model of the conceptual lens suggests

that the theories are nested in one another. The gravitational pull that places advocacy first proposes that principals, in the case of this study the three principal participants, begin all their work at the relational level. That is, they are firmly committed to building respectful and trusting relationships that they believe will help them to make the best possible decisions for individual students as well as for all students. When they must address a particular dilemma that deals with students with disabilities, they all appeared to first filter the situation through their relationships—knowledgeable professionals, colleagues, the policy and law, and so on. This act of "caring" to ensure that all parts of the problem was viewed to ensure the individual and the whole wound not be harmed implicated their notion of fairness. Fairness had them consider the ethics of justice as they lead toward a common good of schooling for everyone.

Throughout this highly dynamic process principals were engaged in making sense of justice and care. The wavy threads represent the flow of where sensemaking may appear—it weaves together the nested pieces—revealing how the principal chose one set of actions over another. Unfortunately, the study did not delve further into each principal's sensemaking process so it is not clear if they were explicitly aware that they were moving in and out of Weick's (1994) elements of sensemaking. An analysis of their short Photovoice narrative certainly reveals that they were engaged in retrospectivity, extracting cues from their environment, and the social aspect of sensemaking.

The final functions of viewing care, justice, and sensemaking as nested theories with advocacy as the focal point is to better answer the overarching exploratory question of how do elementary principals make meaning of and enact special education policies to create caring environments for students with disabilities while adding to the existing

literature. Summarizing the above synthesis, these 3 theories show that a caring environment for not only disabled students, but all students, is crafted with the ideas and concepts of fairness bound the actions that the principals took to meet individual needs. It was through the practice of retrospection, extracting environmental cues and working with others that Tracy, Jack and Joe were able to make decisions "for the purposes of improving the lives" (Merchant & Shoho, 2006, p. 86) of the each student. Finally, the nested framework and the implied gravitational pull works to not only support Clement's (1996) theory that care can be integrated through justice.

This model views acknowledges the significant role of advocacy and fairness at the core of each of the principal's sensemaking as they worked to meet the needs of both students with disabilities and general education students. And, it further problemmatizes their work by exploring how they meet (or not) the needs of both groups. The model makes visible three key findings that help to better understand how elementary building-level principals make meaning of and enact special education policies to create caring learning environments for students with disabilities.

The first of significance is that policy and policy enactment favors maintaining a "just" system, or a common good, for all children. Federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind talks in inclusive language that addresses that all students will be learning at highly proficient rates. Even IDEIA focuses on students with disabilities as a whole and mandates that such students obtain a free and appropriate education. This federal law does not isolate or distinguish between learning disabled students and those with vision loss. The purpose of the state assessment that Joe gave to his students, including the 3 with learning disabilities, was to ensure that all students within this state were receiving

rich and robust educations that were aligned to the state's benchmarks and grade level education content standards.

The second important finding of this study is that the 3 principals are actually integrating the ethics of care and justice; that is filtering care through justice and at both the personal and public relation spheres. Student placement, as Tracy shares in her narrative of 4.3 *Classroom Space and Programs* (February 2007), is an example of this. Her placement of a student with a disability is not only based on meeting his or her academic and social needs (ethic of care—personal sphere) in a way that is fair to that student by determining the appropriate amount of time out of the general education setting (ethic of justice—personal sphere), but it is also based on meeting the needs of the rest of the learners (ethic of care—public sphere) that is fair (ethic of justice—public sphere) so that general education students are not loosing educational time. Returning to the state assessment that Joe gave to the 3 learning disabled students shows this, as well. The disabled students who took the test and "broke down" resulted in school changes that would help alleviate the stress felt by future students in the same situation. In essence, Joe and his staff were looking to better meet the needs of future disabled students that may not be ready for the state assessment (ethic of care) (Joe, one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007).

Finally, the application of the nested conceptual framework with the data indicates that the utilization of the ethics of care and justice help shaped the principals' understanding of advocacy and how they practice it. First, the utilization of care and justice is not standardized and has application at various levels of social relations—from the private to the public spheres. This allows the practitioner that opportunity to define

and enact advocacy is context and need specific. Second, advocacy for Tracy, Jack and Joe was a team approach that required input from various members of the community. Jack's picture titled 4.4 *TEAM: We are in this Together* (February 2007) illustrated this idea. Finally, advocacy not only partners the ethics of care and justice, but it is also assists the principals' efforts to include special education as a valuable part (not an outsider) of the total school culture. Through the pictures and stories of the principals, it became clear that the students in these 3 schools were not grouped into "disabled" and "non-disabled" students. Rather, they were all members of the school who had needs to be met. Symbolically, this reflects Jack's picture 4.6 *Flutter by Mosaic* (February 2007) where each student is a part of the whole.

IMPLICATIONS

If principals, both aspiring and seasoned, believe that filtering the ethic of care through the ethic of justice leads to advocacy for students with disabilities, than there are implications that arise from this study for both practicing principals and programs that prepare them. For example, current school principals should take advantage of on-going professional development in the area of special education law. As Joe's special education teacher noted, "Special education is always evolving" (Merryvale focus group, February 26, 2007). Often it takes years for the rules and regulations that accompany IDEIA's reauthorizations to be written and implemented. This means that interpretations of the law frequently fluctuate.

Echoing this suggestion, Davidson and Algozzine (2002) contend that successful management of special education directly results from the principal's knowledge of special education law. The literature indicated a dearth of preparation courses for

principals with regard to special education and students with disabilities at the nations' institutions of higher education. Monteith's (1994) and Hirth and Valesky's (1992) research indicated that few universities prepare principals in special education issues. Indeed, current and aspiring principals must understand how policies are framed and how special education policy fits. The principals in this study rated their knowledge of special education law on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 representing little to no knowledge (one-on-one interviews, January 10, 18 and February 19, 2007). The highest self-rated score was 8 and the lowest was 5, "dangerous, but enough to be proficient" (Joe; one-on-one interview, February 19, 2007). This supports Burton (2004), Aspedon (1992) and Davidson and Algozzine (2002) research that contend that principals feel that they are not adequately prepared to supervise special education issues and that their knowledge of special education and its laws are limited. Therefore, I would suggest that the institutions that prepare principals should begin to strengthen their offering in special education administration.

Universities that are preparing principals for the field would do well to have course offerings that address special education issues such as the various disabilities, running IEPs, and child find teams. The 3 principals' knowledge of various disabilities came either from their own experiences as a classroom teacher or from their own research. A teacher in Tracy's building was struck by Tracy's willingness to make time to read about Autism and Jack tries to schedule his day so that he has time to research various issues that happen through the course of the week. Many of those issues, he says, are related to special education. A necessary component of a course for administrators in regards to special education is the running of IEP meetings. Attending an IEP is different

as an administrator than it is as a teacher. For some principals, such as Jack, they are required to write the IEP. Without training in this, Jack was left to rely on his team members to help cobble IEPs together. As a result, a manual for Jack's district was created to aid principals in this endeavor. Finally, for elementary principals especially, preparation programs should focus on creating and maintaining effect child find teams. Such teams are incorporating data collection and analysis as documentation to show responses to interventions.

NEXT STEPS

Though this study offered rich insights into the principals' perception of their work for students with special needs, it is important to note several methodological limitations that may be further revisited and revised in subsequent studies. First, the one-day of shadowing did not yield as much insight into the work of the school principal as I had originally anticipated. It did, however, help me to understand the context of the school and added to the description of the individual case studies. I would encourage spending more time observing the principal in her/his school. Second, the modification of Photovoice from face-to-face meetings to discourse on a weblog, I felt, did not offer the opportunity for a more robust dialogue that would have been enhanced by face-to-face meetings. I believe that if I had the principals meet and discuss their pictures, it would have strengthened the depth of my understanding of their meaning as well as assisted the principals to uncover other tensions not evident in the current data. However, being cognizant of time demands on principals, I opted to use electronic discourse instead. As novice researcher, I was uncomfortable facilitating more of their

conversations; however, in hindsight, had I done this, I believe the richness of understanding advocacy might have been further illuminated.

Given the limitations of this study, I am comfortable concluding that it does set a beginning foundation about how principals make sense of advocacy for students with disabilities. There are four avenues for continuing research to take as a result of this study. First, although this study was an attempt to identify specific forms of advocacy, it did not offer practical "check list" of advocacy strategies for current and future administrators. Knowing the conundrums that have been brought to the surface in the study, future applied research work might help frame inclusive leadership.

Second, in this study disabilities were presented as a whole. That is, they were not separated out into students with learning disabilities, cognitive impairments, or other specific disabilities. This generalization of disabilities may limit the understanding of advocacy and the forms it may take for various types of disabilities. Future researchers would do well to look at the various subgroups of disabilities to gather a deeper understanding of how principals advocate for specific disabilities.

A third possible arena of work focuses on the methodology utilized. That is, employing strategies that would allow a researcher to study principal sensemaking in real-time. As the principals examine and reflect on their data and that of the other principals, they are making sense of it in the present.

Finally, an interesting topic for future research would be a comparison of principals who did and did not have courses in special education and disabilities in their leadership preparation studies. A study of this nature might illuminate further the

struggles that principals' face and lead to a better understanding of their advocacy for disabled students.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Many metaphors have been employed to describe the dissertation process, from being lost in the woods to standing in a line waiting for admittance only to be told to go to the end of the line (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). I, too, experienced these feelings of being lost and repeated frustration on my journey through this process. However, I liken my journey to what it must be like to have a learning disability. I heard and saw things that I knew I must understand, but felt frustrated because I could not. I felt overwhelmed and burdened, discouraged by my slow pace to fit the pieces together. I questioned my ability and second-guessed myself each step of the way. Yet within me was always a seed of belief that I could accomplish this task. With guidance, support, and time, I emerged from this journey exhilarated that I had completed it, triumphant in my learning, and secretly knowing that I could do it all along. These feelings are ones that my disabled students have shared with me over the years, and because of this research project, I have a better understanding of the mountains and valleys they must traverse in school. I can empathize better with the despair and the elation they face on a daily basis. The experience of completing this dissertation has changed how I will practice my craft as a special education teacher and how I view educational leadership.

Although this research took on the principal as a focus for advocacy and pointed out the importance of the ethics of care and justice, I have learned that these same ethics are necessary for me as a special education teacher. I know that I use the ethics of care and justice as alternatives, but that using them as an integrated model of sensemaking

will better serve my students. Analyzing the data from current elementary principals has increased my understanding of the complexity of administrators' advocacy for disabled students. As such, my future interactions as an educator with principals will have greater sensitivity.

As a future special education leader, this experience has given me deeper insight into the complexities that elementary principals face as inclusive leaders and the tensions that they encounter. I have also gained an understanding of how principals make sense of advocacy and how they translate that into practice for disabled learners. Collecting the stories of these three principals has given me a clearer idea of how my role as a special education director can be of service to elementary principals.

Goethe said, "Thinking is more interesting than knowing, but less interesting than looking." Learning about the ethics of care and justice and the theory of sensemaking was more interesting than the things that I thought I knew going into this study. However, the experience of capturing the stories and images of principals in the inclusive education field and the analysis of the data proved to be the most interesting and enlightening part of this journey.

APPENDIX I

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide potential research participants with a consent form to completely inform participants about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to discuss risks and benefits of participation, and to empower participants to make informed decisions. This form is only part of the consent process, and you should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: Elementary School Principals Making Sense of Special Education
Investigator and Title: Krista Sherman Nobis, doctoral candidate
Department: K-12 Educational Administration
Address and Contact Information: 1567 Cahill Drive, East Lansing, MI 48823 (517) 331-4212
krista_nobis@hotmail.com

1. PURPOSE:
You are being asked to participate as a research participant in a study to examine elementary principals in their natural setting in order to learn how they make sense of special education policies and procedures and the extent to which they translate them to action that supports students with disabilities within their buildings.
You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because your special education director or principal views you as an exemplar when working with special education programs.
From this study, the investigators hope to learn how effective principals create a learning environment for all students, including those with disabilities.
In the entire study, three to six people are being asked to participate.
Your participation in this study will take about five hours spread across three to four days.

2. WHAT YOU WILL DO:

Participate in an initial interview
Participate in a debriefing interview
Allow the investigator to shadow you for a day
Take pictures
Respond to prompts
Nominate teachers and support staff to participate in a focus group
Any significant findings that develop during the course of the study that relate to your decision to participate in the research will be provided to you.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS:
You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the growing body inquiry focused on the roles and work of school principals as they address special education needs in their settings, and second, to offer insight for current school principals who are wrestling with doing the best for "all" children; special and general education students alike.

4. POTENTIAL RISKS:
The potential risks of participating in this study are discomfort associated with sensitive questions, minimal strain to your time, and the chance for comments to be carried to outside parties.

5. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:
All names and identifiers will be altered.
Conversations, field notes, and observations will be private and shared only with the investigator's advisor.
The data for this project is being coded and a key will be maintained separately.
Information will be keep confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law.
Data will be kept in a locked file in the home of the researcher.
Data stored on the computer will have a password known only to the investigator.
The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.
You will be audio taped and may appear in photographs.
I agree to allow audio taping/videotaping of the interview Initials_____
Tapes will be kept in a locked file and will be complete destroyed after the publication of the dissertation.
Some data will be collect via the Internet and through e-mail correspondence. Identifiers, such as e-mail addresses, will not be given to third parties and be known only to the investigator.

6. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW
Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no.
You may change your mind at any time and withdraw.
You are free not to answer any question or to stop participating at any time.

7. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:
There is no cost or compensation for participating in the study.

8. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

If you have any questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the investigator and/or her advisor:

Krista Sherman Nobis
Doctoral Candidate, Michigan State University
1567 Cahill Drive

Dr. Maenette Benham
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If you have any questions regarding your role and rights as a research participant, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Director of MSU's Human Research Protection Programs, Dr. Peter Vasilenko, at 517-355-2180, FAX 517 432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

12. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.

You are making a decision whether or not to be in this study. Your signature below means that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in this research study. Your signature also indicates your voluntary agreement to be photographed in this study and release any rights to any financial gain resulting from its publication. If any financial gain is incurred, the researcher will contribute an honorarium for you to a school needing financial resources. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

APPENDIX II

Focus Group
Research Participant Information and Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide potential research participants with a consent form to completely inform participants about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to discuss risks and benefits of participation, and to empower participants to make informed decisions. This form is only part of the consent process, and you should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: Elementary School Principals Making Sense of Special Education
Investigator and Title: Krista Sherman Nobis, doctoral candidate
Department: K-12 Educational Administration
Address and Contact Information: 1567 Cahill Drive, East Lansing, MI 48823 (517) 331-4212 krista_nobis@hotmail.com

1. PURPOSE:
You are being asked to participate as a research participant in a study to examine elementary principals in their natural setting in order to learn how they make sense of special education policies and procedures and the extent to which they translate them to action that supports students with disabilities within their buildings.
You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because your principal views you as an exemplar when working with special education programs.
From this study, the investigators hope to learn how effective principals create a learning environment for all students, including those with disabilities.
In this part of the study, 3-6 people from your school are being asked to participate.
Your participation in this study will take about one hour.

2. WHAT YOU WILL DO:

Participate in a focus group with other colleagues.
Any significant findings that develop during the course of the study that relate to your decision to participate in the research will be provided to you.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS:
You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the growing body inquiry focused on the roles and work of school principals as they address special education needs in their settings, and second, to offer insight for current school principals who are wrestling with doing the best for "all" children; special and general education students alike.

4. POTENTIAL RISKS:
The potential risks of participating in this study are discomfort associated with sensitive questions, minimal strain to your time, and the chance for comments to be carried to outside parties.

5. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:
All names and identifiers will be altered.
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The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.
You will be audio taped and may appear in photographs.
I agree to allow audio taping/videotaping of the interview Initials_____
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6. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW
Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no.
You may change your mind at any time and withdraw.
You are free not to answer any question or to stop participating at any time.

7. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:
There is no cost or compensation for participating in the study.

8. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

If you have any questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the investigator and/or her advisor:

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If you have any questions regarding your role and rights as a research participant, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Director of MSU's Human Research Protection Programs, Dr. Peter Vasilenko, at 517-355-2180, FAX 517 432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

12. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.

You are making a decision whether or not to be in this study. Your signature below means that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in this research study. Your signature also indicates your voluntary agreement to be photographed in this study and release any rights to any financial gain resulting from its publication. If any financial gain is incurred, the researcher will contribute an honorarium for you to a school needing financial resources. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

APPENDIX III

One-on-One Initial Interview

Purpose: To establish a rapport with the participants, to gather data for case study, and to introduce how to participate in the study.

Instruction to the participants: Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study. I am looking forward to learning from you. I want to take this time to get to know you a bit better, to learn about your special education programs and to explain and answer in questions about how I am asking you to help me collect data.

Our work today will be audio taped, affording me the opportunity to go back and reflect about our work together. It will be used strictly for reviewing your responses as I reflect on the data you've provided through this discussion.

Please talk about key moments in your life – personal or professional – that have helped you to understand special education policies and practices.

How many years have you spent in the classroom?

What levels did you teach?

Did you have students with disabilities? If so, what types of disabilities were present?

What was your biggest joy when working in an integrated classroom?

What was your biggest frustration when working in an integrated classroom?

Why did you move from teaching to administration?

How involved are you with your buildings special education program?

On a scale from 1 to 10, with one being zero to none and 10 being extremely familiar, how familiar are you with special education law?

What is your biggest challenge when leading an inclusive school?

Thank you for sharing this with me. I want to walk you through the Photovoice, an activity that will help me understand how you make sense of special education and students with a disability.

APPENDIX IV

Photovoice Steps

I will walk you through Photovoice, one of the data collection projects.

Step 1: Framing questions

I have generated framing questions to serve as a guideline as you participate in each step of the process. These framing questions will accompany the appropriate step.

Step 2: Photographing

I am asking you to take pictures using the disposable camera provided to you of images and symbols that help you answer the following questions:

What activities in your school best show how special education programs meet IDEIA policy?

What complications (for example: school organization, resources, teacher/staff, parents, and so on) do you struggle with as you work to meet IDEIA policy?

What strategies have you used have worked successfully (and not successfully) to meet the needs of special education students AND general education student

At this time, please complete the photo subject release form.

Step 3: Collection of cameras

In two weeks, I will return to collect the cameras and develop the pictures you have taken. I will then post them to the Internet on the following blog site (web address to still be created).

Step 4: Picture selection and responses

You will view all your photos via the web. I will then ask you to select three (3) pictures that best respond to the framing questions (one or all) and then for each photo to respond to the following probes:

Give your picture a title:

- "I would like to share this photo because" (briefly finish the sentence):
- What's the real story this photo tells? (provide a short statement)
- How does this photo give meaning to your work as a school administrator? (provide a short statement)

Step 4: Email Response #1

After you have selected your photos and submitted reflections on the snapshots, I will post them in a viewable by all section of the weblog. Each cluster of three-photos with accompanying reflection will be identified as "Participant A", "Participant B", and so on. At this time, I will ask you to review the participant photo clusters and respond, in an email to me (note that your responses at this point will not be shared with other participants), to the following probes:

- What are some common experiences, across all the photo clusters, shared by the participants that reveal their work with special education programs?
- What about the administration of special education programs appears to be missing from these clusters of photos?

- And, why do you think they were not captured or selected?
- What can we learn from each other?

Step 5: Email Query #2

After I receive your response to email query #1, I will then collate and summarize the responses and post them on the weblog. I will ask you to review my summary and respond to theses clarifying probes (note: again, your responses are only viewed by me):

- What concerns you the most about the relationship between special education, general education, and educating "all" students?
- Where do you get your information/data that assists you in making decisions about special education programming? What's missing in this strategic process?
- Provide three examples of what has worked for you (strategies) in your practice to meet the needs of both special and general education students?
- And, provide at least one example of what hasn't worked for you.

APPENDIX V

One-on-One Debriefing Interview Questions

Purpose: To explore the participants' beliefs and assumptions regarding tensions between special and general education. It will focus on how they construct their roles as leaders, how they see advocacy in their setting, and how they look at advocacy after participating in Photovoice. Because the data generated from Photovoice will be the basis for interview questions and cannot be determined ahead of time, the following questions act as a guideline of possible questions and will more than likely be modified.

Introduction for the respondents: Thank you, again, for agreeing to participate in this study, for all your time, and thoughtfulness. I hope that you have enjoyed participating in the Photovoice aspect of the project. I have sent to you an e-mail that describes my analysis of the data generated thus far. Today, we are going to debrief Photovoice, as well as give you to comment on my analysis, and provide each participant an opportunity to share any thoughts or "ah-hahs!" with me.
Our work today will again be audio taped, affording me the opportunity to go back and reflect about our work together. It will be used strictly for reviewing your responses as I reflect on the data you've provided through this discussion.

After viewing the photos and the analysis, what thoughts come to mind?
Do you see the findings as universal themes that most schools face? Are there others that have been overlooked?

What do you think advocacy for students with disabilities means? What does it look like?

Where there any "ah-has" for you at any time during this process?

Are there changes that you would like to see within your school in order to make general and special education more seamless? Your district? The state? The nation?

Did your thinking around these issues change by participating in the Photovoice process? If so, in what way?

If you were mentoring a novice elementary school principal, what piece of advice would you give them in regards to providing an education for all students? In other words, what words of wisdom would you share in how to handle the special education component?

APPENDIX VI

Focus Group Questions

Purpose

1. A discussion to better understand the issues that arise from general and special education programs.
2. Probe the thoughts and feelings about the different roles and responsibilities/practices.

Introduction for the respondents

Your principal has been participating in a study designed to determine how administrators negotiate tensions created by a general and special education in order to create deep and powerful learning for their students. He/She has identified the following three tensions that are present in your school: Tension1, Tension 2, Tension 3. Today is an opportunity for you to reflect on your experience as a member of this school community and your interaction with special education. The distinctive feature of today's focus group interview is that you get to hear the experiences of others, include your voice to the mix, and to validate or clarify tensions that you see at work in your school. The listening process is meant to prompt the memory of your own experiences as you compare and contrast your thoughts and ideas with the thoughts and ideas of others. You have been selected by your principal to participate in this group and your responses will be included in the study. However, your identity will be protected as best as possible and what is said to day will not be reported back to your principal.

Our work today will be audio and video taped affording me the opportunity to go back and reflect about our work together. It will be used strictly for reviewing your responses as I reflect on the data you've provided through this discussion.

Setting the tone: Introduce the Participants:

I have had the privilege to learn about your school by working with your principal. Though most of you probably already know one another, I like to get to know you as well. Take a moment and introduce yourselves by sharing your name, your school and something new that you hope to learn as a result of this meeting.

Personal reflection

Before our Focus Group meeting starts, I would like you to jot down the experiences with special education and any tensions/issues you see with educating both general and special education together. Consider experiences you have had here at school, in the home, or in the community. The purpose of the sketch is to give you an opportunity to think and reflect about some of your experiences before we begin our discussion.

Focus Group Protocol:

Thank you for your introduction and personal reflection sketch. Please feel free to refer to your sketch any time throughout the interview. Let's begin. I'll ask a question. Take a moment to think about it, and if and when you would like to respond, go ahead. Since it is important to hear from everyone, I'll check with you before moving on to a new question.

1. How would you say special education and the students it services is treated within your school?

Probes: (Use your notes to help with your response).
a. What are the strengths?
b. What are the weaknesses?

3. What tensions/issues arise when running a school that services a variety of learners, i.e. disabled and non-disabled students?

Probes:

a. Why is it difficult?
b. What may hinder services?
c. What makes servicing all students possible?

4. Here are some tensions that principals and research have identified as problematic: [list the possibilities here]. What are your thoughts on these?

Probes:

a. Do you agree with theses?
b. If so, what do you think creates the tension? How does your school work with this tension?
c. If you disagree, why?

5. Tell me a story about a time that you thought things were gelling, working well, for both disabled and non-disabled students (effective strategy).

Probes:

a. Where was this? What was going on at the time?
b. Who was present?
c. Why do you think this worked well?
d. Did the students with disabilities feel? Non-disabled students?

6. Now tell me a time when things were not working, that they were falling apart, or that the two types of learners were separated (ineffective strategy).

Probes:

a. Where was this? What was going on at the time?
b. Who was present?
c. Why do you think this did not work well?
d. Did the students with disabilities feel? Non-disabled students?

APPENDIX VII

Weblog Discussion Among Principals

"What Roles and/or Responsibilities You Have in Regards to Special Education?"

"This first set of pictures shows how much responsibility an administrator has to promote an open-minded social emotional learning environment. All students needs need to be considered when making decisions about room placements, student placements with teachers, how much time should special needs students be integrated for learning and/or separated for learning. It's a big responsibility and only happens with daily contact with students in a variety of situations whether it is recess, lunch or in the classroom. There is so much learning taking place in a school no matter what the situation and we must help to develop the safe, secure environment for all students."

"I see these pictures as symbols for what constrains us and who we are responsible for. We must survive among the legislation and the resources we are given, yet our responsibilities are to the students. As a leader of the school, it is my job to make something beautify out of something messy."

"My role is just as clear as seeing the forest for the trees. The lines of my responsibilities are blurred and bleed into one another as the painting does. I serve many roles and have many expectations placed upon me, but at the center of all these lines radiating out from what is expected from me is the fact that I must educate every kid to the best of my ability."

Tensions that You Struggle with as an Inclusive Leader

"It seems that each of these pictures represent the struggles that we all have as we evaluate our decisions on what might be good for the big picture. Sometimes the big picture doesn't always work for the individual child and we need to figure out (with lots of assistance) how to meet their needs also. It is our role to help others see how this new challenge can help all of us grow and become better educators. There can be a tendency to set up roadblocks when someone doesn't fit the current set-up of the environment. We must be the leaders to help others see the possibilities."

"I think these pictures show that we all struggle with balancing needs, student and adults. As a principal, I struggle with how much time should I and my staff spend on one student with a disability. Why is this child more important than the next? How do I justify that to the parents of the non-disabled student? Yet, I know that students with disabilities didn't choose to be that way and they require more time, resources and energy. I think my caring for my students as individuals often creates the tensions that I face."

"These photographs and their descriptions make me ask "Whose big picture is it?" Is it mine? My teachers'? The students with disabilities? The general education parent? The

federal government? Or are each one of these a mere tile in the butterfly? A piece of the whole and that is the key. Does the legislation obscure the vision or does it help define it? I wonder if needs would be met of all students without such laws as IDEA. I believe that in my school, we do and would continue to see each piece as valuable as the next and critical to make the whole picture come into focus."

Special Education Programs in Your School that meet IDEIA Policy

"The pictures denote how far we have come over the years. Special needs students are no longer looked upon as mysterious. They are active participants in each of these schools. It's what makes each of these schools a place that I would want to send my own children."

"Each picture has connections. If you look closely, the children in them are all linked to each other. I think this is tell-tale of the types of programs we have in my school. We are as successful with special education as we are because as a staff, we are connected to one another. And our kids are all connected."

"I agree that connectedness is important, but I think it is also about the individuality. Each student in the pictures have individual personalities and individual needs. I like to think that the programs that have are tailored to the individual needs of the student. We don't take the 'one size fits all' approach. Making the education fit the student is what we strive for."

APPENDIX VIII

Weblog Posting Probes

What can we learn from each other?

"What can we learn from each other? We can learn that each child who walks through our doors is an individual and special. We need to look at their individual needs to help them become successful students in our learning environments. It is important to talk with their parents and the student to find out their goals for a successfu future and to do everything we can to help them meet those goals."

"Hopefully we learn that each of us is a student and a teacher. It does not matter what our role is (teacher or student) and successful intervention relies on the development of a positive and interactive relationship between the two. Trust and respect and crucial in the learning environment."

"We can learn both good and bad from each other. Ideally, we are learning to accept each other as individuals. And at the same time, to collectively improve who we are as a community."

What forms does advocacy take?

"Advocacy looks like learning as much as we can about student learning styles and strengths. It is important for us to help all students feel that they are a part of the school. We need to make changes in curriculum delivery if necessary to met a child's needs. We need to read and understand about their disability so that we can help others understand why they are apart of our learning environment."

"Advocacy takes many forms. At times it means being honest with parents when we might otherwise temper our words. It means having the teacher try the behavior plan that takes extra time and effort. It means treating each student differently is the key to treating them fairly. It means never giving up on the child, and the hopes and dreams the parent has invested in that child's future."

"Advocacy takes numerous forms: The form of the parent trying to understand the system and help their child, the administrator providing and supporting programs, the teacher facilitating programs and ultimately the student advocating for what they need to be successful. In a larger context, taxpayers can be advocates in the form of funding and advocating policy makers."

What things concern participants when working with special education?

"We all have concerns about curriculum decisions, developmentally appropriate, student's family life and it's affects on school, meeting the needs of all children and state testing. Are we making the right decisions for our special needs students? How do we meet state mandates and still meet the social/emotional and learning needs of our students. We need to evaluate our decisions and hope that we are doing the right thing for all our students."

"I'm concerned with balancing the needs, but it depends on the participants. Often, each member of a referral team will have slightly (or very) different perspectives on what is needed. Parents may worry about children being stigmatized, classroom teachers are concerned with meeting the needs of a child and getting them help, and special education staff are concerned about addressing the disability through goals."

"Labels. Often people fear a negative stigma being attached to them when they are working with special education. This could be the stigma of the teacher that can not "cross-over" to general education, professionals that become labeled as federal and most often the student who is seen as "sped." Finding a balance in this regard concerns me the most."

What gaps/tensions are common to all participants?

"The gaps or tensions expressed by each of these pictures and narratives is the concern to meet all students needs responsibly. We are learners everyday by our observations of the students and staff as they interact with each other. As administrators, we must use those observations to determine whether we need to change something in the learning environment, provide professional development to create an opportunity for better staff understanding or have conversations with students and/or parents to see if they have concerns or ideas. We are always looking for ways to better meet everyone's needs - students, staff, and parents."

"The tensions or gaps common appear are a genuine concern to meet the needs of special learners. Often, tension arises when teachers feel they are giving their all and not making progress. Students also experience tension through their everyday learning struggles and relationships with peers. They want badly to be "normal." Always trying to do what is right to meet the needs of the child is key, and keeps the adults focused on what is truly important- the child."

"One large tension that I hear is that "there is no special education world." The tension from the perceived double-standard, in particular when it comes to behavior, between what is acceptable and what gets you in trouble.

APPENDIX VIV

Audit Trail

	Transcriptions	Photovoice	Shadowing/Documentation
Data Managing	* Each principal will have it's own file. Copies of transcriptions will be kept in it.	* All pictures and posting will be sorted as to individual principals.	* Documentation gathered via the shadowing will be kept in the individual principals file. * Field notes taken after each shadow.
Reading, memoing	* Transcriptions will be read. Notes in margins made. * Initial codes will be generated (such as tensions, sense making, ethic of care, justice, effective strategies, etc.) * memos of thoughts will be written after each session.	* Notes made in the print out of participants posting. * Use the codes established with transcriptions. May change/elaborate codes. * Note pictures in codes.	* Notes made in the margains of field notes. * Make copies of documentation if possible. Write notes on copies. * Use initial codes
Describing	* Build a profile/picture of the each context. * Begin to describe meaning for each context.	* Build a profile/picture of the each context. * Begin to describe meaning for each context.	* Build a profile/picture of the each context. * Begin to describe meaning for each context.
Classifying	* Categorical aggregation (collection of instances to draw meaning from) * Create common categories	* Photovoice prompts used for categorical aggregation. * Add to categories.	* Use field notes and memos for categorical aggregation. * Add to/refine common categories.
Interpreting	* Naturalistic generalizations created	* Direct interpretation of the instances given by the photographs and the writings. * Naturalistic generalizations created	* Gathered artifacts used for direct interpretation. * Naturalistic generalizations created

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