

SEEING THE FRACTAL: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING  
SUSTAINABLE CHANGE IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

A Dissertation  
by  
JODI LEDBETTER GRUBB

Submitted to the Graduate School  
Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

August 2016  
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program  
Reich College of Education

SEEING THE FRACTAL: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING  
SUSTAINABLE CHANGE IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

A Dissertation  
by  
JODI LEDBETTER GRUBB  
August 2016

APPROVED BY:

---

Michael J. Marlowe, Ph.D.  
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee

---

Susan M. Pogoloff, Ph.D.  
Member, Dissertation Committee

---

Rose Marie Matuszny, Ph.D.  
Member, Dissertation Committee

---

Sara Olin Zimmerman, Ph.D.  
Member, Dissertation Committee

---

Kathleen T. Brinko, Ph.D.  
Member, Dissertation Committee

---

Audrey Dentith, Ph.D.  
Director, Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

---

Max C. Poole, Ph.D.  
Dean, Cratis Williams Graduate School

Copyright by Jodi Ledbetter Grubb 2016  
All Rights Reserved

## **Abstract**

### SEEING THE FRACTAL: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY EXPLORING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS. (August 2016)

Jodi Ledbetter Grubb

B.A., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

M.A., Appalachian State University

Ed.D., Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Michael Marlowe, Ph.D.

Research indicates that although much is known about how to implement successful inclusion and why it is worth implementing in the first place, general education students and special education students have remained in predominantly separate classrooms for over three decades. This qualitative collective case study is designed to explore what would make it worth the commitment and effort of stakeholders to sustainably and successfully merge compartmentalized school settings into more holistic learning environments.

Seeking to understand the multiple perspectives of 18 study participants from six different rural public school settings in a holistic manner provided insight into facilitating meaningful inclusion for all students. Participants included school administrators, a special education teacher, general education teachers, parents of students from both general education and special education, and one general education student. The data collection method was in-depth interviews.

This research is multi-layered in theory, which guided data analysis. At its core, is the idea that an exploration of shared experiences in inclusive settings may collectively

broaden our perspectives of how we fit together within a larger context. This exploration was positioned within the conceptual framework of change leadership. Data revealed inclusion as an adaptive challenge involving adjustments in attitudes and values. In response to a gap in the literature, this study begins directly linking theories of successful organizational change under complex conditions to tensions surrounding inclusion. The outer layer situates the whole study within three theories of new science, which exposes and challenges the prevalence of today's society to view education through a post-positivist lens.

Descriptive data and patterns emerging from this research contribute to the development of leadership strategies for proactively supporting inclusive settings rather than reactively dealing with frustrations that occur as classrooms become more integrated and less compartmentalized. Data reveal that gaining clarity of the whole—seeing the fractal of inclusion—is what makes it worth the frustration and challenge of change. Beyond proposing a grander perspective from which participants and readers can look *at* rather than *through* our current educational system, this research holds potential to inform educational policy. Recommendations and practical applications are offered for administrators and teachers seeking successful and sustainable inclusive settings. Further research possibilities are also explored.

## Acknowledgments

No words could ever express my gratefulness for the many people who fluttered their butterfly wings to make this journey possible for me. A special thanks to:

Scott, Sydney Kate, and Hallie, for believing in me and loving me. I believe in and love you back.

Mama, for being my person and showing me what a great leader looks like.

Daddy, for teaching me by example to always keep things in perspective.

Beth, for taking care of more people in a day than most of us take care of in a lifetime.

Pawpaw Puzie, for being my laughing place.

Greg, for our random text conversations. I always know you are there.

Alex, for being smart and willing to help. I am proud that you are my brother.

Hollie and Tiffany, for all the babysitting and cooking and cheerleading. I owe you both a lot.

Clyde, for being my favorite philosopher. I hope I grow up to be just like you.

Gary, for always showing up. I am glad that I am in one of your bands.

Jake, for being able to see the invisible. You will do the impossible.

Ann, for always making big ideas come to life and all our “Lucy and Ethel” adventures.

Holly, for getting the birds out of my hair. You are the best kind of friend.

Tina, for making me bread and for the prayers I know you keep in your heart for me.

Sandy, for helping me know that sometimes things that matter won't show up on a scoreboard.

Lucinda and Elaine, for zooming in on the details, so I could focus on the big picture.

Keith, for being my resident quantum physicist. Thanks for reading and talking with me.

Denise, for all the times I left you with kids to go study, and four seemed more like forty.

Bryan, for liking trees and dragonflies, and well, you know.

Janet, for the late night phone calls and texts and the best hug ever at that rest stop.

Jennifer, for your quantitative expertise and for sharing chips, cheese dip, and  
encouragement.

Cohort 17 and Dr. Vachel Miller, for teaching me how to seriously play. ~~YYYYY~~

Dr. Kathleen Brinko, Dr. Rose Marie Matuszny, and Dr. Sara Olin Zimmerman, for your  
patience, encouragement, and wisdom.

Dr. Michael Marlowe, for letting me build a chrysalis and find my own wings.

Dr. Susan Pogoloff, for being one of my heroes and for inspiring me to be the best I can be.

Most especially, thank you to all of my study participants, for sharing your time and your  
hearts.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my greatest teachers  
who thought they were my students.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Dedication.....	viii
List of Tables .....	xii
List of Figures.....	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Defining the Issue .....	1
Research Statement and Questions .....	7
Definition of Terms.....	7
Personal Connection to Research and Acknowledgment of Lenses as the Starting Point.....	9
Significance of the Study and Contributions .....	30
Organization of Chapters .....	33
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	35
Introduction.....	35
Historical Background.....	35
Inclusion and Continuum Debate.....	38
Research Controversy .....	41
Why Will Now Be Any Different: Current Conditions and Policy Shift .....	42
Conceptual Framework and Change Leader Literature .....	51

Chapter 3: Methodology .....	57
Qualitative Approach and Case Study Design.....	57
Strategy for Participant Selection .....	59
Data Collection Procedures.....	60
Introduction of Participants.....	65
Recurring Storylines .....	66
Conclusion .....	71
Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Interpretation .....	72
Introduction.....	72
Fractals and Strange Attractors .....	73
Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle .....	91
Butterfly Effect .....	141
Concluding Notes.....	170
Chapter 5: Findings and Recommendations .....	171
Introduction.....	171
Does the Process of Inclusion Strengthen Individuals’ Understanding of Commonality?.....	174
Does the Process of Inclusion Contribute to a Single Cohesive Unit in the Classroom?.....	177
Why Are Some Settings More Successful Than Others in Creating a Sense of Inclusion? .....	179
How Can Educational Leaders Support Sustainable Change in Inclusive Settings? .....	182

Study Limitations and Strengths .....	188
Study Implications .....	189
Recommendations for Further Research.....	190
Conclusion and Resolve.....	191
References.....	194
Appendix A: Lay Summary .....	203
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form.....	205
Appendix C: Interview Questions.....	206
Vita.....	212

## **List of Tables**

Table 1. Overview of Roles and Storylines .....	70
---	----

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1. Research Design.....	5
--------------------------------	---

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Defining the Issue**

Stephen King (2000) says, “Stories are relics, part of an undiscovered preexisting world. The writer’s job is to use the tools in his or her toolbox to get as much of each one out of the ground intact as possible” (p. 164). Every tool in my toolbox looks quite worn after trying to “unearth” the story of inclusion that I believe I am called to explore and share. What I discovered, after a lot of digging, is that “my” story is only a tiny piece of “our” story. At first glance, our combined stories appear random and chaotic, but when we step back more and more of the bigger picture is visible. It becomes apparent that the stories fit together quite precisely and, in fact, are dependent upon one another. By design, schools are typically quite compartmentalized. Teachers, as well as students, are isolated by classrooms, subjects, abilities, and specialty areas. Such separation from one another causes us to judge situations solely by our own experience without access to a grander perspective. Fullan (2008), suggests that:

Identifying with an entity larger than oneself expands the self, with powerful consequences. Enlarged identity and commitment are the social glue that enable large organizations to cohere.... When teachers within a school collaborate, they begin to think not just about “my classroom” but also about “our school.” (p. 49)

Beyond that, we begin to think about our community and our world. This research reveals that inclusion—the practice of including all learners in the regular public school classroom—is more than a process; it is an attitude that demands a change of perception. This study

allows educators the opportunity to view their role in this organizational system from the outside in, rather than the inside out. Three tools proved especially instrumental in the development of this study—a pilot project conducted in 2010, immersion in relevant literature, and a deep exploration of conflicting philosophies throughout my doctoral program.

Typical of qualitative research, my pilot project—essentially dealing with inclusion-related tensions—generated more questions than answers. The project focused on how to implement successful inclusion but evolved into a search for why we should strive for inclusion in the first place. Due to federal and state guidelines concerning what it means to be “highly qualified” in the field of education, the role of special education teachers is changing. These shifts in policy are, in effect, mandating inclusive classrooms. In theory and spirit, this is a positive change. In practice, many factors contribute to this being extremely problematic.

I expected to reveal that the main source of tension revolved around how to implement inclusion effectively. What I uncovered is that adaptive, sustainable change – above and beyond implementing technical changes – is imperative. In *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow (2009) make the distinction between technical and adaptive leadership challenges. The solution to technical problems involves applying what is already known. In contrast, adaptive challenges involve adjustments in attitudes, values, and behaviors in order to thrive in a new environment. Fullan (2011) adds further clarity on adaptive challenges: “It is not that the problem is mysterious; it is more that helping people discover and embrace change is socially complex. Adaptive challenges and social complexity are one and the same” (p. 18). My pilot project convinced me that tensions

and challenges in inclusive settings are much more adaptive than technical. Although school personnel require training to make inclusion work, the “technical” issues – such as differentiating instruction and developing a repertoire of teaching strategies – do not deviate very far from what is necessary for effective teaching in general. After interviewing several regular education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators, I was most impressed not by what educators were able to express, but rather what they could not express. When posed with the question of what general education students could gain from inclusion very few answers surfaced. For most participants, this was a new concept to consider; students with support needs were the ones seen as beneficiaries of inclusion; access to richer content and socially appropriate models came up frequently. I believe most people had a difficult time responding because the answer to this question is not one that can be taught, but must be experienced. From an “inside-out” perspective of a general education teacher, the struggle to create this new environment may not seem worth the effort. At this point, my questioning shifted from “how” to “why.”

Confident that I was finally on the right track, my literature review soon presented another viewpoint allowing me to see inclusion from yet another angle. Looking back, my search for relevant literature also began from an “inside-out” perspective. I began by examining the policy shift I was experiencing at the time, as well as what I now consider the “technical issues” of inclusion. Before long, I had situated the current policy shift within its legal history. I became aware of ongoing, passionate epistemological debates that seem to be at a thirty-year standstill. I reviewed current practices and the resistance to change. Again, as my perspective broadened, my questions changed. Information on the “how” of inclusion, as well as the “why” is readily available for those who seek it. Despite this, with few

exceptions, classrooms remain relatively unchanged for the past three decades. As I continued to explore why some schools seem to be more successful at easing tensions involved in merging regular education and special education than others, I was drawn more and more toward change leadership literature. I found myself viewing inclusion from the perspective of leadership in a culture of change. My new central question was not, “how” or “why,” but “what” would make stakeholders want to discover and implement changes necessary to make inclusion successful? This study reveals that gaining a more holistic view of education as opposed to the predominant compartmentalized view is key.

While collecting and analyzing data, it became increasingly apparent to me how school in today’s western society is most prevalently viewed through a post-positivist lens that colors and limits our way of knowing. In order to foster a necessary change of perception in stakeholders, this tendency must first be exposed. Prior to immersion in my doctoral program, I never thought about personally looking “at” the lenses I look “through.” As I tried to find the language for exploring sustainable change in inclusive settings, I kept coming back to the theories that enabled me to explore, explain, and enlarge my own worldview. St. Pierre (2011) proposes the deconstruction of knowledge that we unconsciously use to form opinions and make decisions; she proclaims:

If we don’t read the theoretical and philosophical literature, we have nothing much to think with during analysis except normalized discourses that seldom explain the way things are. However, when we study a variety of complex and conflicting theories, which I believe is the purpose of doctoral education, we begin to realize as Fay (1987) suggested, *that we have been theorized*, that we and the world are products of

theory as much as practice, and that putting different theories to work can change the world (p. 614).

In *Plugging One Text Into Another: Thinking With Theory in Qualitative Research*, Jackson and Mazzei (2013) reiterate this notion saying, “We have tried to illustrate our reliance on theory to shake us out of the complacency of seeing/hearing/thinking as we always have, or might have, or will have” (p. 269).

Therefore, this research became multi-layered in theory. The following diagram is helpful in visualizing how the non-linear research design of this study ultimately reveals that gaining clarity of the whole is what makes it worth the commitment and effort required to sustainably and successfully merge general and special education.

Figure 1. Research Design



At its core, stemming from personal experience, my pilot project, and relevant literature is the idea that an exploration of shared experiences in inclusive settings may broaden our perspectives so that we are able to see the beauty, intricacy, and perfectness of how we fit together within a larger context. The center of this diagram reveals the compartmentalization of stakeholders within our current post-positivist lens. It is representative of “the way things are.”

The middle layer signifies what this study reveals as necessary for moving from compartmentalization in education to holism: a change in perception – an expansion of our collective lens. By examining theories of successful organizational change under complex conditions, in relation to tensions surrounding inclusion, educational leaders can more proactively set the stage for success. Having a vision is a great place to start, but “a vision without a strategy remains an illusion” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 215). This layer represents a gap this study attempts to fill by linking what is known about leadership in a culture of change directly to inclusion. Data indicate ways to specifically apply change leadership in theory and practice to the process of restructuring for more meaningful inclusive school settings.

The outer layer represents a more holistic view of education as seen through three specific theories of new science: Fractals and Strange Attractors, Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, and the Butterfly Effect. Each of these theories and their relevance to this study will be further developed in the following sections. This layer represents the attempt of this research to unsettle our combined assumptions that the way we see things within our own contexts is complete. Lines and boxes drawn around stakeholders are challenged and an underlying interdependence among them is exposed.

## Research Statement and Questions

In this interpretive study, 18 administrators, teachers, parents, and/or students from six different rural public school settings in the southeastern United States were interviewed in order to understand and explore the process that leads to adaptive change in inclusive settings. Four questions are central to my research:

1. Does the process of inclusion strengthen individuals' understanding of commonality?
2. Does the process of inclusion contribute to a single cohesive social unit in the classroom?
3. Why are some classroom settings more successful than others in creating a sense of inclusion?
4. How can educational leaders support sustainable inclusive settings?

## Definition of Terms

**Butterfly effect.** A term made famous by Edward Lorenz, a meteorologist in the early 1960s, who called attention to this “law of sensitive dependence on initial conditions.” Although classical science leads us to believe small differences average out and that the universe is unaffected by slight changes, Lorenz proved, through a series of computerized equations, that something as seemingly insignificant as a butterfly flapping its wings on one side of the planet could cause a tornado on the other side of the world (Andrews, 2009; Wheatley, 2006).

**Chaos theory.** Chaos theory, the study of nonlinear dynamics, reveals that systems—no matter how complex—rely upon an underlying order. Weather systems, which are affected by the behavior of all the molecules that make up the earth’s atmosphere, are

examples of such complexity. Chaos theory also stresses the idea that simple or small systems and events can generate very complex behaviors and events (Wheatley, 2006).

**Fractal.** A fractal is any of an infinite number of objects, natural or man-made, that display self-similarity at increasingly larger and smaller scales. Through magnifications of more than a billion, the same forms are evident providing a glimpse into infinity (Wheatley, 2006).

**Inclusion.** In this study, like Sailor (2009), I conceive of inclusion as the practice of including all learners in the regular public school classroom. Presently, most students with disabilities are offered a continuum of services and supports in environments becoming increasingly restrictive and removed from the general classroom based on the intensity of need. The push is toward providing these supports for students within an integrated classroom (Sailor, 2009).

**Post-positivism.** “Post-positivism is referred to frequently as ‘the scientific method,’ ‘quantitative research,’ or ‘empirical science’ ” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 8). It refers to a school of thought maintaining that knowledge can only be obtained through logical inferences and careful measurement based on direct observation and that things are always what they seem as perceived through our senses (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Wheatley, 2006).

**Strange attractor.** The ordered shape of chaos that becomes visible as a distinct pattern emerging on a computer screen as chaotic movements are plotted in multiple dimensions over time (Wheatley, 2006). The shape of chaos, more aptly referred to as the “shape of wholeness” by Briggs and Peat (1989), takes form through the process of iteration

and feedback. These breathtaking images vividly reveal chaotic systems are not really indeterminate, just astoundingly complex (Zohar & Marshall, 1994).

**Thinking with theory.** In *Plugging One Text Into Another: Thinking With Theory in Qualitative Research*, Jackson and Mazzei (2013) describe “plugging one text into another” as a way of thinking *both* “methodologically *and* philosophically” (p. 261). This analytical strategy involves utilizing various theoretical perspectives through which to view common qualitative data.

**Uncertainty Principle.** Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle is one of the most fundamental discoveries in quantum theory. Classical physicists argued for years whether photons, the basic constituents of light, were particles or waves – two entirely different phenomena. Heisenberg’s revolutionary discovery revealed that while we are condemned to see only one at a time, the answer is decidedly both. Findings are dependent on the type of experiment conducted. A scientist seeking to measure a photon’s exact position is left with only a fuzzy reading of its momentum. Likewise, a person measuring a photon’s momentum is unable to determine an exact position (Zohar & Marshall, 1994).

### **Personal Connection to Research and Acknowledgment of Lenses as the Starting Point**

My personal journey is included as part of this introduction because it speaks to the importance and necessity of adding theories of new science to the conceptual framework for this study. This research reveals inclusion as not only a process, but also an attitude demanding a change of perception. Similarly, for me, the process of becoming a researcher through my doctoral studies demanded a change of perception. In order for my perception to change, I had to take a hard look *at* the post-positivist lens *through* which I viewed the world. Before stakeholders can enlarge their view, they must likewise acknowledge and understand

this lens through which most of us in today's society currently perceive education. This section explains and explores post-positivism through my personal experiences, as well as defines the scientific theories this research proposes as a new lens through which to view education. It is the nonlinear starting point for evolving feedback that reveals the fractal of inclusion.

As I analyzed data and salient themes and patterns began to emerge, it became more and more apparent that finding myself as a researcher paralleled many experiences of interview participants. *Blue Like Jazz*, a philosophical and spiritual self-examination by Donald Miller (2003) opens with, "I never liked jazz music because it doesn't resolve." The author relates a short anecdote about observing a man playing the saxophone outside a theater. The musician didn't open his eyes for fifteen minutes.

After that [Miller says] I liked jazz music. Sometimes you have to watch somebody love something before you can love it yourself. It is as if they are showing you the way. I used to not like God because God didn't resolve. But that was before any of this happened. (p. ix)

When I began this doctoral program, I had no idea that becoming a researcher meant first undergoing a very stringent philosophical and spiritual self-examination of my own.

Adyashanti (2012) says, "The primary task of any good spiritual teaching is not to answer your questions but to question your answers" (p. ix). I have grown to believe that this is the primary task of any good teaching. I used to be afraid to question things too deeply. I was afraid things wouldn't resolve. But that was before any of this happened.

**My personal journey.** Kegan and Lahey (2009) assert “a way of knowing becomes more complex when it is able to *look at* what before it could only *look through*” (p.51). I began this educational experience looking *through* the lenses of some pretty thick glasses. I really never paid much attention to them sitting right there on my nose coloring my perspective on everything. I grew up with them. They felt natural. For all of us, the world comes into focus through lenses that have been adjusted to fit our own personal DNA, culture, and experiences. Maugham (1944) suggests:

Men and women are not only themselves; they are also the region in which they were born, the city apartment or farm in which they learned to walk, the games they played as children, the old wives’ tales they overheard, the food they ate, the schools they attended, the poems they read, and the God they believed in. (p.82)

Although none of our lenses could ever be identical, for the most part, I interacted with people whose vision was very close to my own. We wore the same white, American, Christian, middle-class prescription. So, there never was much need to notice them or explain them to others or even myself.

Every once in a while, I had to wrinkle my nose and squint through my glasses when I bumped into someone whose view of the world was different than my own. I am a special education teacher because of one such collision with a little boy considered severely and profoundly disabled. He was non-ambulatory, non-verbal, and non-compliant. I became a first-hand witness to how a simple communication device eased his frustrations and gave him a way to begin expressing all that was trapped in his beautiful mind. Because of him, physical appearance no longer limits my perception of a person. Although, on occasion, I allowed certain people, ideas, and experiences to adjust my prescription ever so slightly; for

the most part, I remained blissfully unaware I was seeing through glasses in the first place. Until, this doctoral program called them starkly to my attention. At first, it was unsettling to even reach up and feel for them and frightening to think about taking them off. I was afraid of losing my balance, but looking back I learned, “growth demands a temporary surrender of security” (Sheehy, 1976, p. 353).

I remember an assignment early on to write a blog about our emerging research identity. I used the metaphor of a chrysalis. A cohort member posted the following comment. I have thought about it often.

This reminds me of a teacher I once had. Dr. Schmidt was an old nun who brought her dog to class every day. She was a neurophysiologist, interested in the nature of consciousness, and was a delightful sort of rebel in her own unique way. When she taught the concept of “bifurcation point,” she used the metaphor of the chrysalis. She said there is a point in metamorphosis where the entity inside is neither caterpillar nor butterfly, but simple “mush”—as she called it—pure potential. M.C. Richards referred to a similar idea. She talked about the “crossing point,” such as in a plant, where a fine membrane (one cell thick) of intelligence separates the growth of a shoot upward toward the sun, and the growth of roots into the earth. This is a great, creative place to be. (personal communication, October 29, 2011)

I chose this metaphor without realizing how truly fitting it would become. Many sleepless nights, the word “mush” summed it up quite well—an exciting, wonderful, pressure-filled, uncomfortable place to be. Searching for resolve. Pure potential.

As I examined my convictions alongside those of others and took a hard look *at my* personal lenses rather than *through* them, I emerged from my chrysalis not any less of

myself, but more. A much broader perspective developed, along with new ways to get around and make sense of the world. I still mattered, but only as part of a much bigger, grander picture. Indeed, “our way of knowing becomes more complex when we create a bigger system that incorporates and expands on our previous system” (Kegan & Lehay, 2009). This process happened slowly, in stages.

At first, realizing a sheer plethora of philosophical paradigms even existed was freeing. My qualitative mind finally understood a lifelong dread of school science fairs. If only I had known in seventh grade to say I was epistemologically opposed to them. However, my new excitement was mixed with an almost intangible feeling of having been cheated or held back. My reaction was not unlike how Dorothy must have felt when Toto pulled back the curtain revealing the “great and powerful” Oz was just an ordinary man from Omaha, Nebraska. Never could I recall learning anything in school—and even more unsettling, even in church—that was not presented objectively. As I wrote this dissertation, it became impossible to examine the process of change without referring back to concepts that changed my own patterns of thought. While drawing conclusions and finding resolution in seemingly conflicting data, it became not only useful, but also necessary to sort through the following ideologies that led to my own personal resolve.

**Wrestling with post-positivism.** Until this program, I looked *through* post-positivism. I was immersed in today’s society where our whole perception of reality is based on seventeenth century “modern” science (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010; Wheatley, 2006). Despite advances, the idea that knowledge can only be obtained through direct observation and that things are always what they seem as perceived through our senses remains hegemonic. This frame of reference stresses a single way of looking at things. A hypothesis

is either true or false—an action either good or bad. There is an absolute truth and one way to experience it.

The greatest figure still associated with this worldview is Isaac Newton and his formulation of the fundamental laws of physical reality. At the core of traditional physics are individual, isolated atoms reacting predictably to applied forces. Newton’s mechanistic view of the universe—one of fixed, working parts in which laws of interaction are strictly determined—became a model for Western society (Wheatley, 2006; Zohar & Marshall, 1994). Guided by a firmly objective epistemology and absorbed with expectations of clockwork regularity, philosophers, political thinkers, and sociologists followed in his wake. Most disciplines readily accepted the view that empirical knowledge was not only essential to science, but also that empirical research methods were necessary for “describing and discovering the lawful regularities of phenomena such as human behavior, learning, communities, and social institutions” (Paul, 2005, p.4). This view of the world – one with well-defined edges – gave rise to the industrial revolution and the age of mass production. Organizations ran like great machines, fitting people into place with very specific functions, limited responsibilities, and varying levels of importance and authority. Knowledge was separated into disciplines, offices divided into distinct spaces, and schools compartmentalized into subject areas, grade levels, and ability levels. Three centuries later, boundaries remain prevalent. We are conditioned to view the world from very narrowed perspectives. “We have reduced and described and separated things into cause and effect, and drawn the world in lines and boxes” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 29.). We have drawn even ourselves into lines and boxes. Although Newtonian mechanics still greatly contribute to

scientific advances, due to the discovery of a strange new world at the sub-atomic level, it is becoming increasingly apparent that studying fragments does little to reveal the whole.

I am reminded of the story of the six blind men and their unwavering descriptions of the elephant. Based on direct observation, they each walk away with a different conclusion equally convinced of their knowledge. One man examines the trunk and professes the animal is snake-like. Another finds the tusk and argues that the animal is most like a spear. A third kneeling on his knees gropes a thick leg and envisions the trunk of a tree. Likewise, the tail is compared to a rope and the ear, a fan. After falling into the elephant's side, the last man insists the beast is most like a sturdy wall. Although each man was partly right, they all were ultimately in the wrong. Perhaps Mark Twain said it best, "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so."

**Questioning my answers.** So, I reached for my glasses. I didn't let go of them; they were part of me, but I pushed them back on top of my head and let fuzzy images of new philosophical perspectives come into focus. I began to question. The idea that knowledge might be discovered subjectively resonated within me. Rarely are things in my classroom what they seem. As Paul (2005) suggests, "There is no such thing in the natural social world, as a 'controlled variable'.... Nor do we seem able, with conventional science, to counteract the effects of poverty, motivation, or other human failures on schooling" (p.61). In other words, people are messy. Based strictly on direct observation, my students are limited. However, I have witnessed non-verbal students communicate and become literate, non-ambulatory students become active participants in the world around them; and once, I realized incredulously a twelve-year-old girl, presumed blind, could see. Over the years, my most meaningful individual and group revelations have formed by drawing commonalities

from seemingly random, isolated behaviors that tend to show up again and again from student to student.

Traditionally, social science describes only what perception causes us to believe. Based on these descriptions, we predict and measure in order to control situations and our environment. Truths are created based on what our senses reveal. However, it is imperative to always consider that, at best we only perceive in part. Measuring inevitably narrows our focus. In all probability, relevant information is lost. How many times do we walk away from the elephant satisfied with discovering only minimal knowledge of its trunk? It is my observation that until another point of view is experienced, a person's perception is definitely his or her reality.

I remember becoming almost giddy at the realization that research was not limited to following the “scientific method” and collecting quantitative data. I was drawn to paradigms in which knowledge was constructed. Instead of being a spectator, researchers could be agents and participants. I could pour my efforts into revealing and casting light on issues—transforming and empowering, as opposed to predicting and controlling. Rather than seeking to prove or disprove hypotheses, I could seek to make connections and illuminate as many points of view as possible as indicated in the following anecdote Paul (2005) cites of Kaplan.

He recounts the well-known example of an inebriated man looking for his lost car keys under a streetlight because the area around the light was the only area where he could see. That is, we are guided by the lights of the logic we use but those lights are of little help in seeing other possible constructions. (p. 6)

My enthusiasm, however, quickly turned to something more like apprehension. Although closely examining my own epistemological perspective left me inspired, an internal

conflict arose at the mere thought of entertaining deeply personal, ontological questions. This happened about the time I was testing my vision through a post-structural lens. The view was mesmerizing. Of particular importance to me is making visible what are often intangible connections between special education and regular education revealing an underlying interdependence and need for one another. I became intrigued with the concept of binary opposition and how hierarchical implications of dominance surface simply by seeing two terms side by side – rich/poor, black/white, male/female, presence/absence, civilized/uncivilized, regular education/special education.... Discourse concerning the deconstruction of such binaries was my first grasp of the concept that the world did not necessarily have to be understood in terms of “either/or,” but “both/and” was a distinct possibility. Rich conversations exposing meaning and values of opposing terms did not lead to their synthesis, but rather marked their difference in a way that brought out symbiotic connections.

As my concept of knowledge evolved, I became uncomfortably conscious of the fact that virtually every school of thought heralding subjective epistemologies, likewise proclaimed the construction of reality. Bilton (2002) confirms, “Oddly, the last people in the humanities who are still talking about ‘absolute truth’ are the Post-Structuralists in the business of demolishing it” (p. 11). Hard questions were emerging. I ignored them. I was afraid things would not resolve. However, it became increasingly clear that dealing with such daunting questions was unavoidable. They were not going away. I had ventured too far. Spencer (2000) draws the following line:

For any theory that we have about what knowledge is, we must have a presupposition about what the world is like. That is, we must assume that the world exists in such a

way that it makes our theory of knowledge possible. There is no escaping having a theory of ontology; it is only a question of whether or not it is consciously acknowledged and studied or whether it is left as an implicit presupposition of one's theory of epistemology. (para. 7)

Although I was realizing how presumptuous it is for any of us to believe we were lucky enough to be born in exactly the right little corner of the world where we got it all exactly right the first time, I could not just let go of the elephant. There had to be one. Parts of it had been discovered. I had touched it myself. I still believed in and needed an absolute truth—the problem was merging a subjective epistemology with an objective ontology. The Newtonian view of the way the world exists, instilled in me from birth, made the two seem incompatible. I was unnervingly stuck between “either/or.” Although Western society seems intent on drawing hard lines between science and religion, creating yet another binary; it was at this point that I realized I could not separate my spirituality from my ontological perspective as a researcher. I had to choose between subjectivity and objectivity or find a way to erase the lines. Wheatley, (2006), captures my dilemma, “When our worldview doesn't work any longer and we feel ourselves sinking into confusion, of course we feel frightened. Suddenly, there is no ground to stand on.... The world appears incomprehensible, chaotic, lacking rationality” (p. xi).

**My turning point.** Later, as I learned of a new philosophical paradigm emerging from the radically new science of the twentieth century, I would find I was in good company. In *The Turning Point*, Capra (1983) reveals that Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr, founders of quantum theory, dealt with the same disconcerting confusion during early atomic experiments. “Their problem,” he says, “was not only intellectual, but involved an intense

emotional and existential experience” (p. 76). He goes on to quote Heisenberg as saying, “The violent reaction to the recent development of modern physics can only be understood when one realizes that here the foundations of physics have started moving; and that this motion has caused the feeling that the ground would be cut from science.” (p. 7677). I took solace in Heisenberg’s ultimate declaration as cited by Hildebrand (1988), “The first gulp from the glass of natural sciences will turn you into an atheist, but at the bottom of the glass God is waiting for you.”

Despite a lifetime conditioning me to be content as a recipient of knowledge, I slowly became a questioner. I found out, not only was the ground still under my feet, there was also stability over my head and all around me. Outside the lines and boxes, my new view of reality was more dazzling, chaotic, precise, multi-dimensional, and absolute than I could have ever imagined. I began to learn the freedom of dialogue versus debate. In his powerful memoir *Night*, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize recipient, Elie Weisel recounts the words of his childhood mentor; “Man comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him.... Therein lies true dialogue.... I pray to the God within me for the strength to ask Him the real questions” (Weisel, Mauriac, & Rodway, 1969, p. 5).

Although traditional, organized religion and old science often seem at a standoff, they both lean toward an absolute truth. If absolute truth exists, then it is inherently the same for everyone. It seems the more diligently truth is sought after by any means, the more of it will be revealed. Within a mechanistic “either/or” worldview, conversations of religion and science only lend themselves to debate. Only within a “both/and” perspective is true dialogue possible. Religion often interprets questioning as a lack of faith. Ledbetter (2013) in his personal search for truth states, “I don’t think it is fair for one to be labeled a doubter

when one is a questioner” (p.188). The doubter, he says, is one resolved to the doubt, while a questioner believes there is an answer. The author refers to the admonition of Jesus, as it applies to gaining wisdom, “Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7, New International Version). Three times in these words of instruction and promise, it is implied that the searcher must take the initiative—put forth effort, question, research and study. So, I began. My efforts not only led to personal resolve, but also a framework for making consonance out of the seemingly dissonant voices of my eighteen interview participants. I found a way to speak of unity expressed as diversity.

**Aligning with theories of new science.** I remember opening the pages of Margaret Wheatley’s *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, and feeling like I had climbed into a raft after treading water for a long time. The concepts that were first introduced to me through her words were the catalyst for changing my worldview so that my objective theory of reality—how I believe the world exists—could finally make my subjective theory of knowledge possible. Intentionally or not, seventeenth century Newtonian physics defined and shaped our collective social vision. It has been said, “The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.” If society continues to function in relation to the natural sciences, then it must at least begin aligning itself with the science of our times. Much has changed in regard to the perception of our universe. Discoveries and theories of new science reveal in the midst of its chaotic, ceaseless change an inherent orderliness, a deeply patterned nature, and a substantial web of connections (Hawking, 2010; Wheatley, 2006; Zohar & Marshall, 1994). It is only recently that modern philosophers,

political thinkers, and sociologists are applying new scientific discoveries and insights from the quantum world to everyday concerns about self and society. A few such discoveries in particular helped define my personal worldview as well as provide the language necessary for exploring sustainable change in inclusive settings. These include Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, fractals and strange attractors, and the butterfly effect of Edward Lorenz. As Zohar and Marshall (1994) assert,

Real social transformation requires that we change our basic *categories* of thought, that we alter the whole intellectual framework within which we couch our experience and our perceptions. We must, in effect, change our whole "mindset," learn a whole new language. (p. 38)

Our current language for perceptions and attitudes about others and ourselves stems from a collective immersion in mechanistic thought where things have a definite position and identity. Matter is solid. We are accustomed to one-dimensional, linear measurements of space, time, and movement. Despite our comfort with this perspective, new science suggests some other, wholly different, nonlinear view of reality. It reveals reality as multi-dimensional.

"In the quantum world relationship is the key determiner of everything" (Wheatley, 2006, p.11). In fact, subatomic particles do not exist as independent entities. They come into form and can be observed only in relationship to something else. Just as context determines the meaning of homonyms (words that look the same, but have different meanings, such as "bat," and "saw"), subatomic particles change their nature according to their surroundings (Zohar & Marshall, 1994). One of the most fundamental discoveries in quantum theory is Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. Classical physicists argued for years whether photons,

the basic constituents of light, were particles or waves – two entirely different phenomenon. Heisenberg’s revolutionary discovery revealed that while we are condemned to see only one at a time, the answer is decidedly both. Findings are dependent on the type of experiment conducted. A scientist seeking to measure a photon’s exact position is left with only a fuzzy reading of its momentum. Likewise, a person measuring a photon’s momentum is unable to determine an exact position (Zohar & Marshall, 1994). Due to the observer not only interfering with such an observation, but also participating in its creation, beliefs of objective measurement are challenged. As cited by Pine, Heisenberg cautions, “What we observe is not nature in itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning” (Pine, 2013, para. 2). In other words, you get what you look for.

When applied to a new worldview, this basic principle of quantum reality calls the whole “either/or” way of thinking into question, and opens the door for “both/and.” Likewise, the Uncertainty Principle has huge implications for research on inclusion. While society, and schools in particular, make evaluations based on one-dimensional measurements, people are anything but linear. It is sobering to think about how confidently and quickly we can label an entire person, when something as microscopic as a photon defies categorization. The following insightful words come to mind: “Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid.” In an effort to maintain control, which is too often confused with order, we classify not only individuals, but also entire groups of people imposing on them a collective identity. In many instances history has proven that at best, this is restricting; at worst, it is debilitating and dangerous.

Chaos theory, the study of nonlinear dynamics, reveals that systems – no matter how complex – rely upon an underlying order. Weather systems, which are affected by the behavior of all the molecules that make up the earth’s atmosphere, are examples of such complexity. Since the Uncertainty Principle establishes that even a tiny particle cannot be precisely pinpointed, exact weather predictions are impossible. At first glance, this lack of predictability within Chaos theory offers little to a search for a more orderly universe. However, Wheatley (2006) describes just the opposite.

There is a constant weaving of relationships, of energies that merge and change, of momentary ripples that become noticeable within a seamless fabric. There is so much order that our attempts to separate out discrete events create the appearance of disorder. (p.22)

Despite its unpredictability, chaos has always partnered with order. However, not until modern computers could plot chaotic movements in multiple dimensions over time was this observable to scientists. Points of light on a computer screen track the evolution of chaotic systems. Lights that never seem to show up in the same spot twice, inevitably weave into a pattern. Order emerges as a distinct shape on the screen “evoking a feeling of awe in most who observe them” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 117). The resulting shape is known as a “strange attractor.” The shape of chaos, more aptly referred to as the “shape of wholeness” by Briggs and Peat (1989), takes form through the process of iteration and feedback. These breathtaking images vividly reveal chaotic systems are not really indeterminate, just astoundingly complex (Zohar & Marshall, 1994). Only by shifting our focus from “parts” to the “whole” can the inherent order of chaotic systems become visible. There is never a straight path to order, it displays itself as patterns that develop over time.

This same process of iteration and feedback results in the beautiful creation of fractals. A fractal is any of an infinite number of objects, natural or man-made, that display self-similarity at increasingly larger and smaller scales. Through magnifications of more than a billion, the same forms are evident providing a glimpse into infinity (Wheatley, 2006). Our universe is full of fractal forms, and their patterned splendor is evident in the way nature organizes clouds, rivers, seashells, many plants, and even our own lungs and circulatory system. In order to wrap our minds around the concept of a fractal, we must take in the whole. The closer it is examined, the less it is understood.

Since fractals resist definitive assessment by familiar tools, they require a new approach to observation and measurement. What is important in a fractal landscape is to note not quantity but *quality*. How complex is the system? What are its distinguishing shapes? How do its patterns differ from those of other systems? In a fractal world, if we ignore qualitative factors and focus on quantitative measures, we doom ourselves only to frustration. Instead of gaining clarity, our search for quantification leads us to infinite fogginess.... Deep inside the details we cannot see the whole. (Wheatley, 2006, p.125)

I remember exploring Mandelbrot and Julia set fractals on the computer screen for the first time. I was fascinated. I never knew math could evoke such beauty. As I watched the process of nonlinear iterative transformation unfold, my mind opened to see numbers in a whole new light. Stewart (1996) observes, “Mathematics is not about symbols and calculations.... Mathematics is about ideas” (p.2). As I zoomed in and out of the dazzling images, pattern within pattern within pattern took shape before my eyes. Each shape seemed to become more and more of what it was intended to be to start with. I began to imagine how

differently the fractal landscape would appear if I were looking *through* it rather than *at* it. At most, I could only appreciate a minute fraction of the wonder that encapsulated me. Others looking from within the same fractal would describe their surroundings much differently; none of us realizing it took all of our connected points of view to make up the complete whole.

Suddenly, my view of reality became fractal in nature allowing my world to exist in such a way that my theory of knowledge was made possible. Lines were erased; it no longer had to be “either/or.” I could make sense of *both* an objective ontology *and* a subjective epistemology. My ontological stance is that there is a reality – an absolute truth, but we all understand and perceive it within our own context. It is astonishingly more than we can take in from our limited perspectives. Our bodies and senses at once enable and limit what we can observe. As Zohar and Marshall (1994) assert, “There is just one reality, and we are all a part of it” (p. 13). It was in this thought, I found resolve. I believe there is a “strange attractor”, a shape of wholeness, pulling everything together. There seems to be instilled inside each of us, a collective desire to unlock the mysteries of the universe, the mysteries of life itself. “The desire to unlock these wonders has been, for centuries, the catalyst for research and development of discoveries and technologies that have greatly increased human comfort, knowledge, and happiness” (Ledbetter, 2013, p. 184). Perhaps this desire is pulling us toward becoming more and more of what we were intended to be to start with. To me, this “strange attractor” is God. It has been said that as knowledge increases, wonder deepens. I am inclined to agree with the sentiment of Miller (2003); “I don’t think there is any better worship than wonder” (p. 206).

I found the metaphor of fractals and strange attractors indispensable in providing the language needed to cast light on sustaining change in inclusive organizational settings. Wheatley (2006) stresses, “Fractal complexity originates in simplicity” (p. 126). In the case of computer-generated fractals, a simple equation is set in motion as the starting point for evolving feedback. As one solution is determined, it is fed back into the equation, so that another, different solution may develop. This process can continue infinitely at different levels of scale. Therefore, no single solution is important; complex shapes emerge only as millions of solutions are plotted. This concept has many implications for my research. It is phenomenal what dynamic, effective, and “whole” organizations emerge when an explicit, yet simply expressed parameter is set and its members are given the creative freedom to make sense of it in their own way.

Chaos theory also stresses the idea that simple or small systems and events can generate very complex behaviors and events. Edward Lorenz, a meteorologist in the early 1960’s, called attention to this “law of sensitive dependence on initial conditions” with his now famous “butterfly effect.” Although classical science leads us to believe small differences average out and that the universe is unaffected by slight changes, Lorenz proved, through a series of computerized equations, that something as seemingly insignificant as a butterfly flapping its wings on one side of the planet could cause a tornado on the other side of the world (Andrews, 2009; Wheatley, 2006). Andrews (2009) expounds, “Science has shown the butterfly effect to engage with the first movement of any form of matter – including people” (p.9). Not only does this concept reveal, at its core, that everything that makes up the universe is intrinsically dependent upon and connected to everything else, but also that every action matters exponentially. From a mechanistic point of view, it is

reasonable to simply get rid of or replace pieces that do not seem to fit or no longer appear useful. Imagine assuming that everything is supposed to fit. New science indicates a profound web of connections in which there are no disposable parts. Everyone serves a purpose, and we are less than we are meant to be without each other.

A human being is part of a whole, called by us the “universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. (Einstein, 2013)

Not only does this intriguing concept have profound implications for research on inclusion, it also sets the stage for innovative discussions of leadership.

**Searching for order.** Newton’s law of inertia exerts that objects have a natural tendency to resist changes in their state of motion and only do so when acted upon by an unbalanced force. Naturally, after centuries of mirroring such strictly determined laws of interaction, today’s mechanistic society has a tendency to do the same. Boundaries and binaries separate us from opposing points of view that might upset our individual states of motion. The lines and boxes we have drawn for ourselves seem to have backed us all into tight corners. Wheatley (2006) observes, “It is a world of increased fragmentation where people retreat into positions and identities” (p. xi). Recently, however, it seems more and more lines are being crossed. A mysterious force can be felt pushing and pulling on our “either/or” mentality, and a tendency to resist is all too readily apparent. It only takes turning

on the news, reading posts on any social media website, or even tuning in to Sunday morning sermons to observe one another in a defensive stance. I believe this exertion of force is globalization – “the increasingly interdependent nature of social life on our planet” (Steger, 2009, p. 1).

Never has there been a time of such economic, political, and cultural interdependence. Due to improved technology, such as the Internet, email, and mobile phones, as well as, improved transportation and global media, it is becoming increasingly difficult for opposing points of view not to collide. Chaos in such forms as wars, terrorism, pandemics, earthquakes, hurricanes, issues of race, and debates over sexual orientation is rampant. Looking *through* such turbulence is daunting; there is a sense of urgency. People representing every possible point of view are desperately seeking a way to maintain control. At such a pivotal point in our society, Wheatley (2006) offers a profound proposition, “What if we could reframe the search? What if we stopped looking for control and began, in earnest, the search for order? Order we find in places we never thought to look before.... The teachers are everywhere” (p. 25). Is it possible that our conditioned narrowed focus is blinding us to what is significant? As Einstein is often quoted as saying, the same kind of thinking that created problems cannot be used to solve them. Perhaps new science offers new insight. Although it is frightening to suspend a worldview, it is conceivable that we can at least begin to adjust our glasses. Even reaching up to notice we are wearing them in the first place could be equivalent to the flapping of butterfly wings and have far reaching effects. No matter our personal beliefs and experiences, humanity is our common denominator. Whether we like it or not, we are intrinsically interdependent. *Parade* magazine cites Wiesel as delivering the following anecdote:

A man is on a boat. He is not alone but acts as if he were. One night, he begins to cut a hole under his seat. His neighbors shriek: ‘Have you gone mad? Do you want to sink us all?’ Calmly he answers them: “I don’t understand what you want. What I’m doing is none of your business. I paid my way. I’m only cutting under my own seat.” What the fanatic will not accept, what you and I cannot forget, is that all of us are in the same boat. (Wiesel, 1992, p.4)

**Conclusion and connection to inclusive learning settings.** My personal journey to resolve could never have happened if I had refused to acknowledge my glasses. I did not get rid of them. It is because of them, I possess a perspective that enables me to offer a unique contribution to something much bigger than myself. Acknowledging them, however, allowed me to see that there was something much bigger than myself in the first place. Zohar and Marshall (1994) describe society as a “repository of skills, knowledge, and potential... not possessed by any one of its members” (p. 105). The authors reference Durkheim’s idea that a whole is not identical to the sum of its parts. It is something new. In order to draw from this abundant source of supply, we must learn to appreciate our underlying unity expressed as diversity. We must make an effort to get to know people different from ourselves. I believe in the midst of today’s turbulence, doing so will bring us closer to the shape of wholeness. Sapon-Shevin (2007) attests:

People who are different from us – whose differences we acknowledge and understand – help us realize that we aren’t the center of the universe and that other people’s experiences are equally valid. This ability to see the world through someone else’s lens greatly expands our ability to navigate in an increasingly complex world and to do so with skill and grace. (p. 25)

The nonlinear equation we must set in motion as the starting point for evolving feedback is how to make “many” equal to “one.” It does not have to be “either/or”; “both/and” is well within the realm of possibility. No single solution is important in and of itself; the ordered shape of chaos – the “strange attractor” can only emerge as millions of solutions are plotted. However, every seemingly insignificant action matters exponentially, so it is important that we each flap our wings. With the knowledge that a myriad of essential solutions exists to this equation, I will offer one as seen from lenses that have been adjusted to fit my personal perspective and experiences. This research is my contribution.

Although I did not have the language to describe it until recently, my classroom has taught me to trust in the process of iteration and feedback. Students are placed in my room because in a compartmentalized, mechanistic system, they do not seem to “fit” anywhere else. Year after year, no matter the needs, my assistant and I work creatively within the explicit, yet simply expressed parameters that we all belong, and we all can learn. There is never a straight path to order, but it inevitably displays itself in beautiful patterns that develop over time, often evoking a feeling of awe. I believe this can happen, in just the same way, in more inclusive environments.

I think people sometimes do not like inclusion because it does not seem to resolve. But that was before any of this happened...

### **Significance of the Study and Contributions**

Grasping the concept of what constitutes meaningful inclusion is difficult. Once again, I envision inclusion as fractal in nature; for its depth to be appreciated, it must be explored and experienced. Fractals metaphorically remind us that gaining clarity of “the

whole” is what makes it worth the commitment and effort teachers must put forth to overcome frustrations and challenges inclusion brings to their individual classrooms.

Of particular importance to me is to try to make visible what are often intangible connections between special education and general education allowing access to this bigger picture. By seeing “our stories” side by side, I feel it is possible to break down binaries and reveal an underlying interdependence and need for one another. I believe exploration of experiences and shared stories are the beginnings of changing compartmentalized classrooms into meaningful inclusive settings by offering a view of inclusion from different vantage points. By consciously choosing to highlight adaptive, sustainable change, beyond technical and mandated change, I believe this research may provide leadership strategies for proactively supporting inclusive settings rather than reactively dealing with frustrations and tensions that occur as classrooms become more integrated and less compartmentalized.

In *Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms*, Sapon-Shevin (2007) describes Jowonio, a school committed to full inclusion. She shares a poem capturing the profound value of exposure and relationships that happen when students experience the world from another point of view. It is worth sharing at length because it exemplifies what I hope to contribute through my research.

*What the Children of Jowonio Know*

*The children of Jowonio know – not because they have been told, but because they have lived it*

That there is always room for everyone – in the circle and at snack time and on the playground – and even if they have to wiggle a little to get another body in and even if they have to find a new way to do it, they can figure it out – and so it might be reasonable to assume that there's enough room for everyone in the world.

*The children of Jowonio know – not because they have been told, but because they have lived it*

That children come in a dazzling assortment of sizes, colors and shapes, big and little and all shades of brown and beige and pink, and some walk and some use wheelchairs but everyone gets around and that same is boring – and so it might be reasonable to assume that everyone in the world could be accepted for who they are.

*The children of Jowonio know – not because they have been told, but because they have lived it*

That there are people who talk with their mouths and people who talk with their hands and people who talk by pointing and people who tell us all we need to know with their bodies if we only listen well – and so it might be reasonable to assume that all people of the world could learn to talk and listen to each other.

*The children of Jowonio know – not because they have been told, but because they have lived it*

That we don't send people away because they are different or even because they're difficult, and that all people need support and that if people are hurting, we take the time to notice, and that words can build bridges and hugs can heal – so it might be reasonable to assume that all people on the planet could reach out to each other and heal the wounds and make a world fit for us all. (Sapon-Shevin, 2007, p. 237-238)

Based on tensions expressed in my own school, I agree that it is important at this pivotal point to help educators and policy-makers make sense of the changes that are taking place. Stakeholders must be allowed to express concerns and collaborate with each other to work through difficult issues. Otherwise, this model of inclusion is set up to fail. Heifetz et al. (2009) remind us, “Adaptive challenges are typically grounded in the complexity of values, beliefs, and loyalties rather than technical complexity and stir up intense emotions rather than dispassionate analysis” (p. 70). As we seek to understand the conceptions and misconceptions that educators hold of inclusion, we can make sense of how this understanding is influencing behaviors in the classroom.

### **Organization of Chapters**

In Chapter 1, I have defined the issue of tensions surrounding inclusion as an adaptive challenge requiring a change of perception, as well as introduced a multi-layered conceptual framework. I also presented my personal connection to the topic, the research statement and questions, significance, and contributions. In Chapter 2, I review the literature focusing on the historical background of inclusion, past and present controversies regarding the issue, a

current shift in policy and conditions, and leadership in a culture of complex change.

Chapter 3 is a description of the qualitative data collection techniques that I used to complete my study. Also in Chapter 3, I include the characteristics of qualitative research and features of the case study method. Chapter 4 consists of findings from data collection situated within three theories of new science. Chapter 5 is analysis of the study findings, guided by both the literature from Chapter 2 and my research questions. Chapter 5 also addresses the limitations of the study as well as possibilities for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I present the historical background of inclusion, which casts light on the difficulty of establishing common ground for inclusion among stakeholders. Roots of controversy that continue through today are exposed. Additionally, this literature review highlights current conditions and a shift in policy that hold potential for a more shared educational agenda. Finally, change leader literature is explored as a framework for navigating successful and sustainable inclusive settings.

### **Historical Background**

Prior to the mid-1970s, school districts in most states were allowed to refuse enrollment to students deemed “uneducable” by local school administrators. Between 1971 and 1973 two landmark court cases, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education*, sent a clear message that this was in direct violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. It was determined that students had a right to equal protection of the law without discrimination on the basis of disability, echoing the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), in regard to race. These cases guaranteed children could not be denied a public education because of mental, behavioral, physical, or emotional disabilities (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996; Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe, and Huerta, 2007; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). This concept, which became known as “zero reject,” was set in motion and came to fruition in subsequent federal rulings.

Due to further pressure from the courts, advocates, and parents, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) was passed in 1975. It was renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 and reauthorized in 1997 and 2004. The effects of this piece of legislation are perhaps the most far reaching in American educational history. “This dramatic legislative act brought into the educational system approximately 1 million students who were barred from public education solely on the basis of their disability” (Harkins, 2013, p.2). The act mandated a full, appropriate, public education (FAPE), in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for all students despite the severity of their disability. It gave parents strong due process rights to ensure that the individualized education plans (IEPs) of children with disabilities indeed met each student’s unique needs (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1998).

The educational rights of students with disabilities were further secured by two additional acts of legislation both prohibiting discrimination based solely on disability. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, at Section 504, prohibits such discrimination in any program or activity receiving federal assistance. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 states that individuals with disabilities, otherwise qualified, cannot be discriminated against in employment, public services, public accommodations, transportation, or telecommunications (Turnbull et al., 2007).

By 1976, all states had passed laws federally funding programs for students with disabilities. Many students with mild disabilities were integrated into general education classrooms based on the mainstreaming model of Lloyd Dunn (1968). However, programs for students considered to have the most significant disabilities were almost exclusively in separate settings, therefore establishing two different side-by-side systems (Winzer &

Mazurek, 2000). With leadership from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) of the U.S. Department of Education, the Regular Education Initiative (REI) of the 1980s marked the first time this dual system came under scrutiny. This initiative not only critiqued the separation of general education and special education, it also spotlighted duality within the special education field itself. Two parallel, but distinctly different, groups of advocates were on board with this movement. Both groups addressed IDEA's principle of Least Restrictive Environment—that all students should be educated with non-disabled peers to the fullest extent possible. However, each approached this concept from different perspectives. Fuchs and Fuchs (1998) divide supporters of the REI into the “high-incidence” and the “low-incidence” groups.

The high-incidence group represented students with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, and mild or moderate mental retardation – students with at least “a foot in the door” of general education. Their primary agenda was to coordinate and collaborate with general educators in order to strengthen the academic performance of these students, as well as others at risk for failure. This group of advocates set the REI in motion (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998).

The low-incidence group represented students with severe intellectual disabilities. Although they were along for the ride, the agenda of these advocates contrasted sharply with the primarily academic focus of those in the forefront. At the time of the REI, their main concern was integrating students with significant support needs into neighborhood schools. Socialization and attitudinal change were of primary concern. For the low-incidence group, collaborating with general education was much more an issue of social justice (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998).

This movement set the stage for debate. From an inside-out perspective it's hard to get past the binaries – special education vs. general education / low-incidence agendas vs. high-incidence agendas. Common ground for inclusion is hard to establish, much less a working definition. Winzer and Mazurek (2000) assert, “Inclusion means different things to different people, and no one interpretation matches the needs of all stakeholders in the process” (p. 6). It seems that advocacy groups define inclusion to fit the needs of a particular constituency.

It should be noted that mainstreaming, as well as REI, met with limited success. Many general educators resisted serving students with disabilities due to lack of training and fear of the unknown. Special educators lacked skills in collaboration and consultation necessary to offer support in the regular classroom (Harkins, 2013). These limitations can be attributed to tensions still prevalent thirty years later. Although legislative strides have been made, more recent litigation may prove to create greater impetus for real change. The challenge is for leaders to help passionate – yet independent – stakeholders gain an outside-in perspective in order to make visible a dependent entity.

### **Inclusion and Continuum Debate**

Turnbull et al. (2007) summarize current discourse on inclusion by stating that although it was once “the most contentious issue in IDEA” it is now generally agreed upon to be the most appropriate and effective approach to educating students with disabilities. Today, differing perspectives revolve around extent of support for the least restrictive environment and how to apply it in specific situations, not if such a policy should exist in the first place. However, “(t)he exact balance between inclusion and appropriateness (benefit) is still a much litigated issue” (Turnbull et al., 2007, p.247).

As in the 1980s, there is again a push for special education reform. In comparison to the REI, advocates of students with low incidence disabilities initiated the “Inclusive Schools Movement.” This movement is the cause of much controversy among educators, as well as educational researchers. Proponents of the movement call for full inclusion and firmly acknowledge that it necessitates a unified educational program with shared responsibility for general and special education (Davis, 1989). Although full inclusionists indeed call for radical change, Gallagher (1998) notes that in extraordinary circumstances, such as those involving extremely medically or psychiatrically fragile students, very few of even the most ardent supporters would argue in strictly absolutist terms (p. 638). Presently, most students with disabilities are offered a continuum of services and supports in environments becoming increasingly restrictive and removed from the general classroom based on the intensity of need. The push is toward providing these supports for students within an integrated classroom. Sailor (2009) lists the basic components of this model:

1. All students attend the school to which they would go if they had no disability.
2. A natural proportion (i.e., representatives of the school district at large) of students with disabilities occurs at any school site.
3. A zero-rejection philosophy exists so that typically no student would be excluded on the basis of type or extent of disability.
4. School and general education placements are age- and grade- appropriate, with no self-contained special education classes operative at the school site.
5. Cooperative learning and peer instructional methods receive significant use in general instructional practice at the school site.

6. Special education supports are provided within the context of the general education class and in other integrated environments. (p. 10)

Inspiration for the Inclusive Schools Movement is Nirje's (1992) principle of normalization which proposes that the rhythms and patterns of life of people with disabilities should mirror as closely as possible the normal rhythms and patterns of life of the mainstream society. Furthermore, proponents argue that human resources in general education are too few to meet the needs of many children at risk of school failure, with or without disabilities. They attest that many of those human resources needed for the educational improvement of all children are tied to federal categorical programs and benefit relatively few students, often in separate, isolated settings (Sailor, 2009). Supporters feel that the process of merging general education and special education would transform both into a more responsive and effective system for all students.

However, critics of this model claim that advocates, such as TASH (formerly known as The Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps), "rushed into a vacuum created by others' inaction...intimidating by vigor alone many who disagreed" (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998, p. 300). Opponents argue that although passionate, these idealists close a blind eye to realities confronting the general education classroom that inhibit the implementation of full inclusion. Furthermore, they contend the process of merger would ironically benefit a few students with significant support needs at the exclusion of most other students. Clearly, a single, unifying argument does not support the contemporary inclusive schools movement. As Winzer and Mazurek (2000) underscore, "(A) group of complex and interwoven arguments confronts issues such as civil rights, a merger of regular and special education, and the responsibilities of regular classroom teachers" (p. 21).

## **Research Controversy**

To further complicate matters, research in this area is also highly controversial and at an apparent standoff. Supporters of the traditional continuum of services argue that dispassionate, rational evidence for or against the Inclusive Schools Movement should be based on quantitative scientific research. Kavale (2000) implies that support based primarily on qualitative research findings presented in the form of discourse is a “rhetorical strategy being used to give the impression of erudition” (p. 29). Sowell (1995) negatively refers to the Inclusive Schools Movement as the “vision of the anointed” versus the “vision of the benighted.” He contends that the “anointed” assume a moral high ground and their vision “involves the perceptions, beliefs, and assumptions of an elite intelligentsia whose revelations prevail over others in determining policy” despite a lack of empirical evidence (p. 187).

On the other hand, full inclusionists question whether methods of empiricist science can indeed serve as the neutral arbiter in the full inclusion debate. Gallagher (1998) disputes the objectiveness of quantitative, empiricist methods as they are applied in educational research. When dealing with human subjects countless factors outside the researcher’s control combine to make it impossible to produce “law-like” or even “probabilistic generalizations” possessing instrumental validity. For example, Gallagher asserts that the effect of a given teaching method on student learning is variable, unlike lowering the temperature of water to 32 degrees Fahrenheit, which always causes it to freeze (p.4). Simply put, any number of factors, including personal attributes and craft knowledge of individual teachers or prior knowledge of individual students, can contribute to the success or failure of any given intervention. No matter how methodically research is carried out, even

empirical research is relative when humans are involved. In order to eliminate all extenuating factors when comparing separate and inclusive settings, the same teacher must be teaching the same group of students in both settings, at the same time on the same day.

Despite passionate epistemological debates, studies indicate the problem lies not in the method of research but in the follow through. Kauffman (1993) proclaims, the deficiencies attributed to the field of special education are not due to a lack of knowledge but to the underimplementation of it.

### **Why Will Now Be Any Different: Current Conditions and Policy Shift**

Reviewing the history of special education helped me form a deeper outside-in perspective on the pilot project I conducted in 2010 on current policy shifts. I gained clarification on why asking the right questions at this particular point in time is imperative and why special education and general education could finally be poised for sustainable change in inclusive settings. At this point, it appears that legislation—by, in effect, mandating inclusive classrooms—may create a greater impetus for implementation of research-based inclusive strategies than in the past.

In many cases, middle and high school special education teachers are no longer being considered “highly qualified.” To achieve this standard, teachers must not only be certified in special education, but must also meet guidelines to prove competence in each content area they teach. This results from the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. NCLB is a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* which is the principal federal law concerning education from kindergarten through high school. The policy seeks to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps. It emphasizes, “accountability for results, doing what works based on scientific research, expanded parental

options, and expanded local control and flexibility” (US Department of Education, 2005). It requires that 95% of students with disabilities participate in the general curriculum statewide assessment. The law addresses the effectiveness of educators and establishes a list of minimum requirements related to content knowledge that deem a teacher “highly qualified.” NCLB is reiterated by the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004. One intention of the reauthorization was to more closely align special education law with general education law (Turnbull et al., 2007). Zigmund, Kloo, and Volonino (2009) contend that new standards based education and accountability provisions written into both pieces of legislation further the push toward full inclusion by mandating for many students with disabilities that their academic home base is the general education classroom. Sailor (2009) confirms:

This shift in emphasis in general education reform presents a window of opportunity for the emergence of a shared educational agenda, one that holds potential for capturing the innovative elements of improvement and reform in federal categorical programs such as special education as well as elements in general education. (pp. 8-9)

However, it has been said; “If you want people with you when you land, you have to have them with you when you take off.” Even though new federal legislation mandates change, all stakeholders are not fully onboard. Without buy-in from those most effected, many factors are contributing to implementation being extremely problematic.

Although individual states have the opportunity to develop their own definition of the term “highly qualified” consistent with NCLB, a May 2009, site visit by the U.S. Department of Education found that North Carolina had not established appropriate Highly Qualified Teacher requirements for special education teachers teaching core subjects (NCDPI, 2009, p. 13). It was determined that passing the Praxis 0511 *Fundamental*

*Subjects: Content Knowledge* was not sufficient to demonstrate competence across subject areas at the secondary level. This decision left the state with a shortage of highly qualified special education teachers. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction responded by mandating that teachers “must have at least twenty-four hours of content area coursework or pass the Praxis II in the content area for which the educator is ‘teacher of record’” (NCDPI, 2009, p. 13). Therefore, a secondary self-contained special education teacher must meet these requirements in all subject areas. If teachers are not “highly qualified” in a content area, they cannot be teachers of record for that subject. The state offered strategies to help school systems ensure that students with special needs were taught by “highly qualified” teachers most of which suggested using an inclusion model, such as:

Consultation Model: General education teacher covers course materials, and special education teacher re-teaches difficult skills.

Teaming Model: Special education teachers are assigned to a specific grade level team. The special education teacher provides support to general education teachers in terms of instructional strategies and potential modification ideas.

Blended Learning Model: Via the use of technology, a HQT teaches the students virtually. The special education teacher serves as an on-site facilitator to reinforce learning, answer questions, etc. (NCDPI, 2009, p. 14)

It seems absurd to question that students with disabilities should be taught by teachers knowledgeable in their subject matter. However, Quigley (2009) begins to expose an underlying hegemonic discourse by suggesting, “The HQT legislation appears to be minimizing special education teachers’ pedagogical competencies such as knowledge of learning differences, appropriate curricular and instructional accommodations for students

with disabilities, and behavioral management techniques” (p.53). Such skills enable *all* students, despite differing educational needs, to reach their individual potential.

If such issues are not carefully brought to light, what appears to be a step in the right direction could actually be a giant step back. Ward (2009) admonishes that if we do not push for the pursuit of answers to new questions and the research suggested, we run the risk of resegregation. Without concerted effort to work through initial tensions, the monumental task of blending rich general education instruction with the individualized support of special education may prove insurmountable.

Clearly, federal law and policy are aligning with more inclusive settings. Halle and Dymond (2009) suggest that the task at hand is to make the transition from our current model of least restrictive environment to an idealized one. Meaningful inclusion is not about being “someplace;” it is about being “somebody.” Sapon-Shevin (2007) suggests that physically placing students in “shared space” and calling it “inclusion” is set up to fail. In order for all students to benefit from inclusive settings, each one must participate actively and fully in the classroom and school community (p. 144). Ensuring students are more than physically in a regular education classroom is one of the challenges brought about by this shift in policy. In order to move beyond superficial change, much work must be done at the outset. Leaders must provide context rather than just upsetting the status quo. Teachers must gain buy-in to the fact that inclusion is worth their collective efforts as well as worth the challenge and risk of doing things differently.

Leadership begins, then, with the diagnostic work of separating a problem’s technical elements from its adaptive elements. The task is to appreciate, value, and take in

what the experts say, but then go beyond their filters to take into account the cultural and political human requirements of tangible progress. (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 70)

In his study, Sailor (2009) draws on the experiences of “Horace Mann Middle School.” This school successfully serves all students, even those with the most extensive support needs, in general education in their grade level. Several factors contribute to the effectiveness of this transformative model of inclusion, not the least of which is that all participants share a common philosophy. Rather than see students identified for special education as “disabled,” they choose to see certain environments as “disabling.” Limitations are understood as a “product of their unique learning needs in responding to a particular set of environmental circumstances” (p. 251). By modifying environments with principles of universal design – such as, with curb cuts, electric wheelchairs, functioning elevators, and accessible restrooms – individuals with physical impairments may function alongside everyone else. The school’s simple shift in focus from individual to environmental deficits led to phenomenal results.

This philosophy did not form overnight. It was a well-led process. Students were not simply placed physically from self-contained classrooms into general education settings. The principal established permanent and temporary teams to assist the school as new operations were put into place. Rather than basing delivery of special education services on a particular continuum of time away from regular education, this school bases service delivery on how much and what kind of support is necessary for each individual student to be successful in the general education classroom. “Special education teachers, freed from self-contained classrooms, can engage in collaborative instruction with grade-level teachers and further enhance general education classroom-based interventions....” (Sailor, 2009, p. 252). In so

doing, all students benefit from the expertise of both general education and special education teachers. It seems that this process is the exception rather than the rule. A study conducted in 1989 indicated a mere fifteen school districts in the entire country reported to be fully inclusive (Karasoff & Kelly, 1989).

Although substantial progress has been made in moving students out of separate schools and including students with disabilities in general education classrooms, data indicates these trends vary considerably from state to state. For example, McLeskey and Henry (1999) report 74% more students with disabilities are placed in general education classes in Minnesota than Pennsylvania; and students in New York are five times more likely to be in a highly restrictive separate setting than students in Oregon. It seems that “where a student lives is one of the most significant factors in determining the placement setting in which the student will be educated” (p. 62). These trends suggest that the majority of systems are fitting students into existing programs rather than changing existing programs to fit the needs of students.

In my middle school setting, students formerly in self-contained classrooms are now placed in many regular education settings. In some cases the students are so spread out in the school, it is impossible for the special education teacher to have any contact with them during the class period. A coworker currently dealing with such changes relates to me that her skills in differentiation are not being utilized even when she is present in inclusive classrooms. She expresses that often her time is spent engaging in insignificant duties such as making sure students are on the right page. Her sentiments echo Quigney (2009): “If secondary special education teachers are not HQT in the subject matter areas in which their students require assistance, their role may be viewed as less vital to the educational process” (p. 53). Rather

than being regarded as equal instructional partners, they are likely to be perceived as highly trained paraprofessionals.

Friend, Reising, and Cook (1993) offer the following five co-teaching strategies for inclusive settings: one teach, one assist, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching. Harbort, Gunter, Hull, Brown, Venn, Wiley, and Wiley's (2007) study of teacher behaviors in co-taught classrooms observed across the board, that the only structure being utilized was "one teach, one assist." The general education teacher primarily assumed the teaching role and the special education teacher the assistant role. This structure makes it particularly unlikely that differentiated instruction is being planned for—much less implemented—due to the high percentage of time given to large group instruction. Furthermore, the general education teacher was observed to spend more time managing student behaviors, which does not seem to capitalize on the strengths of the special educator. By utilizing the other four co-teaching strategies, teachers could more effectively support students in the regular education classroom. Again, this data supports a lack of implementation of research-based strategies rather than a lack of knowledge.

In order for regular education teachers to be considered highly qualified, they must demonstrate no special knowledge of adaptations, accommodations, modifications, or functional skills. This issue does not prohibit regular education teachers from being the teacher of record for students with significant support needs. It is apparent that we all have much to learn from each other, and our students have much to learn from us all. This shift in policy seems to be calling for a more unified and collaborative approach to teacher education in general. This sentiment was echoed in a conversation with a colleague:

If you ever truly want special education children to be fully included – if you ever want that to happen, then you are going to have to have one teaching degree. You can't have a special ed and general ed. Teachers are going to have to go and learn to be a teacher of children. And within that program, they are going to have to learn how to differentiate instruction, and about universal design, and about formative assessments... those are all just good teaching things. And so people can't come back and say, "Well, I didn't go to school to teach these kids. I went to school to be an English teacher." They are going to have to stop teaching subjects and start teaching children. (personal communication, October 29, 2010)

Both regular education and special education teachers need to be prepared for this shift in policy. Delano, Keefe, and Perner (2009) recognize that it is not consistent with the intent of NCLB or IDEA to place students with special needs in classrooms of "highly qualified" teachers, who are unable to meet their support needs. Although the following solution seems simple to clarify, it is equally as difficult to put into practice:

Typically, neither special education faculty nor teachers of students with extensive support needs are content area experts. Similarly, general educators often have limited opportunities to acquire skills in making accommodations and individualizing instruction for students with extensive support needs. Therefore, collaboration between special educators and general educators both in higher education and in public schools would enhance educators' ability to support access to the general education curriculum for all students. (Delano et al., 2009, p.238)

Furthermore, educational administration programs in higher education often provide only cursory attention to special education policy. In order to offer programs designed to

make a difference for all students, school leaders must not only be knowledgeable about current shifts in special education policy, but they must also develop skills in its implementation (Crockett & Bays, 2007; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002).

Every professional brings specialized expertise to the table. Rather than encourage practicing and preservice teachers to combine resources, our current system compartmentalizes services. Students with more extensive support needs tend to receive either content area expertise and socialization in a general education classroom or individualized instruction and training in functional applications in a special education classroom. Likewise, students in general education have little opportunity to participate in community-based settings where skills can be generalized to real-life experiences. Sailor (2009) says, I have “used the term *siloization* to describe the problem of locking away valuable human capital resources in applications that are restricted to discreet populations” (p. 250). In the description of “Horace Mann Middle School,” he attests that there are no educational environments set aside only for students with IEPs (p. 253). The current shift in policy concerning HQT opens the door for educators to collectively imagine the potential of changing our existing model of service delivery for all students; however, in order for positive changes to occur, educational leaders must make a conscious effort to facilitate a smooth transition. Classrooms in which diverse students actively participate and learn from one another do not simply materialize. Preservice and practicing teachers must be provided successful models and frequent opportunities to collaborate with one another, time to work through tensions, and a knowledge base of philosophies consistent with best practices (Delano et al., 2009).

This again reminds me of conversations with my coworker. When asked how this shift in policy affects her classroom personally, she responds with mixed emotions. She describes people overall as trying to be cooperative. However, the fact that she does not share common planning time with most of the regular education teachers makes it nearly impossible to co-teach lessons. She worries that rushing into someone's classroom and having no time for collaboration makes it appear that she does not have a lot to offer. With 14 years of experience, she expresses frustration because she really wants to teach. She believes in the concept of inclusion, but due to the current set-up feels that she would be much more effective back in a self-contained setting.

In the best of circumstances—even when everyone is in agreement—organizational change is hard. After forty years of debate and controversy, it becomes even harder. It is only recently, due to being personally affected, that many educators realize they are even a part of the conversation. The task of helping others see from the “outside-in” seems daunting. This research proposes to begin filling in gaps by endeavoring to make connections among seemingly dissonant stories in an effort to reveal consonance.

### **Conceptual Framework and Change Leader Literature**

Following the initial coming together by opening the doors of education to millions of students with disabilities, change within classrooms is relatively small. A culture of segregation is still predominant in most school settings. After decades of controversy and passionate debate, it seems that current policy shifts are forcing stakeholders to finally move beyond dialogue and take action. However, simply mandating that students be placed in regular classrooms without leaders capable of navigating complex organizational change, dooms inclusion to failure. Sapon-Shevin (2007) notes, “It has been said that there is no

good way to do the wrong thing. But it is also true that the right thing done poorly or thoughtlessly is unlikely to be successful” (p. xvi).

A gap in current research is linking what is known about leadership in a culture of change to the process of restructuring for inclusion. By using literature on leading for change as a conceptual framework for evaluating the merger of general education with special education in the lives of participants, key insights emerged as to what support was or was not present in successful attempts.

So far, it seems that only a handful of educational leaders are able to spark enthusiasm for sustainable change in inclusive settings. The goal is to change whole organizations, whole systems. How do you motivate people to invest the passion and energy needed to get results? What does it take to hold organizations together through the struggle of complex change? Despite evidence of better alternatives, Reeves (2007) comments on the continued use of ineffective and counterproductive teaching and leadership tactics in today’s schools. He draws a comparison to a smoker’s continued use of cigarettes despite knowledge of health risks. It is suggested that evidence, whether qualitative or quantitative, is “strikingly powerless against the forces that drive human behavior” (p. 1). For both individuals and organizations there is often a huge gap between intention and action. Kegan and Lahey (2009) assert that “leadership is necessary when logic is not the answer” (p. 38). Leaders must move people who are stuck in their “hearts and stomachs, not in their heads” (p. 38).

In order for education to change and evolve into a dependent system, walls of compartmentalization must first be broken down; binaries must be deconstructed. Educators must take on the challenge and risk of doing things differently. Without a vision from the

outside in, the struggle to change and follow through with implementing new programs results in tension and chaos and hardly seems worth the effort. Poorly implemented initial efforts could also sabotage the whole process, as in the following case.

In a qualitative study highlighting a failed attempt to understand and implement inclusion, Mamlin (1999) confirms that leadership was the clearest theme to emerge. Although the principal of the school was strong and effective in other areas, her authoritarian leadership style was ineffective in restructuring for inclusion. It was not this principal's style to empower others by delegating responsibilities. Since the principal did not involve her staff in the process of making decisions, no one became invested in making substantive changes. There was no follow through of support or understanding of gradual change. Therefore, efforts to improve inclusion fell by the wayside. Salisbury and McGregor (2002) emphasize that commitment strategies, rather than control strategies, are critical skills for leaders working to improve schools. Fullan (2002) offers that high-profile, charismatic leaders often get in the way of sustainability. In contrast, leaders possessing extreme personal humility blended with an intense professional will, can build enduring greatness (p. 19).

What is known about successful organizational change under complex conditions? Today as educational leaders take on the challenge of implementing federal policies regarding inclusion, this question must be asked with urgency. The stage is set for creating a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools and of the teaching profession itself. Five major themes surface in the change leader literature. Beyond being attuned to the big picture, and demonstrating energy, enthusiasm, and hope, a change leader must

understand the process of change; emphasize relationships; connect peers with a moral purpose; cultivate leadership at all levels; and realize that learning happens in context.

Leaders must first expect the idea of change to be unpopular. They must anticipate and appreciate an initial implementation dip and face the early difficulties associated with trying something new head-on. Reeves (2007) emphasizes creating immediate short-term wins because the “pain of change often overwhelms the anticipated long-term benefits” (p.2). By utilizing formative assessment, effective practice can be immediately reinforced and ineffective practice immediately modified. It is also important not to dismiss naysayers who often bring up important points that need to be addressed (Fullan, 2011; Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Improving relationships is vital to the change process, especially among people who think differently.

Organizations can only be transformed through people and teams. Forging relationships amid disconnected teachers is the first step in overcoming a culture of fragmentation and compartmentalization. Effective leaders build coherence. It is imperative for change that peers be connected by a moral purpose (Fullan, 2011; Kegan & Lahey, 2009). People do not give themselves to need; they give themselves to vision. Having a sense of purpose provides inspiration and energy and is vital to the practice of leadership. The case for change must be compelling and associated with moral imperatives rather than compliance with authority. Mandating an order to comply with state and federal regulations is not enough to arouse engagement. I have observed in my professional career that individuals are more responsive when they are allowed to create instead of forced to comply.

Once a purpose is decided, what will see people through the long haul? Kegan and Lahey (2009) maintain that leaders must create a “holding environment” (p. 155). By

establishing rituals and ties that bind people together, leaders can offset forces of division and dissolution enabling organizations to maintain a collective focus. Gaining vision from “the outside-in” involves realizing interdependence and compensating for personal weaknesses by relying on another’s strengths.

In order for immediate changes to be sustainable, leaders must be cultivated at many levels; thus, the qualities of leadership must be attainable by many, not just a few (Fullan, 2002). Leo and Barton (2006) reiterate the importance of school and faculty involvement in changing the school culture in inclusive settings. Teachers can often influence and encourage colleagues to try things they would not ordinarily consider without the influence of a leader. Most discussion about special education leadership centers on principals and district administrators; however, collective and distributed forms of leadership have taken center stage in contemporary discussions about improving schools. Successful attempts at merging classrooms, seem to happen in places where teachers were conscious of the fact that they were “actively engaged in a relentless struggle to create and sustain inclusive practices at all levels” (Billingsley, 2007, p. 163).

Finally, it must be understood that “learning is the work” (Fullan, 2008). Although there is a place for professional development, it must be balanced with applied learning within the setting in which one works. Learning apart from the job is often individual, short-term, and superficial. Learning in context helps an organization build a shared collective knowledge and strengthens commitments to the whole.

As I immersed myself in the literature on this topic, the following wisdom attributed to Lao Tzu kept coming to mind, “The worst leaders are those despised. The next worst

leaders are those praised. The best leaders are those who are barely noticed and the people say, 'We did it ourselves'." (Shinagel, n.d.)

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter, I provide a look into qualitative inquiry with an emphasis on case study design. Included is a description of how I designed my research as well as the ways in which I collected and analyzed data. I also address ethics and concerns of trustworthiness. Interview Participants are introduced.

#### **Qualitative Approach and Case Study Design**

The purpose of my qualitative study is to better understand the process that leads to adaptive and sustainable change in inclusive settings. Qualitative methods are aligned with this purpose and my interpretive stance. They are best suited for this particular study because research questions exploring various points of view contain variables that are “complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure” (Glesne, 2011, p.9). Schram (2006) reminds us that a premise common to qualitative studies is that reality is “a function of multiple perspectives, including those of the researcher, those of the individuals being investigated, and those of the readers who would interpret the completed study” (p. 41). This research seeks to gain insight into the “whole” by searching for emerging patterns and similarities in the stories of seemingly dissonant voices. In *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow (2009) get at the heart of my intentions:

The voices and perspectives that do not sound quite right together, and may never sound quite right together in isolation, are woven into a larger composition, and as part of the whole picture, they become essential. The working through of their differences provides the hope that some new synthesis will emerge, a new experiment

and new capacity. People learn by encountering different points of view, not by staring at themselves in the mirror or engaging just those with consonant views. (p. 151)

By seeking to understand the process of sustainable change in inclusive settings, while at the same time challenging the binaristic nature of regular education versus special education, I examine my problem through a composite lens. As suggested by Schram (2006), this study positions me, as a researcher, somewhere on the interpretive/critical continuum. Although it is my aim to understand and begin to make sense of “the way things are,” I also hope to unsettle our combined assumptions that the way we see things within our own contexts is complete.

Given that my research is focused on discovery and insight, along with understanding the multiple perspectives of study participants in a holistic manner, a collective case study is a fitting method for achieving my goals. Schram (2006) defines a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system,’ something identifiably set within time and circumstance” (p. 107). A collective case study, he further states, “is an instrumental case study extended to a number of cases; the researcher is focused on moving toward a better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a more general phenomenon or condition” (p. 107). The collective focus of this study is sustainable change in inclusive settings. Merriam (1988) reveals that case study “demands emphasis on the *pattern* of interpretation given by subjects, and involves determining the particular *pattern* of factors significant in a given case” (p. 31). This research unveils emerging patterns from the stories of diverse participants often presumed to be unconnected. Pugach (2001) asserts that the power of individual stories of people with disabilities is reasonably the foundation of their current level of rights: “It is

often by telling stories that educators, as well as the public at large, have come to understand the needs of persons with disabilities” (p. 439). This study adds a new spin on this insight. Not only does it address the needs of persons with disabilities, but it also addresses the need of “the public at large” for persons with disabilities.

Although case studies are particularistic in nature and the focus of my bounded inquiry is on the phenomenon of adaptive and sustainable change in inclusive classrooms, my pilot project revealed to me the importance of looking at an issue from as many angles as possible. My own perceptions stretched and adjusted as I branched out from “my own backyard.” I better understand how knowledge is co-constructed. Every new person brings a different perspective to the table, and it is imperative to remember that our best attempts at addressing an issue are partial. As Maxwell (2005) reminds us, the participants’ perspective “is not simply their account of events and actions.... it is part of the reality you are trying to understand” (p. 22). I have observed that until another point of view is experienced, a person’s perception is definitely his or her reality.

### **Strategy for Participant Selection**

I engaged in purposeful sampling for this case study. In order to participate in this project, participants had either direct experience with an inclusive classroom or direct experience navigating successful organizational change. Each participant was purposefully chosen to bring a unique point of view to the table. Purposeful selection of diverse participants able to offer varied points of view set the stage for gathering rich, thick data.

When necessary, I obtained access to school sites by contacting building administrators and providing them a copy of my lay summary. Participants were also given the lay summary and a consent form.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

Data were collected by conducting 18 in-depth interviews. The purpose of an interview is to elicit not only descriptions of experiences, but also feelings, thoughts, and intentions (Merriam, 1988). A minimum of 90 minutes was given to each interview conducted. Participants were informed upfront that as themes and patterns emerged throughout this research project, a follow-up interview or phone conversation might be necessary. Five follow-up phone calls were conducted.

**Data recording.** Each interview was conducted using a digital voice recorder, and transcripts were made following each visit. My pilot project provided me the insight that with the digital recorder, I was free to jot down notes of questions that popped up as I listened and thoughts that ran through my mind, rather than concentrate on getting down on paper only what the speaker was saying at the moment. This process led to much richer dialogue and took me places in conversations that I would not have discovered while taking extensive notes. A complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

**Data analysis.** Upon beginning data analysis, as Merriam (1988) suggests, I was no longer dealing with “observables but also with unobservables and connecting the two with inferential glue” (p. 141). The process of making connections started from the outset. Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) reiterate recommendations to simultaneously collect data and engage in analysis. After each interview, I attempted to “mine” the transcript for emerging themes. I searched for phrases, perspectives, and events that were repetitive and salient. Data was coded accordingly. Each theme or category was color-coded and corresponding sections of the transcript were highlighted in the appropriate color. As in my pilot project, I physically cut out sections of transcription and attached them to index cards.

Cards were then filed by category. As data were being collected and coded, responses were continuously compared and reorganized. Schram (2006) advises researchers to also engage in discrepant case analysis and dig for evidence inconsistent with emerging themes. He cautions researchers to “indicate an openness to... the examination of competing explanations and discrepant data so that research does not develop into a self-fulfilling description of events and ideas” (p. 173).

I conscientiously considered conflicting ideas. I also kept a reflective field log with personal observations during interviews and my thought processes as data were analyzed. It was in this field log that I began using theory to analyze data by situating the voices of participants within the doctrines of new science. In *Plugging One Text Into Another: Thinking With Theory in Qualitative Research*, Jackson and Mazzei (2013) describe “plugging one text into another” as a way of thinking *both* “methodologically *and* philosophically” (p. 261). This analytical strategy involves utilizing various theoretical perspectives through which to view common qualitative data. I learned through this process as the authors cogently expressed, “...(D)ata interpretation and analysis do not happen via mechanistic coding, reducing data to themes, and writing up transparent narratives that do little to critique the complexities of social life; such simplistic approaches preclude dense and multilayered treatment of data” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 261). I used “thinking with theory” in order to reconceptualize the data in analytic terms. Although this research remains a rather conventional qualitative case study, it attempts to “unplug” data from a post-positivist perspective, and “plug it in” to philosophical concepts of new science in order to produce knowledge differently.

In addition to filing index cards by themes, I also began making copies of them and sorting them according to their relationship with change leadership literature and/or one of the three theories of new science. Often the theories I was thinking with prompted questions that challenged the hegemony of “the way things are”. Therefore, my philosophical notes indeed inspired me to think about data in a new way. As St. Pierre (2011) proclaims, “I believe inquiry should be provocative, risky, stunning, astounding. It should take our breath away with its daring. It should challenge our foundational assumptions and transform the world” (p. 623).

**Ethical considerations.** I engaged in ethical research practices throughout this study. First, I submitted this research proposal for review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Appalachian State University and gained permission to conduct this research. I asked the participants to review the lay summary (see Appendix A) and sign an informed consent form before the research began (see Appendix B). The informed consent form contained information about the purpose of the study, the benefits as well as risks, and the assurance of confidentiality. Throughout the data collection process, I took steps to ensure this confidentiality by using pseudonyms for participants, names of schools, and locations in all written documents. All interview transcripts and recordings were kept in password-protected computer files.

Due to the nature of my questions and the involvement of families of children with disabilities, I remained conscious of the possibility that sensitive, emotional issues could surface. I was also aware of the possibility that participants might reveal both positive and negative aspects of their workplace. The use of pseudonyms minimized vulnerability and

these potential risks. I was also up front with participants and responded to questions concerning the nature and scope of what I intended to report.

**Trustworthiness.** Peer debriefings and eliciting feedback from the chair of my dissertation committee helped ensure that I continually questioned my own assumptions and not just observe what I hoped to see. As Glesne (2011) stresses, I had to “consciously be aware not to force events but to watch and learn” (p. 67). As much as possible, I also engaged in member checks with interview participants. Maxwell (2005), assures me as a researcher that:

This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on and an important way of revealing my own biases and misunderstandings about what I observe. (p. 112)

Ten out of 18 interview participants provided useful feedback on my data presentation, interpretation, and analysis.

Anderson-Levitt (2006) attests that the biggest challenge for insider researchers is “to make the familiar ‘strange’ so as to make it visible” (p. 286). Not only was it arduous to describe the phenomenon of adaptive change in inclusive settings to outsiders, it was equally as challenging to help insiders look *at* changes in their classrooms, rather than *through* them. Merriam (1988) describes this challenge as a “schizophrenic activity” (p. 94).

By conducting interviews with parents, teachers, students, and administrators, triangulation of data also enhanced the trustworthiness of this study. Maxwell (2005) calls triangulation, “the collection of information from a variety of individuals, sources, and

settings” (p.112). Yin (1994) calls this same process one of “converging lines of inquiry” (p. 92).

It was also imperative throughout this process that I engaged in researcher reflexivity. Memos from my reflexive field log helped me monitor my own biases and learn from my subjective positioning. I remained quite conscious of my close relationship to this topic. However, as I purposely harnessed my personal passion and kept it in check, I also realized its power. It is passion that pushes me to ask questions in the first place, and passion that motivates me to persevere in my efforts to find answers, interpret meanings, and construct theories.

**Reciprocity to participants.** Based on reactions from participants, I believe that most people ache to be heard. Hopefully, this study gave participants an opportunity to share their stories concerning either inclusion or adaptive leadership and engage in meaningful dialogue. Although the participants may have benefited by helping others, as well as myself, better understand the process of adaptive change in inclusive settings from their unique perspectives, their time and the heartfelt experiences they shared were a gift that can never be repaid. Merriam (1988) asserts that “the qualitative researcher is interested in perspectives rather than truth per se, and it is the researcher’s obligation to present a more or less honest rendering of how informants actually view themselves and their experiences” (p. 168). It is my sincere desire that I have conveyed an honest rendering of these shared experiences. My study would not exist without these eighteen participants, and I am gratefully indebted to them.

## **Introduction of Participants**

Exploring the experiences and shared stories from multiple perspectives can open the door for understanding our current compartmentalized system in a more holistic manner. Just as seemingly random points of light tracking chaotic systems inevitably weave into an astounding “shape of wholeness,” definite patterns and themes emerge from the seemingly disconnected perspectives of 18 interview participants. These participants included nine school administrators, one special education teacher, two general education teachers, three parents of students from general education, four parents of students from special education, and one general education student (the three general education parents also worked in the schools; two were general educators and one was an administrator). Participants represented six different rural public school settings in the southeastern United States. This study reflected the demographics of the communities within which the interviews took place: 16 participants were Caucasian and 2 were African-American. Ten participants were female, and eight were male.

Because this study attempted to bridge a current gap in research between what is known about leadership in a culture of change and implementing meaningful inclusion, several administrators were chosen specifically for initiating and navigating some type of sustainable, organizational change. Whether or not transformations within their organizations dealt with the process of restructuring for inclusion, successful change leader strategies can be generalized and connections were made in Chapter 4, as well as Chapter 5 of this research.

An ancient Chinese proverb suggests an invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place, or circumstance. It assures that although the

thread may stretch or tangle, it will never break. Similarly, the stories that meet in this study – although some intertwine – are from different times, places, and circumstances. This study, like the red thread, weaves together an unbreakable web of connections.

Not only are individual identities dynamic, every bond formed is inherently original. This is suggestive of the quantum world where relationship determines everything. Just as subatomic particles come into form and can be observed only in relationship to something else, it is important to keep in mind that labels given to participants are contextual. For example, several participants were *both* educators *and* parents, as opposed to “either/or”. Questions were often approached from more than one angle even within the same interview, and many participant experiences overlap. A synopsis of each recurring storyline follows, along with a brief description of each of the 18 interview participants. All participant names, school names, and locations are pseudonyms. Table 1 is also provided to help keep the red thread untangled as data are presented.

### **Recurring Storylines**

**The Hub.** The Hub is a self-contained separate setting located within Savington Elementary School in Harper County. Until relatively recently, students with significant support needs from prekindergarten to 22 years old were served exclusively at this site. Within the last decade, older students have transitioned to more inclusive programs at the local high school and are also involved in work-study opportunities in the community. A few self-contained classrooms serving students through 8th grade are still located in this separate setting, but the push is to transition them into the main elementary school building. The experiences and stories of five interview participants were directly or indirectly related to the

Hub. The varying perspectives from the following interview participants reflected the evolution of this facility since its inception in the 1970s.

Bryan is a doctoral-level manager who served in several administrative roles (especially related to exceptional children) in Harper County, prior to becoming the Exceptional Children's Division Consultant for his state's Department of Public Instruction.

Melody was the principal of Savington Elementary School at the time of interview.

Robert was the assistant principal at Savington Elementary School in its early years, after serving as a special education teacher, and prior to becoming an adjunct professor at the local college.

Steve and Susan are the parents of a daughter, Cora, who was participating in a college program for students with disabilities; both are professional people with advanced degrees.

**Cora.** Cora is the daughter of Steve and Susan. During Cora's elementary school years, the family fought for her to be served in an inclusive general education setting at a regular public school rather than have her attend the Hub. Bryan was an administrator involved in many decisions made during her early IEP meetings.

**Jake.** At the time of these interviews, Jake was a high school student significantly affected by autism. In many ways, his early story mirrors Cora's. His parents also challenged the assumption that Jake would attend West Franklin School, a special purpose school that served students from prekindergarten through 22 years old in Lloyd County. The following interview participants tell Jake's story from unique perspectives.

Kevin and Ann are Jake's parents.

Beth was Jake's elementary school principal at Creswell Elementary School.

Tricia was Jake's elementary school general education teacher.

**Bret.** At the time of the interviews, Bret was a recent graduate of Pinewood County High School. Throughout his school career, he received special education services due to significant cognitive disabilities.

Tom graduated with honors from the same high school. Tom and Bret share a friendship that began in the second grade. Their friendship not only profoundly affected one another, but Tom's family as well.

Tina is Tom's mother and is also an administrator in a neighboring county. For this study, Tina was first interviewed as an administrator, and then as the parent of a general education student. At the time of the interview, Tina's title was Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction in nearby Clem County. Bret's influence on their insights is apparent.

**Middle school.** Each of the following interview participants has in some way experienced sustained organizational change. Fifteen years ago, the Pinewood County School System consolidated three local high schools into one. Prior to this consolidation each high school also accommodated junior high students. The new high school housed only 9th through 12th grade, which opened the door for the first middle school in the area. Not only did leaders at the middle school level navigate the merger of three separate schools, but they also faced implementing a new approach to educating adolescents. Valuable insights on restructuring and leading organizations through complex change were gleaned from these interviews. Teachers currently teaching at Pinewood County Middle School offered different points of view on inclusion.

James is a charter member of the National Middle School Association and organizer of the first middle level teacher preparation program in his state; he recently retired as a professor of Middle Grades Education at a local college.

Judy was the first principal of Pinewood County Middle School and was a leader of the middle school initiative in her county.

Greg was the principal of Pinewood County Middle School at the time of interview.

Ray was a general education teacher at Pinewood County Middle School and is also the parent of students in the general education program.

Maggie was a special education teacher at Pinewood County Middle School and was also the head of the Exceptional Children's Department.

Although the final two participants share experiences of different places and circumstances, their stories – connected by the invisible red thread – seemed destined to contribute to this study. Their voices add an even greater depth to emerged themes.

Jackie is the parent of Eli, an elementary school student with Down syndrome who was receiving special education in Jackson County.

Janet was a principal in Bedford County who successfully led her faculty through the implementation of the RTI (Response to Intervention) program in her elementary school.

Table 1

*Overview of Roles and Storylines*

Role	Storyline				
	The Hub	Cora	Jake	Bret	Middle School
Administrator					
<i>James</i> <sup>a</sup>					X
<i>Bryan</i> <sup>a</sup>	X	X			
<b>Janet</b> <sup>a</sup>					
<b>Melody</b> <sup>a</sup>	X				
<b>Beth</b> <sup>a</sup>			X		
<b>Robert</b>	X				
<b>Greg</b>					X
<b>Tina</b> <sup>b, c</sup>				X	
<b>Judy</b> <sup>a</sup>					X
General Educator					
<i>Tricia</i> <sup>b</sup>			X		
<b>Ray</b> <sup>b</sup>					X
Special Educator					
<b>Maggie</b>					X
Special Education					
Parent					
<i>Steve</i>	X	X			
<i>Susan</i>	X	X			
Kevin*			X		
<i>Ann</i>			X		
<b>Jackie</b>					
General Education					
Student					
Tom <sup>c</sup>				X	

*Note.* Participants represent six different rural counties in the southeastern United States. Participants in bold and italic font have earned doctorates, participants in bold font have earned master's degrees, participants in italic font have earned bachelor's degrees, participant in normal font with asterisk has earned an associate's degree, participant in normal font is a first year college student. <sup>a</sup>Administrator chosen specifically for initiating and navigating some type of sustainable organizational change. <sup>b</sup>Parent of a general education student. <sup>c</sup>Mother and son dyad.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, I used qualitative methods to explore the process of sustainable change in inclusive settings, while at the same time challenging the binaristic nature of regular education versus special education. My goal was to better understand the complexities of the participants' lived experiences. Research findings are presented and interpreted in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Interpretation

### Introduction

Sapon-Shevin (2007) makes the lofty assertion that sustained meaningful inclusion requires a “critical examination and reconceptualization of all aspects of school: the curriculum, the pedagogical practices, the ways in which teachers and students are supported, the ways in which learning is assessed, and the overall articulated goals of the educational process” (p. 122). By seeking to provide a quantum view of education as opposed to today’s dominant mechanistic view, this dissertation set this directive into motion. Its purpose was to make visible the often intangible connections between special education and general education in order to allow access to the bigger picture. By taking a look *at* rather than *through* “the way things are,” this research intended to unsettle our assumptions that the way we see things within our own contexts is complete. This project further sought to establish a link between the literature on leadership in a culture of change and the literature on the process of inclusion. The following questions guided this study:

1. Does the process of inclusion strengthen individuals’ understanding of commonality?
2. Does the process of inclusion contribute to a single cohesive unit in the classroom?
3. Why are some settings more successful than others in creating a sense of inclusion?
4. How can educational leaders support sustainable change in inclusive settings?

In accordance with Zohar and Marshall (1994), this chapter attempts to “alter the whole intellectual framework within which we couch our [educational] experience and our perceptions” (p. 38). In an effort to change our mindset, themes gleaned from the data are divided into three sections based on their connection to one of the following discoveries or theories of new science: Fractals and Strange Attractors (includes five themes—commitment, resistance to change, fear, experience, and lack of empirical data), Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle (includes eight themes—a challenge to the status quo, administrator and/or teacher attitude, communication, a climate shift in special education, purposeful scheduling of students and time, alternative assessment measures, staffing, and a climate shift in general education), and The Butterfly Effect (includes five themes—appeal to a moral purpose, balance mandating change with distributing leadership, provide ongoing and visible support, analyze instruction rather than students, and nourish growth while dealing with resistance to change). Applying insights from the quantum world to a wide range of experiences involving inclusion and leadership in the midst of change provides consonance amidst seemingly dissonant voices.

### **Fractals and Strange Attractors**

Coding and analyzing data from these 18 perspectives was reminiscent of exploring Mandelbrot’s set on a computer screen. As an interviewer, driving from county to county, listening and recording in various offices, classrooms, living rooms, and even passenger seats, I moved deep inside the details. I observed from the inside out. Slowly, through the process of transcription, color-coding themes, and cutting apart and reassembling disparate conversations, my view shifted to the outside in. As my lens zoomed wider, more and more

of the big picture came into focus. Indeed, only by looking *at* data rather than *through* it, could I perceive patterns emerging before my eyes.

On a computer monitor, the process of iteration and feedback results in a dynamic, surprising display of self-similarity at increasingly larger and smaller scales. An observer must zoom in and out of a fractal image to appreciate its order and depth. I found myself making connections and discovering themes within these data in a similar way. It is difficult to convey such nonlinear findings in written form. In an effort to simulate for readers the experience of noticing surprising, fractal-like patterns, within this dissertation italics will be used to draw their attention to interconnected, self-similarity among interview participants. As I gazed steadily into these data, the first distinct shapes took form around five recurring themes: commitment, resistance to change, fear, experience, and lack of empirical data.

**Commitment.** Without a doubt, the most salient theme discovered about inclusion from these in-depth inquiries is that it requires unwavering commitment. Exclusion is not an option, even when the going gets hard. In this study, stories told by parents begin much like those told by teachers and administrators. They start with a child requiring something from them that was unanticipated. The major difference between practicing inclusion within schools, as opposed to within families, is that alternatives are not only more eagerly sought and expected, but they are also much more readily accessible. Although some choose otherwise, most parents are deeply committed to seeing it through. Slowly, familiarity and love transform aberrance from something the family must learn to cope with to an integral piece of the whole. Solomon (2012) reflects, “Intimacy with difference fosters its accommodation” (p. 6).

In his provocative work, *Far From the Tree*, Andrew Solomon (2012) makes the distinction between vertical and horizontal identities. Vertical identities are defined as characteristics and values passed from generation to generation from parent to child through DNA and shared cultural norms. Although there are exceptions, ethnicity, language, and religion are typical examples of vertical identities. “Often, however, someone has an inherent or acquired trait that is foreign to his or her parents and must therefore acquire identity from a peer group. This is a horizontal identity” (Solomon, 2012, p.2). Physical disabilities and conditions such as autism or dwarfism tend to be horizontal, as are being born deaf, gay, or a prodigy. For 10 years, Solomon conducted interviews with over 300 families dealing with a host of horizontal identities. Alone, each individual story would seem like a random, isolated event. When these experiences of difference within families are told together, an awe-inspiring strange attractor—a shape of wholeness—becomes visible. As pattern after pattern after pattern is revealed, what emerges is the beautiful fractal of inclusion.

Echoing the voices heard in *Far From the Tree* (Solomon, 2012), parents in the current study testified that the stages of accepting, coping with, and finally embracing the reality of dealing with difference in their families enriched them in ways they never would have conceived. Solomon (2012) writes, “This book’s conundrum is that most of the families described here have ended up grateful for experiences they would have done anything to avoid” (p. 47). Parents who supposed they could not care for an exceptional child discovered not only were they wrong, but they also seemed awakened to the extraordinary life they would have missed if they had not had this opportunity. The experiences of these families may provide educators with the inspiration and insight to make

similar discoveries by committing to inclusion. Although school systems may not share the same motives as families, and less appears to be at stake, the potential benefits of becoming less fragmented and more holistic are likewise inconceivable.

Families are our best models of unwavering commitment – of working within the explicit, yet simply expressed parameter of “everybody belongs.” As in the case of computer-generated fractals, this starting point for evolving feedback must not change. No single solution for making it work is important in and of itself; the strange attractor emerges as millions of solutions are plotted. Given the creative freedom to make sense of horizontal differences in their own unique way, it is phenomenal what dynamic, effective, and “whole” systems evolve. As I conducted my own interviews involving three families, the concept that chaos always partners with order continued to ring true.

In *Leadership and the New Science, Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Wheatley (2006) asserts that in order to see patterns, we must step back and gain perspective; “they require distance and time to show themselves” (p. 126). Sadly, due to compartmentalization and a mechanistic mindset overall, most classrooms are not set up or committed to go the required distance. Therefore, benefits of inclusion for all stakeholders are rarely given time or space to become apparent. Learning to look for wholeness is an underdeveloped skill.

In today’s mechanistic educational system, where it is desirable and reasonable to remove pieces that do not easily fit or appear useful to the whole, rarely do we put in the required effort to see the results of assuming that there are no disposable parts. There are not enough solutions to reveal definite patterns. However, even within this study, there are instances of the law of inertia at work. At times an unbalanced force acts upon our natural Newtonian tendency to resist changes in our state of motion and a glimpse of the fractal

becomes visible. In the cases of Cora and Jake enough force was applied by a parent, a teacher, and/or an administrator, despite substantial resistance, to keep both of these students with significant support needs out of separate settings. As participants looked back on the nonlinear process of working out solutions, they described benefits that emerged for all involved that were unfathomable before seeing it through. They proclaimed, as have countless parents, “Life is enriched by difficulty; love is made more acute when it requires exertion” (Solomon, 2012, p. 43). Since these school stories are few and far between, they appear as random, isolated events. This dissertation seeks to begin the process of iteration and feedback. It seeks to shift our focus from parts to the whole, so that an inherent order may become visible. As a starting point, this section zooms in on how the process of inclusion contributes to a single cohesive unit in the family, setting the stage for similar sustainable patterns to be utilized in successful inclusive school settings.

By the time students with disabilities enter school, chaos in the home is steadily pairing with order. For the most part, during those earliest years, families accept their new reality. They intimately know and deeply love a child with a unique personality who just happens to have a horizontal difference. School, abruptly, means being confronted over and over with people first noticing a disability, which has become distantly secondary to the beautiful child that the parents now almost exclusively see. I think it is important to acknowledge that parents are the first to experience a sense of panicky unpreparedness, and despite drastic measures that would forever change their family dynamics, they have no choice but to equip themselves with the necessary skills and attitudes they need to see it through. For some parents this comes much more naturally and easily than others. The following heartfelt conversation with Cora’s parents describes one such transformation.

*Steve:* We had an EC teacher in the second grade tell us that Cora needed to learn how to be with her own kind.

*Susan:* That's the whole thing. Seeing her as "other." Seeing her as not like us. "HER OWN KIND!" And she's still a teacher. EC. In this county. It's happened at church too. *Susan suddenly remembers the biting words of a new Sunday school teacher, "She's not coming in here," uttered when Cora was supposed to move up to an older class.*

*Steve: (sarcastically)* Well, no, because Jesus clearly wouldn't have wanted her there. How do you get someone to see her as... *voice trails off*, and I can't talk. I have to look at myself and think, well, when I first found out, I saw her as other too. When I found out she had [a disabling condition], I was really pissed at Susan for not... *couldn't finish sentence*

*Susan:* Undergoing prenatal testing.

*Me:* And without Cora, your attitude would not be changed? You think? About people? About...

*Steve:* Well, both of us, we have advanced degrees. We're professionals. You know, this whole arrogant, elitist kind of thinking. Cora has changed my whole idea of aesthetic, of what is beautiful. What IS beautiful? She's just very wise, and it's made me value wisdom more than intelligence—and to value that in people. So, she's changed everything.

This seemed to strike a deep chord, and Steve launched into a story.

*Steve:* So, I fix a nice dinner one night. I got it all ready, and I've been working on it all day. I'm thinking, 'This is really cool.'

Susan smilingly rolls her eyes as if to say her version of this night plays out a little differently.

*Steve:* I know, I get to embellish.

*Susan:* Not with me here. You embellish, and I'll embellish in the other direction.

*Steve:* So, anyway, I had been working on this dinner a long time, and I was going to serve it at 6:00. She got home at 6:05, but it was still warm.... Cora must've been about twelve.... I went and got fresh stuff; I mean this was a BIG deal.

*Susan:* Not a word to me about what he was doing!

*Steve:* But you could see it on the table. And the phone rings, and it's somebody she knows out in Portland, and I give her the phone. I'm thinking, 'She sees what I've done here, and it's time to eat.' The food's already there. It's hot. And she gets on the phone. Twenty minutes later, I got in the car and drove off.

*Susan:* This is the part where he skips a major piece of the story.

*Steve:* Okay, I was furious.

*Susan:* And loudly so.

*Steve:* And I would've been louder if I hadn't got in the car. So, I drove off. It was after dark when I came home. Everybody had gone to bed, and I pulled the food out. And, I glopped some on my plate. I didn't put it in the microwave because I wanted to taste how cold and angry it was.

*Susan:* Because it was somehow getting back at me for him to eat it cold.

*Steve:* And I put some of that cold, gloppy food in my mouth, and I could taste how angry it was.

*Susan:* Your food was not angry.

*Steve:* I tasted it.

*Susan:* The food was not angry.

*Steve:* And, uh, there was this note from Cora.... *wipes away a tear*

*Susan:* You have to finish.

*Steve:* It was on the bar.

*I love you both very much, and I hope you love each other (spelled  
O-T-E-R) too. I will cook for you.*

See, the whole deal was, I wanted something beautiful to happen that day.

And it did.

*Susan:* It wasn't what you planned.

*Me:* I'll write that down, so I will remember. Because I think that might be the whole point. We want beautiful things to happen, but we want them to happen the way we plan.

*Susan:* Beautiful is something maybe you didn't expect that happens.

From the moment Eli was born, his devoted mother, Jackie, was determined to provide every opportunity she could to ensure that her son has the best quality of life possible. She described a constant inner struggle. "I'm okay with the feeling there's nothing I can do," she said, "like, Eli has Down syndrome. There is nothing I can do about that." She went on to say, however, that every time she hears of a new diet or therapy she has not tried, she wonders if she has somehow failed her son. "It's like a whirlwind in my head. I can feel my heart just pounding—almost like a panic attack. I feel like, 'What if there's something I should be doing that I'm not doing?'" The following anecdote was like listening to a dialogue between her head and heart.

Eli would be my easiest, sweetest kid, if I weren't constantly trying to change him. He needs to learn this; he needs to learn that. He needs to be with other kids. He needs. If I could just let Eli be Eli and be happy doing what he wants to do, he would be the easiest child in the world to have. When he was little, I felt like I was always trying to do something therapeutic with him. And now I just let him BE sometimes – happy and content. One day I was swinging on the front porch with him, and he was moving around a little bit, and all I was thinking was, “How can I turn this swinging motion into something therapeutic?” And I looked across the street, and my neighbor was swinging with her child, who is exactly the same age as Eli. She was just enjoying the time and cuddling. And I was like, “Oh my gosh, I am completely wasting this child's life. I need to enjoy him and who he is, instead of always trying to change him.”

As Jackie continued, the words of Cora's mom, echoed in my mind. This echo was the first of many self-similar, fractal-like patterns discovered within this study. *Beautiful is something maybe you didn't expect that happens.*

Other kids' parents tell me they hear stories about Eli every day. EVERY DAY. How many other kids are people sitting around talking about at dinner? And that makes me think how wonderful that we get to have this kid who makes a difference in strangers' lives. Like when parents bring their kids to Buddy Walk, and they feel so good to be a part of it—a part of something special. I like to think that it's not ordinary. It's outside the ordinary—which makes it extraordinary. If my girls get married I will think it's wonderful, but nobody else will. If Eli gets married, it's going to make the newspapers. It's a BIG, extraordinary life because of him.

Sometimes Down syndrome seems like nothing, and sometimes it seems like everything; but it always makes me feel like I get to have this life that's so much bigger than I would've ever wanted or felt comfortable having.

Another family deeply affected by a horizontal identity is Tina's. Although Bret is not her biological child, because of his lifelong friendship with her son, Tom, he is an integral part of their daily life. At the time of this interview, Tom had just completed his freshman year of college. Tina remembered the first time she truly realized Bret and Tom's special bond:

I walked out on the elementary school playground, and there they were. Tom was just lying over in the grass looking at the sky, and Bret's head was like this [holding out arms making a T]. They were perpendicular. So Bret's head was on Tom's belly. They were both just there talking and looking up; and in the sixth grade, that's just not one of those things boys do. But it didn't matter because it was Bret, and I got it then.

When asked what Tom has gained from being Bret's friend, Tina's words flowed effortlessly:

Tom loves life. He loves people.... He has this streak of justice and righteousness – not that he always does the right thing. This child is nowhere close to perfect, but he has always looked after, felt a real obligation to look after, people that he perceived weren't getting a fair shake. He's got a protective spirit about him, especially when it comes to Bret.

Tom, himself, reflected:

I don't think I would be as happy a person without Bret. It brings such good feelings on the inside to make him happy. And it doesn't take that much. When I tell him I am coming to pick him up... I might tell him I'm coming around 11:00. I know that he wakes up at like five or six to get ready because he is so excited. He's not afraid to tell me he woke up at 5:00.

I asked Tom what was hardest about being Bret's friend. His answer was quick and unexpectedly selfless:

It's hardest not to get to see him doing the things I get to do. I hate that more than anything, and I don't ever know how to handle it. It's only happened a few times, but sometimes when we talk on the phone, he'll talk about how he knows he's limited. One time he told me one of the simplest things he wanted to do was be able to drive a truck. Simple things like that are the hardest – not big significant events – just the little things that most of us would take for granted.

Later, listening to Tina speak from the perspective of an administrator added depth to what was becoming a refrain in my dialogue with families. *Beautiful IS something maybe you did not expect that happens, but it far from just happens. It has to be purposely set in motion.*

Tina said:

My son's inclusive journey began as a toddler enrolled in a Developmental Day School, and I don't think it ever stopped. I think daily interaction with peers with special needs became his expectation of what school was going to be like all the way through.

Because she believes both Tom and Bret learned reciprocally from one another to “walk among different kinds of people,” she expresses concern about segregated classrooms—not

only for the “Bret’s of the world,” but also for students who might solely be placed in honor’s classes. Tina said:

Who’s going to open those doors for them to have these experiences? What if there’s not ever a mama or daddy or teacher who says, ‘You may not get it now, but this is good stuff. You are going to be a better person the more people you spend time with who are different than you are. It’s going to make you stronger. It’s going to make your brain bigger. It’s going to make your world bigger.’?

By the end of my interviews with both Tina and Cora’s dad, Steve, they each reached a similar conclusion about how to see the “us” rather than the “other.” Tina stated that, “You have to experience it. It’s almost like one of those desensitization things where you have to look at the airplane, touch the airplane, sit down on the airplane, and finally take off and fly in the airplane.” Steve stated that, “I think the answer is more exposure, more exposure, more exposure. And of course, just the opposite is what’s often done.”

Author and lecturer, Gail Sheehy (1976), once said, “If we don’t change, we don’t grow. We aren’t really living. Growth demands a temporary surrender of security.” At first glance, growth often appears more like destruction. In order to become all it was intended to be, a seed must crack wide open; a caterpillar must form a chrysalis. All of the parents interviewed humbly spoke of unimaginable personal growth simply because they found themselves in a situation that demanded it. They expressed an extreme consciousness of the fact that given a choice, prior to the experience, they would likely have opted out of the very circumstances that quite literally provided their families with a new world view – a glimpse of the fractal.

*Tina:* If everybody could just not be afraid... It's all about fear. We are terrified because all we know is this itty-bitty box that we live in. And so it's just easier to stay in our box and think that there's something wrong with everybody else, and it gives us permission not to have to figure out that there's a core of us that's the same core. It's almost a question of humanity. If we all could just step back and look at the root causes for all the crazy stuff happening in the world, it comes down so much to the fact that somebody is different than somebody else. End of discussion. The benefits are, once you step outside of that box, and once you know that, you can't go back. You can't go back.

Consistent throughout this research is the idea that gaining a more holistic perspective through experience and exposure is necessary for sustaining meaningful inclusion. This process begins with commitment. Exclusion cannot be an option.

**Resistance to change and fear.** According to this study, the foremost challenge of inclusion, as far as schools are concerned, is the same fierce resistance to change. Bryan, a State Exceptional Children's Division Consultant, has made a career of fostering inclusive practices in public schools. He lamented, "You are fighting generations of public education where people hang on to the status quo with both hands as tightly as they can." Just as it takes time for parents dealing with horizontal differences to reconceptualize the idea of family, educators hold firmly to their concepts of school. The parents in this study, at times painfully, let go of predetermined goals, expectations, and plans for their families, only to realize that in doing so, they made room for even bigger ones. These parents freed themselves to achieve their greatest expression. Rather than following a linear plan leading to one-dimensional results, they found non-linear solutions for accommodating their

children's significant support needs that inconceivably led to multi-dimensional benefits for all involved. Parents realized, ironically, that their own narrow perception of family was far more limiting than the disability of which they had been so afraid. As Bryan elaborated on this resistance to change, the prominent theme of fear was also reiterated: "The biggest obstacle, to me, is fear of the unknown. I think people fight inclusive practices because they're just scared to death that they don't have the skill sets to do what needs to happen to make it work." It is also just plain hard. People resist hard, especially when the final outcome is unforeseeable.

Based on personal experience teaching inclusion classes, Ray, a middle school general education teacher, was among those unconvinced that the required change and hard work were worth the effort. His thoughts address these issues as well as the feelings of inadequacy. When discussing his experience teaching inclusion classes Ray said:

It was painful. Emotionally, it was really hard. I knew I wasn't serving those kids well – at least I felt that – maybe I was. It's possible there's a bright side to it, but I am cynical.... And doing it well definitely would require more work of teachers. You would have to have a whole new culture of planning, and that's hard and scary to think about. Teachers would have to plan way ahead. It happens more than we would like to admit that what we are going to teach the next day hasn't been planned that far ahead. Planning at the last minute doesn't work for collaboration. So, you're asking for some big changes. Good, but painful changes. I'm not convinced the will is there. It would take a different lens to look through. It would rock the boat, but that's not always a bad thing.

In one of my favorite movie scenes Jimmy Dugan, from *A League of Their Own*, convinces Dottie not to quit baseball before reaching her potential.

*Dottie:* It just got too hard.

*Jimmy:* It's supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. Hard is what makes it great.

Even within families, there are some who choose to give up before seeing it through. In today's culture, parents may experience some sense of guilt or may even be frowned upon for not accepting the role of caregiver to their own child. Contrastingly, teachers are often viewed as compassionate and helpful to the student with special needs—perhaps even more so the rest of the class—for initiating a “better” placement for a child who does not seem to fit. Although, in some cases that may be so, the compartmentalized design of our current school system not only allows for relatively easy access to alternatives, but these alternatives are also often heralded, without much question, as better options than finding a way to support that child in the general classroom. Often, it is a matter of how far individual teachers are willing to go. Bryan stated that:

Every teacher has a responsibility to differentiate instruction for a diverse group of kids. It's often a matter of degree. ‘Well, I will do that to a point, but when things get too intense for me, it's time to send them to the special ed teacher down the hallway, and they can work their magic down there.’ I still believe this stems from a fear that they might not know how to teach them.

Because each situation is unique, with too many variables to control, it is unknowable beforehand if the hard work of learning to accommodate a child's individualized support needs within a general classroom setting will promote growth. We want to predict and

measure the most logical way to minimize risks and manage situations and our environment. We hold on to the assumption that control is synonymous with order. Is it possible, as in the case with countless families that our narrowed perception of what makes a classroom successful is inconceivably limiting us as an educational system? As will be evident in the following sections, all 18 interview participants either directly or indirectly brought out the themes of resistance to change and fear. However, in order for the fractal of inclusion—the ordered shape of chaos—to become visible, a change must take place and fears must be confronted.

**Experience.** Before experiencing life as a butterfly, a caterpillar would never set out to fly. *Beautiful is something maybe you didn't expect that happens.* Conversations with Ray revealed an openness to consider that there was more to inclusion than his own experience, provided hard evidence that the benefits outweigh the costs. Ray stated that:

I have not been convinced of that. The benefits, to me, are few and far between. Maybe they're there and I'm not looking for them, or maybe I don't even know what to be looking for. It's not been proven to me that everybody is gaining. There can't be winners across the board. It's a disadvantage to my regular education kids because time spent either managing or preparing something for the inclusion kids has to come from somewhere. I'm sorry. If the winners are the inclusion kids, then there's got to be losers.

Upon closer examination in the following section, Ray's story revealed that necessary supports and best practices were not properly in place; inclusion seen *through* his situation appeared ineffective. Janet, an elementary school principal skilled in change leadership, likewise came to the conclusion that children learn best in homogenous settings based on her

personal experiences. Although her leadership style is conducive to organizational change and will be discussed at greater length, her background does not include inclusive practices.

Janet stated that:

Research does say that students with special needs have some benefits from inclusion, like role models. I believe that to some degree, but I stand by leveled classrooms. I saw the benefits. I've looked at settings where you have all levels in the same room, and you have uninvolved students. I saw less frustration from regular kids in separate settings where they could move on. Kids with special needs were also more engaged in classrooms with a level playing field; they didn't have anything to prove. They weren't trying to mask differences like they would in a regular classroom. I think there are some settings where inclusion works, more hands-on classes maybe—like science, but when you get to the nuts and bolts of learning, I believe in leveled.

I questioned Janet further, asking if the issue could be a matter of not enough support in the general classroom to make it work? “Maybe, if a co-teacher were in the classroom, do you think fewer students would disengage?” Janet said, “Probably, but we never have had that number of adults.” Rather than reconceptualizing school and looking *at* a bigger picture of possibilities, the tendency is to continue looking *through* existing practices, methods of instructional delivery, and measurements of success. Once again, the story of the blind men and the elephant comes to mind. Truths are created based on what our senses reveal. It is my observation that until another point of view is experienced, a person's perception is definitely his or her reality.

**Lack of empirical data.** The literature review in this study exposed the crux of the problem with inclusion as most often not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of

implementation of it. Therein lies the Catch 22 of producing the empirical evidence many seek. Bryan, a State Exceptional Children's Division Consultant, addressed this dilemma:

There's not a lot of research out there that shows that specific skill levels are really increased by inclusive practices. And I think the reason for that is that people haven't gotten a really good handle on what good inclusive practices look like. People say, "Show me the results, and then I'll do it." Well, it's got to be done well to show results.

Furthermore, our microscopic view of success based on predetermined "specific skill levels" might be preventing us from achieving our greatest expression. Measurements, such as standardized test scores, inevitably narrow our focus. Bryan made a statement suggesting that often the overall articulated goals of a school defy quantification:

When you examine a school's mission statements, every one of them has some sort of flowery language... 'We're going to make everyone better citizens of the world and lifelong learners' [smiles]—that's one of my favorites. Well, you can have some discussion about what that really means, but one of the things it means is to come to a better understanding and appreciation of your fellow man, of your fellow young person. And inclusive practices are the only way you are going to get close to any of that.

Based on both good and bad observations across his state, Bryan shares Tina's optimistic sentiments – almost to the letter – of what happens once people practice meaningful inclusion:

I think people in general really do move forward. It might be at a snail's pace. There aren't too many places that come to mind where people have really gone backwards.

Because, once you've experienced and you've seen the difference and all the things you can hardly put into words... you wouldn't go back the other way.

*Beautiful is something maybe you didn't expect that happens.*

The following section, while presenting holdbacks to inclusion, highlights the stories of teachers and administrators who went the distance. Solomon (2012) wrote, "Having exceptional children exaggerates parental tendencies; those who would be bad parents become awful parents, but those who would be good parents often become extraordinary" (p. 6). Perhaps, it is the same with educators. Perhaps, the exposure of enough extraordinary families and extraordinary classrooms plotting chaotic movements in multiple dimensions overtime will show up as points of light weaving steadily into an awe-inspiring pattern, and order will show up as a distinct shape – not indeterminate but astoundingly complex—the strange attractor, the shape of chaos, the shape of wholeness.

### **Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle**

In *The God Theory*, Haisch (2006) quotes Heisenberg as attesting:

It is probably true quite generally that in the history of human thinking the most fruitful developments frequently take place at those points where two different lines of thought meet. These lines may have their roots in quite different parts of human culture, in different times or different cultural environments or different religious traditions: hence if they actually meet, that is, if they are at least so much related to each other that a real interaction can take place, then one may hope that new and interesting developments may follow. (p. 160)

*Beautiful IS something maybe you didn't expect that happens, but it far from just happens. It has to be purposely set in motion.*

Data in this section further indicated that discovering beautiful (*new and interesting developments*) likely depends on a willingness of the observer to let go of preconceived and long held notions of its attributes. Heisenberg’s revolutionary discovery that photons were *both waves and particles*, depending on the type of experiment conducted, shook the foundations of modern physics. The idea that you get what you look for challenged Newtonian “either/or” objectivity and certainty. Similarly, the concept of classrooms being *both general and special* shakes the foundations of modern education on both sides of the fence. For the most part, compartmentalization condemns us to see only one at a time. Inevitably, merging the two requires a change of mindset, as alluded to by Bryan:

Ask a teacher, “What do you do?” Typically, they say, “I teach seventh grade math, or chemistry, or special education.” And there needs to be further discussion. “Is that how you define yourself, or do you teach children – do you teach young people?” What is the difference between those two descriptions, and what do they reveal about our way of thinking?

Our current language for perceptions and attitudes about others and ourselves grows out of a collective immersion in mechanistic thought where things, as well as people, have a definite position and identity. This one-dimensional, linear lens of space, time, and movement carries over into our view of education. Despite our comfort with this perspective, new science suggests some other, wholly different, nonlinear lens from which all of our reality can be revealed as multi-dimensional.

Beth, an administrator whose story is highlighted in this section, again brought up a matter of degree and the blurriness of drawing objective lines between general and special education. Beth said:

Honestly, I don't think you have a class that's not an inclusion class. Nobody's ever had one. There's never been a non-inclusion class in the world. There are a lot of kids with a lot of different needs in every classroom; they may just not be as visible. They don't have labels.

Other administrators concurred and indirectly referred to the uncertainty of categorizing students, as well as the impossibility of complete "normalcy" or uniformity among any group of people. Judy, another administrator, said, "We're trying to make everybody in each setting like the middle. No differences at the top or bottom, but like it's been said, 'We are all equally different'." This sentiment is reminiscent of several interviews conducted by Solomon (2012), and expressed explicitly by one parent in particular, "I don't believe in normality. It's just an averaging of extremes" (p. 352).

Before zooming out to see the bigger picture, this section seeks to expose and challenge the binaristic nature of general education versus special education and holdbacks to perceiving unity. School, from the point of view of Cora's family, will be the starting point. Similarities and differences in the experiences of other families, as well as, descriptions of the same situations from the perspective of teachers and administrators will follow in order to establish saliency of themes. The data reflected eight key themes that contribute to successfully and meaningfully creating a sustainable sense of inclusion in classrooms: a challenge to the status quo, administrator and/or teacher attitude, communication, a climate shift in special education, purposeful scheduling of students and time, alternative assessment measures, staffing, and a climate shift in general education.

**Challenge to the status quo.** The status quo of school in today's western society is predominantly compartmentalization. By its very nature, inclusion is a challenge to existing conditions.

*Cora.* Prior to kindergarten, Cora's childcare experiences were fully inclusive. Steve and Susan were insistent that such inclusive placements would continue when their daughter entered the school system. However, in their district of Harper County, inclusion of a child with an intellectual disability in a regular setting was unprecedented.

*Susan:* It was brand new for everybody. The only model they knew at Savington Elementary School was that a child like Cora went to "The Hub," the segregated, separate, back of the school. You literally came in the back door. Every child in the county with even a mild intellectual disability went there. We knew enough to know that it was not going to be a good thing for her.

Deciding to try a smaller school in a nearby district, they took their daughter to the kindergarten screening. Steve ran into the principal, who had yet to meet Cora, in the hallway and was assured that out of district placements were never turned down. Back in the classroom, Cora discovered a ladder leading to a children's loft area and climbed up to explore. Steve remembered it taking a good while to coax her down. Susan interjected, "I guess that scene got reported to the principal. That afternoon he called Steve saying, 'People must think we are running some kind of center here,' and that he would be denying the out of district placement." After a brief conversation about discrimination with a disconcerted principal and a supportive EC coordinator, Susan and Steve decided not to force the issue: "We knew if that was the attitude of the school, it was not going to be successful." They returned to their own district preparing to face the next obstacle of keeping Cora out of a

separate setting. Steve said, “So, I think because we weren’t putting her in the Hub, they really didn’t have a system to provide an EC teacher for a kid who’s going to be included.”

Listening to Susan and Steve brought to mind an image of Rosa Parks keeping her seat on the bus. Cora was the first person with a visible disability in this district to keep her seat in a general classroom. Examining snapshots of this family’s brave story reveals that although the ride from kindergarten to inclusive experiences in a university setting has been far from easy, their journey continues to be extraordinary and groundbreaking. Throughout history, when a person crosses established societal boundaries, people are starkly confronted with a new way of thinking. Many steadfastly continue to look through a one-dimensional “either/or” lens confining that person to a single and separate identity. However, the perspective of those willing to peer through a new lens is multi-dimensionally enlarged and forever changed. They can not only zoom in on a common core, but also zoom out on a universal design. They see all of humanity—*both diverse and unified*. Indeed, you get what you look for. *The benefits are, once you step outside of that box, and once you know that, you can’t go back. You can’t go back.*

The solution at Savington Elementary was to move one of the self-contained classes into the “regular” school. Cora would be pulled out from her general kindergarten setting into the EC teacher’s classroom for reading and math. Steve and Susan compromised on their position of full inclusion and settled for most of the day in the regular classroom, taking solace in the fact that at least Cora was not in the segregated section of the school.

The first semester of kindergarten was, in fact, chaotic. Teachers, assistants, and therapists struggled to figure out new, often overlapping, nonlinear roles. Reports of Cora’s

bad behavior at school, as well as questionable consequences, steadily filtered their way home. The most traumatic accounts involved a time-out area.

*Steve:* It was a closet with a light and a fan in it. It was literally a closet. It was built as a closet. Cora had nightmares about it. I remember somebody wrote up something once saying, “We put her in the closet. It worked. She cried for Mom and prayed for God.”

*Susan:* The kindergarten teacher was the only one treating her like a kid. She was positive. She would say, ‘Here’s what she knows, and what’s the next step in the trajectory of what she needs to learn.’ I had this dream, and I ended up telling her about it. She was in the classroom. There were kids everywhere, but there were also all of these little yippy dogs crisscrossing all over the room, and it was almost impossible for her to do anything.

Things came to a head in November, when Cora was suspended for kicking another child in P.E.

*Susan:* She was sent back to the classroom from P.E. The kindergarten teacher wasn’t there. The EC teacher wasn’t there. The speech therapist wasn’t there. I was also out of town in Chicago. All of her familiar support was gone on the same day. She was sent back to the regular classroom, upset, with no support. So, they put her in a separate room by herself, and wrote in the discipline report that we “refused to respond to calls.” I WAS IN CHICAGO! There were no cellphones, and I was in Chicago. Nobody called me there. I don’t know why, but they couldn’t reach Steve either; and we “refused to respond to calls.” So, they suspended her.

The result was a seven-hour IEP meeting spread over two afternoons. It was during this time, the first signs of chaos pairing with order became visible. Prior to the meeting an assistant principal, as well as, a psychologist spent time observing Cora in the general classroom. Interestingly, although their observations described similar situations, they had very different perspectives on what was taking place.

*Susan:* Before listening to their reports, I already felt like I was going to throw up. The principal opened the meeting with, “We have two options here. We have ‘The Hub,’ and we have a self-contained classroom.” That’s how open the meeting started. The assistant principal’s comments were only negative—not one positive thing in her whole observation. The psychologist, however, pointed out that Cora had actually followed more directions than she had not followed. She also said many times when Cora didn’t follow directions immediately, she was looking around at what the other kids were doing, so maybe she didn’t understand or hear the direction. She would figure out what they were doing, and she would then do it. That’s not, “Didn’t do it. Didn’t do it. Didn’t do it,” which was the assistant principal’s entire observation. By casting *uncertainty* on the “either/or” of following directions, the psychologist began to challenge beliefs of objective measurement. *Indeed, you get what you look for.*

The meeting was intense. *At first glance growth often appears more like destruction.* Painstakingly, Steve and Susan were able to express concerns. Cora’s IEP was written before anyone in the school even knew her. The behavior plan was written, but never agreed to or signed. Cora’s behaviors seemed to be viewed as divergent; the same behaviors in other children were seen as “just being kindergartners.” The EC teacher sometimes took unfinished work back to the general classroom or expected the kindergarten teacher to follow

through with punishments designated during Cora's pullout time. "Yippy puppies as far as I was concerned," Susan sighed:

And so I talked. I just put it all out there. Like, when they finally hired an EC assistant for the classroom, all of a sudden Cora's going to the closet over and over and over. As flawed as the behavior plan was, at least it was something. I went to the EC teacher and said, 'Has she seen the behavior plan?' Her response was, 'Oh, I don't think she's seen that yet.' She was the person given responsibility for taking Cora to the time out room, but she had never seen the procedure, or under what conditions to do it. Sometimes she was in there for as little as not doing a worksheet. Susan, exasperated, finally stumbled upon words that were humble, yet powerful enough to shift everyone's focus:

I have been doing to this team what I don't want you to do to my daughter. I've been looking at you from the vantage point of your deficits and not of your strengths. And that's also what is happening to Cora. The IEP meeting isn't supposed to start with placement, it's supposed to start with strengths.

Bryan was an administrator present at the time of this meeting. "So," he said, "let's do it." Picking up a dry erase marker, Bryan went to the board. People started saying what Cora *could* do, and it did not stop until the entire white board was covered in her strengths.

*Susan:* The principal kept repeating, 'She can do that? She can do that?' She hadn't heard any of the positives – ANY of the positives. And that was the turning point. It was like flicking on a light switch. After that day, the behaviors almost ceased. I don't mean there wasn't ever anything, but no big deals were made of it.

*Me:* Because people get what they look for?

*Steve:* They find what they're looking for. Cora was not in that meeting. You can't tell me it was her behavior that changed. It was everybody else whose behaviors changed – whose attitudes changed. The kindergarten teacher came up to us after the meeting.

*Susan:* It was my “yippy dog” dream. She said, ‘I can do this, if they’ll just get out of my way.’ And she did. I believe what made the difference is that she wanted her.

In order for attitudes to change and perspectives to shift, people must have new experiences and be confronted with alternate points of view. In order for people to have new experiences, there must be a challenge to the status quo. As is revealed in the following section, a simple change in attitude of even one teacher or administrator—at any grade level—can affect a child's life into adulthood.

**Administrator and/or teacher attitude.** The second semester was completely different. It was agreed that Cora would benefit from another year in kindergarten, and her teacher requested to keep her.

*Susan:* The second year was very good. Other teachers in the school noticed. The first grade teacher was excellent too. No fear about Cora or anything. She included her in the classroom, and she taught her. She would look at what she was able to do, give her the next step, and monitor the learning. That's just a good teacher.

It seems that when one person sees through a new lens, there are others who are inspired to peer through it themselves. The way begins to be paved. *Beautiful is something maybe you didn't expect that happens.*

Cora remained in general education classrooms through the eighth grade at Savington. Her elementary and middle school years were a roller coaster ride of highs and lows. Steve and Susan maintain that the attitude of the teacher is what makes or breaks a positive inclusive experience. Some years, they confess, “regular setting” was little more than a box checked on the IEP.

*Susan:* In second grade, they left her in the hall a lot. And third grade, I remember walking into the classroom, and all the chairs were facing one direction, except Cora’s. Hers was perpendicular, facing the wall. An assistant was working with her. When I asked about it, the teacher said, ‘Oh, it’s just easier for them to work over there.’ She might as well have been in a different classroom. But then fourth grade was a ‘Totally. Different. Experience.’ The teacher requested to have Cora.

*Steve:* It’s not just how the teacher’s attitude affects the child. It is how it affects the whole class. Cora still has friendships that began in fourth grade. We did lots of sleepovers that year. She just walked in graduation with that same class. They were friends all the way through. One in particular, a regular education student, they still go out to dinner sometimes. It started in the fourth grade. That teacher modeled acceptance, and the kids followed by example. Kids don’t have any other place to learn it. Natural supports kick in because the attitude of the teacher.

In high school, Cora followed an occupational course of study, but she took several inclusive classes, such as social studies, art, and drama.

*Susan:* She also took cosmetology. The cosmetology teacher was fantastic. And Cora’s really good at it. She’s not going to be able to learn all the stuff to take the exam, but she does nails; she can French braid hair. The teacher had the flexibility to

recognize when they were doing heavily academic things—they did some detailed anatomy in that class, which I didn't expect—Cora could just get up. She just knew. She would go launder the towels and put them away. She had jobs in the classroom that were real, purposeful things that had to be done. And she also got work credit toward her occupational diploma.

Following high school, Cora applied and was accepted to a two-year program for students with disabilities at a state university, allowing her full access to its programs and services. Based on individualized needs, she was offered an appropriate curriculum and the necessary support to attain personal academic, career, and social goals. As I listened to Cora's story from the perspective of a self-contained special education teacher, I tried to envision a similar future for my students who spend much of their school career in isolated, separate settings. Problems are often avoided or solved for them. They are often "protected" from figuring out how to cope with emotions or deal with difficult social interactions. I also thought back to my interview with Tom as he discussed his friendship with Bret:

I know he was in some elective classes, like P.E., but if he had been more involved in regular classes all along, I think things would be easier for him – more for social reasons maybe than academic. Sometimes, I know he wants to do something, but I have to drag him places. He seems uncomfortable and shy outside of very familiar surroundings.

There is no doubt that the ups and downs of Steve and Susan's relentless pursuit of inclusion contributed to their daughter gaining the social skills and confidence necessary to actively participate in a collegiate setting and equipped her to expect and enjoy a meaningful quality of life in the adult world. The "specific skill-sets" necessary for Cora to achieve her greatest

expression never enabled her to access or pass a standardized test without accommodations or read on grade level. Was inclusion successful for this family? It depends on what you're looking for. *Before experiencing life as a butterfly, a caterpillar would never set out to fly. Beautiful is something maybe you didn't expect that happens.*

Before leaving, I was reminded that the inclusive struggle continues beyond graduation.

*Steve:* Fast forward to today.... My son, Jonathan, got a call from his soon to be father-in-law who wanted to know, 'What's going to happen with Cora?'

*Susan:* Meaning, would his daughter have responsibility for Cora? He said, 'She can't take care of herself.'

*Steve: (laughs)* It never ends. Jonathan's been going with this girl for four years.

*Susan:* She's great. She loves Cora.

*Steve:* So I tell him. She's going to be taken care of. You'll have to manage the trust fund, but there'll be more than enough to take care of her.... It doesn't stop. I wish I had been him and had the phone and said, 'Well, what's going to happen is she is going to bless your daughter's life, and your daughter will be an amazing person *(wipes another tear)*, and I'm not going to charge you an extra penny for her.

**Jake.** Jake's story reiterates the idea that the attitude of teachers and administrators is key to whether or not meaningful, sustainable inclusive experiences are created. I first heard of Jake from Beth, his elementary school principal. She began:

A man came in the office. He didn't even tell me his name. I knew it was Jake's dad because he looked just like him. He asked if I was the principal. When I told him I was, he just said, "Thank you," and walked back out the door. I'm not proud of this

now, but I turned to the receptionist and said, “I guess he just wanted to see who could put his wife in her place.” Kevin was a meek man [laughing], the exact opposite of Jake’s mom. Much later it was like God told me what he was doing that day. I got a chance to ask him before Jake left the elementary school, and he said, “Yes ma’am, I wanted to see who I was praying for.” I believe Jake’s daddy prayed us all through that first hard year.

Beth consented to an interview, but requested that it also include the woman who changed her perspective to “both/and” from “either/or.” Ann, Jake’s mother, willingly agreed and invited us both to her home, an invitation that never would have been extended early on in their relationship. Knowing that Jake made it to the tenth grade in a regular public school setting, Beth was hopeful to hear of positive experiences since her last direct involvement his sixth grade year. Sadly, this was not the case.

Jake had repeated kindergarten and just finished first grade when Beth arrived at Creswell Elementary School. Similar to Steve and Susan, Ann determined to keep her son out of West Franklin, the district’s public separate school. Even with their resources and the prestige of being doctoral-level professionals, Cora’s parents continually battled the system. The only resource at Ann’s disposal was sheer will. Passion to fight for what she felt best for her son came out as bully-like intimidation to Creswell’s faculty.

*Ann:* The first principal didn’t interact a lot. I never saw her in any of the IEP meetings. I didn’t really have a fight. I would go in there and tell all the teachers [at this point, Ann’s voice boomed], ‘I’m doing my part. I make sure he gets up. He can take his own bath. He’s been able to wash himself since he was a little boy. He brushes his teeth. He dresses himself. He goes to his doctor’s routine visits. I make

sure he takes his medicine everyday. I make sure he gets his sleep every night. I do my part. I'm looking for you to do your part.'

*Beth:* What you didn't know – And you just explained something that hadn't dawned on me before. I am a very involved principal. So, what you didn't know is the teachers were scared to death of you because of things like what you just said, and the way you just said it [laughter from both]. They were also afraid of Jake, and they had never had anybody between you and them. Before I ever saw your face, I was thinking, 'I'm going to take care of her and make sure she doesn't give the teachers too hard a time.' It took me a year of learning you, and your husband praying for us, to understand that we were both trying to do exactly what we thought we were supposed to do. I realized you were just fighting for what you believed was right for your child. I came to admire that. But if I hadn't gotten involved, and we hadn't had that rocky year, a lot of things might not have happened for Jake that were able to happen because I could be that buffer.

*Ann:* [Looking at me] Oh gosh, because she would let the teachers talk. Oh, she had her boxing gloves on. 'You are not going to come in here to my school and tell those teachers how to run their class.' And I was sitting there looking at this woman thinking, 'Who in the hell are you? I've never had the principal... [laughter], Why are you in here?' I left that first day, and I got outside the door, and I got in my car, and I cried. I cried like a baby because I thought, 'This is the end. They're not going to teach my child. I'm going to have to take him out of this school and put him in West Franklin.'

*Beth:* And that's the other part you didn't know. The teachers were all afraid to tell you, but that was in the process. I was hearing, 'Jake needs to be at West Franklin.' And you're right. Exactly how you describe me is the way I started out.

As Ann outlined Jake's first three years, it became ironically apparent that Beth took over as administrator just in time to keep Jake in a general elementary school setting. Under her leadership, signs of order pairing with chaos emerged. Beth truly was involved in the classrooms, and she did indeed "let the teachers talk." After all, she had walked in their shoes. She listened and observed situations from their perspective, and she slowly earned their trust. But something about Ann's tenacity gave her pause. Beth was also a mother; in many ways, she had also walked in Ann's shoes. With great humility and wisdom, she also began listening and observing situations from Ann's perspective. Beth let Ann talk, and slowly earned her trust as well.

She listened to the chocolate story.

*Ann:* One day when Jake was in kindergarten, I got off work early and went by the school. Well, ever since he learned to go to the bathroom, I never had a problem with him wiping himself – never even had anything on his hands. He knows how to wash his hands. I'm walking down the hall to his room, and I could hear him crying before I turned the corner. I sped up. So, when I got there, Mrs. Miller had plastic gloves on. She had my baby and was like, 'I'm just having a bad day. I'm having a day with him, and I am GOING to handle him.' I said, 'No, you won't.' And she said, 'Oh yes, yes I will.' I said, 'I promise if you put your hands on my child, you will regret the day.' I took him. I got him. I looked at his shirt. They had – and even she should've known – [Ann seemed to be reliving the story as it was told] – they ate

chocolate. It was chocolate on his shirt. Mrs. Miller thought it was something else. I pointed it out to another teacher. She said, 'You're right. It's chocolate.' Why did that teacher have the gall to even handle my son? She must've handled him in a rough way. He was crying. That hurt me. That really hurt me.

Ann's early stories were reminiscent of Steve and Susan's experiences. Often, it seems, the worst was expected. *Cora's behaviors seemed to be viewed as divergent; the same behaviors in other children were seen as "just being kindergartners."* You get what you look for.

There were also "closet stories".

*Ann:* They called me one day and told me he was having a bad day. When I got there, Jake was in this little itty-bitty room, out of breath and pouring with sweat.

And there were "yippy dogs." Beth comments:

One thing Ann and I didn't agree on to start with was Jake's first grade one-on-one worker. I thought it best to leave him in place for the second grade. Ann would say, "Something's wrong. Jake's not happy," and he really wasn't. Ann would try to tell me that Dustin, this worker, was the wrong person; so I started paying attention.

*Ann:* The only time he was supposed to intervene was when Jake was having a bad day. Come to find out, he was part of the bad day. His teacher, Mrs. Jackson, she would tell Dustin, "I can handle this," and ask him to step back, but he wouldn't do it. He would try to take over.

*Beth:* Yes, the teacher wanted him gone too. He was the wrong person. At the end of the first semester, we decided to try it without him. Jake did a lot better.

*Ann:* Jake will still tell me, "No, I don't need a worker. No, Mom."

Up close, everyone involved in Jake's elementary school experience was *certain* of his or her position and stance. Only by zooming out did any *uncertainty* creep in. From Beth's vantage point, it could be seen how she and observers on both sides *not only interfered in observations, but also participated in their creation*. After first building relationships and gaining the trust of *both Ann and the teachers*, Beth was in a position to negotiate compromise. By enlarging their perspectives, Beth enabled all stakeholders to look *at* a situation that before they could only look *through*. Teachers took steps outside their comfort zones because they felt administrative support. Ann began letting her guard down and facing some hard truths because she trusted that Jake's best interest was at heart. Later on the drive home, Beth would reveal:

Even in elementary school, the thing that made it the hardest was Ann wanting Jake to do EXACTLY what the other kids were doing. And he really couldn't. We had to gently help her understand that. We also pointed out that we could all learn things from him that no one else could teach us.

It became apparent over the course of the interview, that unlike Steve, Susan, and Jackie, Ann had never come to terms with her child's horizontal difference within her own heart and mind. At the time of the interview, she still expected Jake to learn *specific skill sets* in order to be successful and experience "beautiful" in the singular, linear way she envisioned for all of her children. She talked in terms of teachers being able to fix disabilities rather than bringing out strengths to accommodate for them. It seemed that casting blame was easier for her than reconceptualizing Jake's future.

*Ann:* I want my son in typical settings, typical workplaces. Living on his

own, having his own livelihood, driving.... You know, EVERYTHING. In middle school one of the teachers actually asked me was I preparing him to live with someone when he gets older. I said, ‘Why?’ And she said, ‘You are not looking for him to live by himself?’ I said, ‘Why did you just say that to me?’ I said, ‘Yes, ma’am, just like you live by yourself or your kids live by their self. I’m looking for him to have a typical life.’

As she talked about Jake’s high school experience and her refusal to allow him to participate in an occupational course of study, the anger in her voice intensified.

*Ann:* They started telling us that Jake couldn’t do this and Jake couldn’t do that. They threw me papers – just threw them at me. I’m looking at them, and I said, “Okay, this is algebra, pre-algebra. You told me you were going to put him in a classroom of ten students with a teacher that knew how to teach him. And she can’t teach him?” I even have the EC teacher saying she doesn’t know how to teach him [algebra].

Ann’s tight grasp on predetermined expectations and her yearning for Jake to be “typical” was in sharp contrast to other parent participants who had experienced a multi-dimensional view of success. *At times painfully letting go, they freed themselves to achieve their greatest expression.* Ultimately, for reasons strikingly different than Ann’s, this research reveals that much of her frustration with Jake’s school experience after his sixth grade year was justifiable. As I listened to her describe one tense meeting after another with middle school and high school teachers and administrators concerning Jake’s placement in the OCS program, Susan’s humble yet powerful words kept coming back to mind, but in this case, no one ever spoke them:

*I have been doing to this team what I don't want you to do to my daughter. I've been looking at you from the vantage point of your deficits and not of your strengths. And that's also what is happening to Cora. The IEP meeting isn't supposed to start with placement, it's supposed to start with strengths.*

When asked about his transition from grade to grade in the elementary setting Ann replied informatively, “It was never like, ‘We can’t do anything for him’, like it is now going into the high school.” The attitudes of teachers and administrators directly affect a third key contributor to successful inclusion—communication.

**Communication.** As Ann shared more and more of her story, it became evident that what was lost between elementary school and high school was a facilitator of communication. Granted she did not make it easy, but based on the relationship she had with Beth, collaboration seemed very possible. By acknowledging Ann’s position, Beth set the groundwork for her to build a chrysalis—a place to let down her guard and risk temporarily suspending security in order to grow. Beyond Creswell Elementary School, such a safe and trusting relationship was never forged. No one saw the concerned, frightened mother behind her defensive, brash exterior. *You get what you look for.*

Without an administrator or teacher willing to acknowledge both sides and become a supportive, yet firm, buffer, Ann became increasingly defensive, while school personnel became increasingly elusive. To avoid confrontation, decisions about Jake’s educational placement were glossed over in middle-school IEP meetings, resulting in Ann feeling blindsided when he entered high school. However, as in the case of Cora’s seven hour IEP meeting, sometimes confrontation is absolutely necessary in order to reach a consensus, in

order to clear up misconceptions, in order for both sides to grow. *At first glance, growth often appears more like destruction.*

*Ann:* I told them at the high school that I dropped the ball at the middle school. I'm going to tell you who got me. Mrs. Vance fooled me with everything in her being. She didn't tell me and had the nerve to send the OCS (Occupational Course of Study) teacher to come down there – thinking I was going to sign those papers for him to go in and clean up? See, they wanted him to go into those OCS classes where he would only get so much teaching. Then the rest of it would be so many hours in the community working in the grocery store or wherever. I've been known for them to be dropped off in the barbershops for them to sweep the floors. I've been known for them to be dropped off at the mall to vacuum. I wasn't going for that. She said, "Well, you were preparing him in the middle school to go into those classes." And I said, "You didn't tell me that." And she said, "All those times at his IEP meetings we were discussing it." And I said, "No, you did not, and you are a bold-face liar." And she said, "We don't want to throw him out to the wolves if he's been doing this down here in the middle school."

*Me:* Did he take the regular, standardized End-Of-Grade test at the middle school?

*Ann:* Yes, but it was Extend 2.

Obviously, Ann had not fully understood the implications of this IEP team decision.

Determining that eighth graders participate in this type of modified testing also determines their placement in the OCS program upon entering high school. Therefore, it was decided in middle school that Jake would pursue a diploma based on an Occupational Course of Study rather than a regular high school diploma. Although there are academic components in this

pathway, it is designed for students planning to begin work immediately upon graduation and targets functional skills. Her description of the program indicated a belief that the OCS curriculum was less than rigorous and the vocational experiences offered to students had little to do with their strengths and interests. She also seemed unaware that Jake, like Cora, could still have opportunities to participate in inclusive high school courses. Perhaps Ann still would not have budged if conversations addressing her concerns had happened far prior to Jake's freshman year (as is required by law), but the feeling that decisions were made behind her back definitely took away any chance of compromise.

*Ann:* I would not sign the papers. I said, 'You can talk 'til you are blue in the face, I never agreed to this.' And so they said, 'Well, we have classes where he can have a typical setting with only a group of ten.' So, I said, 'Okay, we'll try that.' And that's where we are now like in that algebra class. They're telling me they can't teach him. Reflecting on these data, I cannot help but wonder what might have happened for *both* the school *and* her family, if Ann had developed a safe relationship with someone at the middle school, someone she believed had Jake's best interest at heart, someone like Beth, with whom she could be simultaneously honest and vulnerable. Data indicate it essential to all stakeholders of inclusion that the lines of communication remain open. I wonder how Jake's future will compare to Cora's.

Beth was brave enough to both confront Ann and set an example to her teachers of admitting when she was in the wrong. Where others saw "*either/or*," Beth could see "*both/and*." She was wisely uncertain. *It is probably true quite generally that in the history of human thinking the most fruitful developments frequently take place at those points where two different lines of thought meet.* Although the view wasn't perfect, as will be discussed

from the perspective of Jake's fourth grade teacher, Beth at least helped Creswell Elementary School see glimpses of the beautiful fractal of inclusion. *It seems that when one person sees through a new lens, there are others who are inspired to peer through it themselves. The way begins to be paved.* Perhaps someone from the high school will choose to look for a broader view of success.

*Eli.* At the time of this interview, Eli was going into the third grade and his "school story" just beginning to unfold. Dialogue with Jackie, Eli's mother, added dimension to the importance of communication to the success of inclusion. In Jackson County, there is no separate school setting exclusively serving students with significant support needs, so Jackie never had to consider fighting the system for Eli to attend the same regular public school as his sisters. However, she reported that about 70% of his day was spent in a separate self-contained classroom. The remaining portion of his day, including lunch, recess, science, and social studies was in a general education setting. A one-on-one assistant accompanied him to both science and social studies. When asked what inclusion meant to her, Jackie responded with a quick answer.

*Jackie:* Well, what I think it should be is that Eli should be able to be in a classroom with his typically developing age-appropriate peers with the content of the classwork being differentiated for him and other children who also learn differently. They are all learning the same subjects, and they're together, but access to the material may change based on their needs. There are two teachers in there, and nobody's really assigned to anybody, and everybody's just helping everybody. And the kids see that everybody learns differently, and everybody can learn from each other in different ways. But that's not what we have.... It's never been like that.

Although Jackie reiterated throughout the interview that the staff at Jackson County Elementary School were all “really nice” and had the best intentions, she conveyed a tangible disappointment in Eli’s academic and, at times, social progress. It seemed to her no one had ever really modified instruction or considered new approaches that might best meet Eli’s needs; rather there was an underlying expectation that he adapt to fit into existing programs. Jackie stated:

They’re at this narrow place. For whatever reason, they can’t do anything different. I’ve talked to them about curriculums that have been shown to help children with Down syndrome, and they’re like, ‘No, we’re not doing that. This is the curriculum, and it’s what we are going to use. Period.’ ...Once I took information about a research-based math program to the IEP meeting. I had copies for everybody. We even offered to purchase it for Eli and any other kids that would benefit from it. And they said, ‘No.’ You would have thought I was asking them... like I had my head on backwards. Anything like that I’ve ever requested or wanted to talk about, I’ve always been completely shut down.

Jackie was most concerned, however, with enlarging their perspectives the way Eli enlarged hers. She wanted to pass on the ability to see a child rather than a label. She was quite cognizant of the fact that preexisting programs, compartmentalized classrooms, and rigid daily patterns perpetuate the idea that students are *either* general education *or* special education. Oftentimes, this linear perspective blinds us to the obvious, as in the following anecdote.

*Jackie:* I go check on Eli sometimes during the school day because he can’t come home and tell me what’s going on. One time, I went to the school to watch him, and

he was there on the playground. He was on one playground by himself with a teacher watching him, and across the sidewalk from him were all the other first graders playing on another playground. Two completely different playgrounds at the exact same time – him playing alone on one and all the other kids playing on the other side of the sidewalk from him. It was in his IEP that his time at recess and lunch could be either special ed or general ed, and it just turned out in his schedule that he was in the special ed class at that time.

*Me:* But they were all out there at that time.

*Jackie:* I know, it made no sense to me, and it just broke my heart knowing that whoever was making those decisions for my child thought this was best. It's hard when I think everything's okay, and then I realize or find out there's something going on that I don't know about. And to blame it on the schedule? The kids were playing at the SAME time. It seemed to me that the schedule worked out for him to be with his peers. By the time I walked to the principal's office, I was sobbing. She was good. She said, 'What can we do to make this better?' So, I think they are very good people and genuinely want what's best for him, but they don't realize. I told them that I entrusted them to do what's best for him and my girls, and I can't imagine why he was out there by himself. I asked why they made that decision, and they said it had to do with the IEP. I know it wasn't intentional, but what message are we sending if we set up situations where it appears that kids need to be by themselves. We HAVE to be intentional. I don't know why they thought it was okay to let it go until a parent saw it, but after that whole incident, it seems like they're doing their best. When I look in the windows, they are engaging him. *The words Jackie chose to*

*finish this story evoke the same emotion as the image of Jake's father walking into the office to put a face to his prayers.*

This story is also reminiscent of a description Cora's father shared about showing up one day to eat lunch with his daughter at school.

*Steve:* They went and got their trays, and they left the lunchroom and went back in another room. And I went back in another room too, and we had lunch. We finished, and the teachers said, 'Thanks for coming.' And I said, 'You're welcome. I enjoyed having lunch with my daughter, but why is she back here and not out there?' They said something about the noise level and that the students seemed more comfortable in a separate place. I think mostly the teachers wanted away from the noise. I said, 'Is it not noisy for the other kids?' You know, lunch is one of those social times where they CAN be with other people. And that changed. All I had to do was ask. Communication is key. Sometimes, change is as simple as raising the consciousness of others. Perhaps this very conversation is the reason Cora is able to independently navigate a collegiate dining hall. *There is no doubt that the ups and downs of Steve and Susan's relentless pursuit of inclusion contributed to their daughter gaining the social skills and confidence necessary to actively participate in a collegiate setting and equipped her to expect and enjoy a meaningful quality of life in the adult world.*

In an effort to expose more and more of the fractal, this section continues to layer these parent perspectives of school with further teacher and administrator perspectives. It is important to acknowledge that just like the six blind men and the elephant, each participant touches and experiences different aspects of inclusion. Although individual observations seem *certain* and conclusive, only by viewing them collectively, can the elephant begin to

come into focus. While counterintuitive, being *uncertain* is paramount to seeing the big picture. Based on empirical evidence, physicists were convinced that a photon must be *either* a particle *or* a wave. Their strong convictions were limiting. Heisenberg's openness to seeing "*both/and,*" the *Uncertainty Principle*, led to revolutionary discoveries. "*It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.*"

**Climate shift in special education.** Data indicate that successful inclusion begins with shifts in the mindset of individual stakeholders toward individuals with support needs. From there, the stage is set for shifts in settings, delivery of services, and the collective focus of education in general.

Although Steve and Susan first introduced me, as a researcher, to the Hub, their perception of it developed decades after its inception. Knowledge of its history sheds light on the following unexpected data that special educators, as well as many parents of students in special education, are equally intent on compartmentalization as general educators, if not more so. My interview with Robert, assistant principal at Savington Elementary School in its early years, served as a reminder of a time when school districts in most states were allowed to refuse enrollment to students deemed "uneducable" by local school administrators, a time when the Hub was seen as a progressive shift. Robert shared the following story:

When they were building the school, several parents went to the board of education saying, 'We would like to have a building especially set aside for people with disabilities.' And the board said, 'No, we don't have the money to do that.' So, they opened Savington Elementary School in 1973, and it didn't have the building out back, the Hub. Well, these parents got together and formed an advocacy group in support of it. And what they started doing was going to school board meetings,

taking their kids with them, and turning them loose. Now these kids were roaming all over the room and sitting on the school board members' laps and making noises. Imagine about twenty-five kids with severe and profound disabilities. So, the school board said, "Okay, we get the point. We're going to build you a building."

When the Hub opened, it had a director, which was one of the assistant principals at Savington, and teachers, and physical therapists, and occupational therapists. There were about ten people on staff serving students ranging in age from 3 to 21 years. They had the foresight to have their own advisory committee, separate from the committee for parents of regular education students at Savington. Every school in Harper County has their own parent advisory committee that meets yearly with the school board and presents a budget. These parents got it to where they presented their own budget. So, when I came in as director, we would go to the superintendent and the school board and present a budget for what we needed at the Hub.

Now, you must remember that these people fought for this for years, and finally there was a school, where school buses picked up their kids and took them to trained teachers who taught them all day long. They never had this before. A lot of those kids were still there, when the law started changing and they started to decentralize. The parents were very, very resistant to it. So, when people just came in and started to change things there were a lot of hard feelings toward them—people like Melody and Bryan [administrators – both also interview participants]. Parents were adamant, "You are not going to take away something that took us years to get." *Me:* So, tension was from the special ed side, not regular ed?

*Robert:* Oh, it was from special ed.

*Me:* Teachers too?

*Robert:* Well, the teachers had changed over the years. A lot of them didn't really know the history behind it. You know, if I had been there, it wouldn't have changed. Not like it did. It would have been a much more gradual process.

Robert went on to share that from his viewpoint things still haven't changed all that much. "There are a lot of the same programs going on," he says; "They just changed locations." Although most of the classrooms from the Hub are now located in the main part of the building, Robert's stance was that they are basically the same self-contained settings.

From an "inside-out" perspective Robert's point resonates with me. As a special education teacher who taught in a public separate school before teaching a self-contained classroom in a regular public school setting, I would describe my approach and instructional methods as strikingly similar in both locations. When zooming in on the details within the walls of either of my classroom situations, it would be almost impossible to tell the difference. Once again, however, I am reminded of fractals and exploring Mandelbrot's set on the computer screen. Wheatley's words echo throughout this study, "*Deep inside the details, we cannot see the whole*" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 125). By zooming out, and looking *at* rather than *through* personal experiences, a bigger picture emerges. Looking from an "outside-in" perspective, it becomes clear that the location of my classroom greatly affects the entire educational landscape. The closer we are to true inclusion, the more visible are our connections. Our interdependence takes shape. I am drawn back to Jackie's statement about the separate playground incident. *I know it wasn't intentional, but what message are we sending if we set up situations where it appears that kids need to be by themselves. We*

*HAVE to be intentional.* Dunlap (2015) concurs, “When we create a separate, special place for children where their ‘special needs’ can be met, we are teaching them that their place is over there, with people like them and not in the full community.” We are also teaching that to the community.

*In the case of computer-generated fractals, a simple equation is set in motion as the starting point for evolving feedback.* By insisting that local educational agencies provide people with disabilities a place to learn and engage in their communities, pioneers, like Robert, helped set the nonlinear equation of how to make “many” equal to “one” in motion – the beginnings of the beautiful fractal of inclusion. As more and more solutions continue to be plotted through this nonlinear iterative process, an ordered shape of chaos – a “strange attractor” – continues to emerge. Slowly, in the middle of what often appears chaotic, people are being required to step outside seemingly compartmentalized points of view. Only then, is it possible to visualize how all of our connected perspectives make up the complete whole. *It does not have to be “either/or;” “both/and” is well within the realm of possibility.*

By building on Robert’s groundwork, Melody and Bryan added dimension to the fractal. When looking *through* a situation rather than *at* it, not only are our spatial surroundings compartmentalized, but also, perhaps, are our perceptions of time. While change seemed to happen too quickly for founders of the Hub, Bryan and Melody both remembered it—and at the time of their interviews, still knew it—as a long and arduous evolution. When asked about personal experiences merging general and special education, they both began with stories of the Hub.

*Bryan:* I've been fighting that fight for many years in different capacities....

But, my biggest dealings with it were as a school administrator in Harper County.

When I got there, students in that self-contained center stayed on a K-8 campus through the age of twenty-two, and one of my goals was to move that forward and get to transition those kids up to their age-appropriate peers at the high school. And that was a long, a LONG, difficult process. It's been years since I left, and there are still remnants of the Hub.

When discussing this transition, Bryan also pointed toward the change in location as the impetus for meaningful inclusion:

At first, in everyone's mind, it was just literally to transplant exactly what was happening there. I knew it was going to change, but not overnight. Eventually, that group of teachers and students became a legitimate, supported part of the whole school.

*Melody:* It's really been this several years' process. If I had just come in and said, 'Everybody move!', I would've just gotten anger. I've had to slowly encourage people.

While they shared the same obstacles as Robert, in regards to change, their take on them was quite different. Bryan and Melody were not as personally invested in the separate setting, and this distance greatly changed their vantage point. In order to see patterns emerge in a fractal, the observer must step back and gain perspective. *"They require distance and time to show themselves"* (Wheatley, 2006, p. 126). It is the same with seeing the emerging patterns of inclusion. Bryan and Melody shared similar thoughts on the challenges of decentralizing the Hub.

*Bryan:* The biggest obstacle I faced there was the parents felt that the safety and happiness of their children were threatened by this whole thing, and they were just scared to death of moving. They had such a safe environment, not necessarily the most effective, but a safe environment, and they were content to just live out their days at this K-8 school. So, I had the parents' fear, coupled with resistance from a lot of the staff there. They didn't want this change to happen because it's what they had been doing for a hundred years. So, they all kind of circled their wagons, and there was this tremendous amount of resistance.

*Melody:* It was actually harder for the self-contained teachers to come into the building. Out there, they had this little world going on. And for a while the assistant principal's office was out there – that was kind of her domain. I would tell them what I wanted to do, but they didn't want to be forced into the rest of the world.... Some of the kids, at that point, were seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old. A couple of them were pretty aggressive. So, I think they thought they were protecting them from being made fun of and protecting "our" students from any kind of aggression.

Although both Bryan and Melody acknowledged "Hub" stories as their most challenging experiences with inclusion, they also heralded them as being the most successful.

*Bryan:* If you had a snapshot of these kids' lives before and after, they'd just look totally different. It's about raised expectations – employment and transition opportunities out in the community which never really happened for them prior to

that, and just the academic rigor. Overall, their exposure and interaction with non-disabled peers is huge. For both kids with and without disabilities you get in to some intangibles. Everybody wants to talk about test results and those kinds of skills, but the socialization piece for kids when they're moved into inclusive settings is tremendous. It's very difficult to improve on a lot of social skills when you put twelve kids with autism in a room together. How are you improving their social and functional skills? It's tough. And the benefits for regular ed kids – again, it's more intangible. They develop a greater understanding of how people are put together in unique ways and get to value and respect that. And I think when it's done well, and they are exposed to kids with disabilities for a long enough time, they see the unique talents and strengths of people with disabilities that they would've never seen otherwise.

Benefits for general education were also emphasized in Melody's interview.

*Melody:* It gives them a chance to see that everybody's not like them and to understand that even if some people can't do something like them academically, they still have a gift to give. I think what they learn is a 'Wow, they've-given-me-more-than-I-can-give-them' kind of thing. It teaches them respect, and patience, and tolerance, and all those things are going to be important when they go out in the world and become leaders and teachers or whatever they decide to do. Let me give you an example, sometimes we have regular ed kids volunteer to work in our self-contained classrooms, and those kids start understanding the gifts in that class. They start greeting their book buddies in the hallways. They start forming those relationships. Some day when they grow up, they will remember. They may be

working in a restaurant when they see somebody come in, and instead of getting frustrated, you know, ‘Why is he ordering that way?’ or ‘Why does he keep repeating it this way?’; they’ll start thinking, ‘Oh, maybe this person has Asperger’s, or he’s like my buddy I used to know, and he’s all grown up.’”

Melody went on to include a personal example:

I was in the mall, and I was trying to just leave Sears or Penney’s, and I was just walking along, and this lady – I saw her coming – was making a beeline for me. She was looking down. And she got to me, and said, ‘You’re in my way.’ [Melody shrugs her shoulders and makes a confused, disgusted face like someone may have used in that situation]. I know some people would respond that way, but I think our kids who are exposed to people with disabilities would be able to go, ‘Ohhhh, she really does need to walk on the dark-colored tiles.’ And that’s exactly what she did, all the way to the register. And if they’re with a friend who gets frustrated they may be able to say, ‘Hey, maybe she has autism, and she needs to do that in order to get herself to the register. We ARE in her way.’

By being even more removed from the situation, and approaching it from yet another perspective all together, Steve, Susan, and Cora were able to add even further dimension to the fractal of inclusion at Savington Elementary. By refusing to enter the school by the back door or be confined to a separate setting, compartmentalization was further challenged. *The closer we are to true inclusion, the more visible are our connections. Our interdependence takes shape.* As perspectives are enlarged, concepts first thought to be conclusive are seen as indefinite. *While counterintuitive, being uncertain is paramount to seeing the big picture.*

**Purposeful scheduling of time and students.** *The literature review in this study exposes the crux of the problem with inclusion as most often not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of implementation of it. Sapon-Shevin (2007) notes, “It has been said that there is no good way to do the wrong thing. But it is also true that the right thing done poorly or thoughtlessly is unlikely to be successful” (p. xvi).* In the same vein, this research indicates that holdbacks to inclusion from a general education perspective most often result from it not being set up well to begin with. Although some interviews revealed steps in the right direction, the data gathered confirm such an implementation deficit. For example, despite the fact that common planning time between a special education teacher and a general education teacher is inarguably crucial for collaboration, this study finds it occurs more often as the exception rather than the norm.

General education interview participants, for the most part, were unaware that necessary supports and best practices were not properly in place in their shared inclusive experiences leaving them with an incomplete perception of what such experiences are intended to be, as well as feelings of inadequacy. Besides common planning time, dialogue with educators revealed sufficient staff and a deliberate make-up of students in the classroom as often missing in attempts to create a sense of true inclusion from the start. Meeting these needs within the compartmentalized, linear structure of school in today’s western society often goes against the grain and quite literally requires thinking outside the box. Some solutions will be explored in the following section.

Although the definition of inclusion is inconsistent, it is most commonly viewed as a collaborative process between general education and special education teachers. This rang true with administrators in this study; most of them agreed that in an inclusive setting, an

observer should not be able to tell the difference between the two types of teachers. Maggie, special education teacher at Pinewood County Middle School and head of the Exceptional Children's Department, put it this way:

*Maggie:* Equally, both are teachers in the classroom. The general education teacher is the content specialist. The special education teacher brings to the table differentiation. You know, what might be the objective for a student coming in with a more significant disability? What accommodations? What modifications? However, just as the general ed teacher provides knowledge of the content for everybody, the special ed teacher is also for everybody. We all know there are a lot of general ed kids falling between the cracks because they don't have the magic numbers on a test to be EC, but they still need as much help as many kids identified with special needs. Helping them access the curriculum should also be the role of the EC teacher. Even 'honors' kids have different learning styles; so again, the EC teacher can adapt lessons for them as well.

Bryan, State Exceptional Children's Division Consultant, concurred:

Everyone in the building owns ALL the children. The expertise in the building should be utilized based on the needs of all kids. What I try to really drill home to people, particularly general ed staff, is that kids with special needs should be instructed by them first because they have the content expertise, and the role of the special ed teacher is to support them in that delivery. We are all general ed first. The best thing would be to do away with labels and just provide services that meet specific needs of all kids. There are tremendous, great instructional practices in the world of AIG [Academically or Intellectually Gifted], and they shouldn't be reserved

for the ‘gifted.’ (*Laughing*) They are very applicable to anybody. Again, that’s just providing that array of services without labels and boundaries. Can we do what we are doing down the hall in the special ed class, in the general ed classroom first? And that’s not a new concept; that’s what least restrictive environment is all about....

Research suggests different models of co-teaching where they alternate or support one another while teaching. To me, the ideal role of the EC teacher should be to literally co-teach or have co-ownership with the general ed teacher.

Even Janet, the elementary school principal who stood by leveled classrooms, described inclusion as collaborative:

*Janet:* In inclusive situations, I see general ed and special ed teachers as equal, as tag-teaming, as being able to do a good dance off each other—where one stops, the other one picks up.... It’s not a territorial classroom. Inclusion cannot be territorial. It’s all-inclusive.

Despite this consensus and the valiant efforts of some participants, no one with whom I spoke conveyed a consistent implementation of all that is known to enable this type of interaction. As a matter of fact, the two general education teachers interviewed about their inclusive experiences, never even had another teacher present in their classrooms at all. Perhaps this explains why Ray, general education teacher at Pinewood County middle school, adamantly argued for “either/or” rather than “both/and” when it comes to merging general education with special education. *Beautiful IS something maybe you didn’t expect that happens, but it far from just happens. It has to be purposely set in motion.* His openness and honesty in taking such an oppositional stance on inclusion perhaps provided the most useful insight into why so many inclusive classrooms are set up to fail. By viewing inclusion

from a completely alternate perspective, I left Ray's classroom seeing a lot more of the elephant.

*Ray:* I don't have inclusion this year. Yay!

*Me:* Can you describe inclusion the way you've experienced it? Who's in the room? What happens?

*Ray:* I've seen students with learning disabilities put into classrooms, in most cases, with students with average to below average abilities. I've never had any honors classes that had inclusion kids in them. It's like – where do I want to invest my time? I can't do everything. In my last experience I had ten inclusion kids join sixteen kids I had for social studies, and at least half of the sixteen were below or well below grade level. That's a huge number of kids that need support.

*Me:* Was another teacher in the classroom with you?

*Ray:* A teacher's assistant came in about one-third of the class time.... I had support, I guess, from the librarian. I had five kids that I didn't feel like I was serving at all. Three of them couldn't read or write. Near the end of the year, I would send them to the librarian. She had some really basic materials. She worked with them about thirty minutes, three days a week, but that's not inclusion. They went out.... I have never seen lessons co-taught. I have never seen or been involved in a class with two teachers. Never seen it.

*Me:* Did you have common planning time with a special ed teacher?

*Ray:* I had very little interaction with the EC teachers because we were on a different schedule. I sometimes went to the teacher who had the lower end kids for pullout language arts and math. I guess I had the most empathy for them.... I learned a few

things, like matching when you have ten words and ten choices is really hard for them – too many choices – that was much harder than multiple choice. Emotionally, it was really hard on me. I felt like I wasn't serving those kids.

*Me:* So, no one ever helped plan or modify lessons?

*Ray:* No, I haven't seen that.

*Me:* Were you familiar with their IEP [Individualized Education Plan] goals? Maybe they were working on goals in your classroom beyond the content. Is it possible you were serving them more than you know in a different way?

*Ray:* I know as a teacher, I have a right to their IEP's. But did anyone come to me and say, 'These are their goals.?' Probably not. Now, for one girl, I did know. I was told specifically by a counselor, 'She is in here to have models of how to act amongst her peers.' I said, 'All right, I will do that, but I'm not sure it's my job.' I don't know if that's the role of the school – to teach these types of social skills.

At this point, Ray's interview took an unexpected turn. He began to speak about how his personal experiences in the classroom changed his outlook on inclusion as a parent of two honors students. It was interesting for me to compare how just the opposite was true for Tom's mother, Tina. Her outlook on inclusion as an administrator was affected in a starkly different way by her experiences with it as a parent. *By the end of my interviews with both Tina and Cora's dad, Steve, they each separately reached a similar conclusion about how to see the "us" rather than the "other."* Their answers included experience and exposure, but Ray's interview made it clear that experience alone was not the answer. Sustainable inclusion must be purposefully planned and implemented.

*Ray:* As a parent of some pretty intelligent kids, I really resent and don't want my children to be in classrooms with inclusion kids. I see it as a disadvantage.

*Me:* Because of the way you have seen inclusion?

*Ray:* Right, the way I know it is done. I think the amount of effort it will take for the instructor to reach those inclusion kids is a detriment to my kids. I don't see the benefit.... Maybe it's there, and I'm not looking for it.... I want my kid to be in the highest-level class that I think they can be. In terms of content, I think they're going to learn more not being in an inclusion class. If I knew that ten kids were being thrown into my child's social studies class, I would say, 'Whoa, is this to the advantage of my child?'.... I go back to 'prove it to me – that everyone is gaining.' One year [due to unavoidable circumstances] my kids registered late and didn't get into honors civics and economics. That's a class everyone has to take, so they were in the regular class. It didn't hurt them, and it's possible it actually helped them. Maybe they have more empathy for other students because they were in that class. Now, I'm not sure if that's where I want them to learn empathy. When they're thrown into a group of three other students to do a project, and those two or three other students couldn't care a lick or hardly know the difference between a roll of toilet paper and the Bill of Rights, what's the benefit to my kid of being in that class? I'm not convinced there are winners across the board.

In contrast, when I asked Tom's mother her opinion about whether or not it is the responsibility of the school to teach empathy or socialization skills alongside academics, her answer was a resounding, "Yes!"

*Tina:* Nowadays, you have to know how to work with different kinds of people—not just in our little town, but all over the world.... In some jobs, your livelihood depends on transcending every bias you've ever had. Teaching is one of them—doctors, salespeople; they have to have the ability to transcend. We've created this sterile learning environment because of how we define education and what matters and how we measure what matters. That is why I am so grateful for the experiences Tom has had with Bret. This kid of mine has a deep soul that he didn't learn in chemistry class, and he didn't learn it in fifth grade. He's learned it all the way through because he's had these experiences that didn't show up on a report card. But by golly, he wrote about it. Any time has to write about anything that matters to him, don't think Bret's not in that paper.

**Alternate assessment measures.** The fact that Ray was expected to do inclusion alone, along with other factors that set it up to fail will be explored further in this section, but perhaps the most important insight I gleaned from him was as simple as it was poignant. Not only should roles of teachers be clearly defined, but also the individualized goals of students with special needs should be precisely specified. From this interview, it was evident that Ray was evaluating himself as a teacher, as well as all of his students, based solely on how well each of them mastered grade level content standards. Sadly, he also was under the impression, perhaps rightly so, that this is how others would evaluate him as well.

*Ray:* I think one of the hardest things is to decide how to assess them. Maybe we need assistance on that. Maybe we shouldn't even be giving them grades. What the heck is a D or a C for a kid in an inclusion class who can't read? How do I know by looking at the social studies standards if they are at a C level? I would feel more

confident knowing that. If you are going to put them in here – what are the goals for them?

Tina and Steve also expressed strong opinions on our society's one-dimensional view of assessment for both students and teachers, and how it hinders inclusion.

*Tina:* We are asking folks to get out there and try new things and be innovative, and then we say, 'but we are going to measure you this way. We are going to put all of these great kids in your classroom, but we are going to measure you this way.' It's really counterintuitive to the whole process.

*Einstein's insightful words again come to mind; "Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid."*

*Steve:* That's a big ANTI with inclusion. The teacher is so worried that having a student like Cora is going to pull test scores down. We've had to tell teachers more than once, 'She doesn't take the regular testing.' A colleague of mine was in an IEP meeting in another county and was told if a child was in a regular ed classroom, they had to take the regular End of Grade testing. NO, they don't. Their testing is irrelevant. There's part of the IEP where the type of testing is decided. That was this academic year. Those teachers did not want children because they thought they had to do the regular EOG's. No one in that meeting challenged that. My colleague came out of the meeting assuming that.

**Staffing.** Although solutions will be explored in further sections, a lack of appropriate staffing was found to be a huge setback to meaningful inclusion, especially by general educators. Throughout the interview, Ray continued to discuss his experiences with

inclusion as a general education teacher in an “us vs. them” way, hesitant to take ownership or fully consider that every student placed in his classroom belonged to him. However, as our conversation progressed, there were notable changes in his demeanor. What began as an assertive stance against inclusion, wavered into self-reflection, and finally uncertainty as Ray contemplated the possibility of inclusion being a positive experience for both himself and his students. Although still skeptical, Ray ended on this note:

*Ray:* So, it sounds like three things would be necessary for an ideal situation – you know, if you are going to include them: training, manpower, and numbers. Where is the manpower to do it well? What is it helping to just have somebody for 1/3 of a class? You really need somebody in there. I have been in this school fifteen years, and the staff has decreased rather than increased. There aren't many assistants anymore, much less enough EC teachers to help collaborate on every subject. Training – What are the expectations? Sometimes training could just be expectations. This is how we expect you to do this. And numbers – don't include too many because then it doesn't seem like an inclusion class anymore.

Despite administrative support and several successes, Tricia, Jake's general education teacher, also expressed feelings of inadequacy which likewise may be traced back to lack of implementation of several key factors necessary for creating a sense of true inclusion, such as sufficient staffing. Jake had pullout sessions for language arts and math in a separate setting, but Tricia was solely responsible for providing all other academic content, as well as adapting and differentiating her lessons to meet Jake's needs. She described checking in with the special education teachers to make sure assignments were on track, but like Ray, collaboration was difficult to fit in within the confines of the school day.

*Tricia:* It required a lot of work on my part just modifying the work for him, but I did that with most all my EC students, not just Jake.

*Me:* Did you ever have common planning time with the EC teachers?

*Tricia:* No, I would just go see them after school, if I had a problem.... Sometimes, I would go during my lunch just to drop in and talk to them. I stayed at school late doing planning and all.

Tricia spoke several times of Jake's interest in machinery:

*Tricia:* He loved machinery, especially like you use for yard work. He loved to look at weed eaters on the computer. He was fascinated with them. Personally, I really have to tell you this; I really thought Jake could have learned a trade or something if he had been at West Franklin School, especially since he was so focused on lawn equipment. I thought he maybe could've been taught something along that line.

As a special educator myself, I was saddened that no one with training in special education was ever able to observe Jake in the general education classroom and help Tricia discover ways to motivate him according to his interests or develop personal strengths within the classroom setting. My mind drifted to Cora and how her cosmetology teacher found relevant activities and tasks she could actively participate in, when the class was engaged in *heavily academic things*. Most likely because students with significant disabilities in her system were expected to attend West Franklin School, Tricia seemed to be under the impression those types of skills could only be developed in such a separate setting. However, it is unreasonable to hold her accountable. As a general educator, she is responsible for teaching the content. Tina, Tom's mother and Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, stressed the importance of collaboration in her interview:

It's key in building the general education teacher's confidence. That sit-down, planning piece and that back and forth share of ideas, strategies, and skills provides collaborative energy. You can't function without it. Teachers feel drained alone. Just having another person to see things in a different way is a game changer.

Robert expressed similar concerns:

There has to be common planning time.... For the regular ed teacher and the special ed teacher to be able to go into a classroom and co-teach objectives to EVERYBODY, they have to plan together. If the special ed teacher just walks in the classroom, and the only thing he does there is help some child with exceptional needs sitting over on the side – that's not inclusion. He is doing something different. He is isolating and identifying that student. That's not inclusion.

**Climate shift in general education.** Data indicated that a shift in the attitudes of both general educators and special educators was necessary for inclusion to be effective. Although not all the issues Ray addressed with inclusion at Pinewood County Middle School (PCMS) are resolved, based on interviews with Maggie, special education teacher and head of the school's EC Department, and Greg, principal at the time, they are at least being acknowledged and incremental changes toward more effective situations continue to be made. In order for their comments to be better understood, it is important to clarify the middle school concept of teams. Capuletti and Brazee (2003) define interdisciplinary teaming as, “organizing two or more teachers who share the same group of students and the responsibility for the curriculum, instruction, and evaluation of that group of students (p. 32). It is also important to note that students considered to have severe and profound disabilities (low incidence populations) at Pinewood County Middle School are served in a self-

contained classroom. Without a challenge to the status quo, it is most likely that upon attending PCMS, Cora, Eli, and Jake would be served in a separate classroom setting. Although these students participate in elective classes with peers in general education, such as physical education and art, only students with higher incidence disabilities are registered for inclusion in academic areas and placed on teams with general educators. That being said, as Maggie shared the evolution of inclusion from her perspective over the last decade, it was apparent that more and more accommodations for students with significant support needs were being made in general education classrooms.

*Maggie:* Are things perfect? Absolutely not, but I really do think we are moving in the right direction a little bit at a time. A lot has changed since I started here ten years ago. From reading articles, and most recently, at the middle school conference, listening to discussions from across our state about inclusion, I realize how far we've come. We all shared similar concerns there – common planning, ratio of students in a classroom.... But PCMS really has gotten way better at scheduling. I heard one teacher say that all their EC kids were still on one team, and it was a nightmare. Now, our principal builds the schedule around EC. We make conscious decisions not to put kids with the most intensive needs all together on one team.

*Greg:* We would hit and miss. We would use trial and error sometimes. Each year, we would modify what we do and then go back and reflect.... Did this work? Did that work? Is this the best placement? We even considered personalities. We tried to take the strengths of individual teachers and match them to the needs of individual children. In a nutshell, we had to revamp.

*Maggie:* When possible, we do have common planning time, but largely because of the number of staff, we have to serve across teams. So, most people don't have a common planning time except for the teams they actually co-teach with. It has to be done before or after school. We email back and forth a lot to see what's going on in class. There really is much more of a mutual effort to communicate. I easily have daily contact in some form or fashion about at least one of the kids we share. People are making it more of a priority. That wasn't ever happening before, but it is now. Ideally, there needs to be an EC teacher per team. They need to be part of that team just like the math or language arts teacher, and definitely they all need common planning time. We will never be able to do that until we have more EC staff.

When discussing why she thought teachers were becoming more supportive of one another, and inclusion in general, Maggie attributed it largely to staff turnover:

New teachers, both EC and general ed, are coming in with a better understanding of what inclusion is and how to make it work. New EC teachers are willing to go and do it. Some of the teachers that were here earlier looked at it as, "I can't go to inclusion class today; I've got paperwork to do." And then often they wouldn't go, and that is not acceptable. And new general education teachers are more open to try new things. Just like in anything else, teachers who have been there for years and years and years, live by the old mentality, "This is my room. I will run my room this way. You have no say-so in my room, and these are my students."

*It's what they had been doing for a hundred years. So, they all kind of circled their wagons, and there was this tremendous amount of resistance.*

Although leaders like Bryan, Melody, and Maggie acknowledged change as slow, they also bore witness to the fact that every baby step along the way makes the next one easier. *I knew it was going to change, but not overnight.* For example, since Ray's experience with inclusion at PCMS, administrators specifically set out to disperse the special needs of students in individual classrooms and on teams as evenly as possible. While still lacking sufficient staff for special education and general education teachers to collaborate daily on every subject, much less co-teach every classroom, Maggie attested that expectations of communication between the two continue to increase. One success story leads to another. As the following section will highlight, even the most seemingly insignificant actions can have far-reaching effects. Bryan talked about starting small:

You find a couple teachers philosophically on the same page, work through some of these issues, and get some results. To me, that's the biggest motivator – other teachers and administrators seeing results, and then there's a competitive nature to the whole thing. But until they see that happening in a tangible way, it's really hard. You can't just quote: "There are several studies from New Zealand that say this is great." People will say, "Well, great! I'm happy for New Zealand, but that ain't gonna happen in (Pinewood) County."

Although too humble to take any credit, it is evident that students have reaped the benefits of Maggie's diligent work to build relationships among teachers and strengthen feelings of co-ownership toward students. *The closer we are to true inclusion, the more visible are our connections. Our interdependence takes shape.* Maggie chose to share Dylan's story as an example of how the school climate surrounding inclusion has shifted. Dylan was one of many of her students labeled as autistic or having a mild intellectual

disability served exclusively in a separate setting prior to middle school. His story, by far, is not unique. *Alone, each individual story would seem like a random, isolated event.... As pattern after pattern after pattern is revealed, what emerges is the beautiful fractal of inclusion.* Because Maggie believes firmly in educating students in the least restrictive environment, she established the precedent of giving them the benefit of the doubt at Pinewood County Middle School. She leads the IEP team in carefully considering a change of placement from separate to resource upon their transition from elementary school. Her thinking is that it is much easier to move students into a situation with more support, if necessary, rather than the other way around, once they are accustomed to it. As Maggie spoke, she seemed to be overcome at the number of students who rise to higher expectations given the chance. *Indeed, you get what you look for.* Although the law requires such a consideration annually for students with an Individualized Education Plan, Greg proclaimed that since Maggie began teaching at PCMS, the number of students in the self-contained classroom has noticeably decreased. He was also pleased with the results of more purposeful scheduling:

*Greg:* Data shows that changes have been effective. Four years ago, we didn't meet our annual objectives in students with disabilities in math and reading. According to the data, strategically placing children in pullouts and inclusion, and really considering if their IEPs match what they really need—truly striving to place kids where they are least restricted—is working.

Dylan, like many in Maggie's path, began his middle school career, for the first time, as a resource student. He was only pulled out for math and language arts. The rest of his school day, which included social studies, science, lunch, and two electives, was spent in inclusive

settings with general education peers. At first this was uncomfortable for both Dylan and his new teachers, but *growth demands a temporary surrender of security*.

*Maggie:* Dylan's autism affects him pretty significantly, but we wanted to try, and we wanted to see what he could do. Does he have the same objectives or do all the same things as the rest of the class? No. Is he growing? YES—by leaps and bounds! He has grown so much more because he has been exposed to his regular ed peers. He is moving around the school by himself – although if his schedule is messed up, I write it down for him.

It freaked Jill [his general education science teacher] out at first. She had never had anybody like Dylan in her class. After the first couple days, she came to me and said, “I don't know what to do with him.” But now, over halfway into the school year, she loves him. She wants to have him. It makes her sad if he won't talk to her and excited when he does. They quote movies with each other. She is slowly starting to understand. It worked out in the schedule that a special ed teacher is in there who modifies assignments for him. So, he's actually doing modified, grade-level, science work.

One thing, I think, that a lot of general educators don't understand – because of what they've been told and the tremendous stress they are under for testing and making sure everything's “equal” and “fair” – is that fair doesn't mean every kid has to do exactly the same thing or that they have to be assessed in exactly the same way as everyone else. I do think teachers are starting to see that it's okay for things to be different, but I think they have to be told, like, “For this student, let's focus on A, B, and C.” I've had several regular ed teachers come and talk specifically to me about

students with autism, and we talk about how one big goal is social interaction. I think it really alleviates some stress in their minds to hear if they are behaving appropriately in your classroom and taking part in a group in any way – even if they are not writing down every single thing – that’s awesome!

Maggie was quick to point out the benefits of this experience for both Dylan and Jill and how it affected the climate of general education at PCMS.

*Maggie:* For Dylan, it has given him more friends, even those ‘popular’ kids. They were his friends to some degree before, but now when his team does something, they come and find him. They don’t want to leave him out. They remember him.

Sometimes Dylan doesn’t want to go – social settings are hard for him. He’s nervous and not sure what to do, and he’ll say, ‘Uhhh, I don’t know about that.’ But those kids will come and get him, and say, ‘It will be okay, Dylan. Come with us!’

*These words seem to confirm those of Tom: If Bret had been more involved in regular classes all along, I think things would be easier for him – more for social reasons maybe than academic. Sometimes, I know he wants to do something, but I have to drag him places. He seems uncomfortable and shy outside of very familiar surroundings.*

Maggie continues:

And how awesome is that for Dylan, especially when he goes to the high school, to have that support and care of his classmates. It has greatly increased his social skills. He is so much more comfortable talking to people he would have never talked to before. Even with me, he’s so much better about coming and telling me what he needs or if something’s wrong. I will walk down the hall with him, and he will speak to other kids first and that’s awesome.

For Jill and his other teachers, I think it's taught them that all kids—if we meet them where they are—can grow and excel and exceed. She sees Dylan can do something! Dylan is learning! Dylan is a human being! Not that she didn't think that before, but I think there are people in the world who wonder what kids like Dylan can contribute to society. They contribute just as much as anybody else. I think she doesn't have to be afraid anymore. If she has another student with special needs next year, I think she would welcome that opportunity much more so than she would have before Dylan.

Maggie's tremendous influence at Pinewood County Middle School definitely contributed to blurring the line between “either/or” and helped others see “both/and” as a viable possibility. This chapter opened with the bold claim of Sapon-Shevin (2007) that *sustained, meaningful inclusion requires a “critical examination and reconceptualization of all aspects of school: the curriculum, the pedagogical practices, the ways in which teachers and students are supported, the ways in which learning is assessed, and the overall articulated goals of the educational process” (p. 122)*. Only as educators, parents, administrators, and researchers, continue challenging the status quo, will current practices ever come into question. *While counterintuitive, being uncertain is paramount to seeing the big picture.*

### **The Butterfly Effect**

As can be seen, the success or failure of inclusion can often be traced back to how it was set up to start with. Seemingly insignificant actions, which stakeholders may not even associate with either outcome, can have far-reaching effects; much like the flapping of butterfly wings on one side of the planet causing a tornado on the other side of the world.

Edward Lorenz's "law of sensitive dependence on initial conditions" is more than applicable to inclusion. *Not only does this concept reveal, at its core, that everything that makes up the universe is intrinsically dependent upon and connected to everything else, but also that every action matters exponentially.* The previous two sections, Fractals and Strange Attractors and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, highlighted initial conditions necessary for meaningful inclusive experiences, many of which require a different mindset or approach to education altogether. They require change. They require letting go of linear, predetermined expectations of success. Setting this kind of inclusion in motion requires leaders skilled in facilitating change.

This section seeks to spotlight administrators who have successfully navigated some type of organizational change within a school setting. Whether or not their experiences directly relate to merging general and special education, successful strategies can be generalized and connections formed. Several administrators refer to the implementation of the Response to Intervention model as a significant change within their schools. The following definition is provided to clarify their insights. According to the RTI Action Network, "Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs" (National Center for Learning Disabilities, n.d.). This model requires ongoing individualized assessment and interventions at increasing levels of intensity for struggling learners. It also holds true that the growing wealth of literature on change leadership does not directly address reconceptualizing schools for meaningful inclusion. Chapter 5 further connects these dots.

Data from dialogue with interview participants reveal five common themes associated with actions administrators must employ in order to gain buy-in for change within

educational settings. These include: appeal to a moral purpose, balance mandating change with distributing leadership, provide ongoing and visible support, analyze instruction rather than students, and nourish growth while dealing with resistance to change. For the most part, these actions correlate with change leadership literature, notwithstanding two key differences that will be explored in this section and further in Chapter 5. As this section took shape, I was drawn back to the wisdom of Lao Tzu that ended my literature review: *The worst leaders are those despised. The next worst leaders are those praised. The best leaders are those who are barely noticed and the people say, "We did it ourselves."* (Shinagel, n.d.). Data reveal that the best leaders for change, without a doubt, are powerful, but choose to seek order rather than control. They deliberately and purposefully, yet gently, flap their wings. As Gandhi is often quoted as saying, "In a gentle way you can shake the world."

**Appeal to a moral purpose and balance mandating change with distributing leadership.** Data overwhelmingly indicate that leaders must be purpose-driven in order to facilitate the adaptive change necessary to foster sustainable inclusion. This study also finds that being *both* authoritative *and* empowering of others are equally essential attributes of administrators attempting to merge general and special education. Only by thinking through theories of new science does this view of leadership become comprehensible.

In this study, the administrator with the most experience navigating organizational change was James, charter member of the National Middle School Association and organizer of the first middle level teacher preparation program in his state. For over half a century, James has championed the cause of meeting the specific educational needs of young adolescents. When asked about his personal leadership style, he fumbled around his desk for a masked, sword-wielding, bobble-head doll. Proudly, James shared an accompanying letter

given to him by a former graduate student describing him as, “a cross between a Ninja Warrior and an Evangelical Missionary determined to spread the gospel about the middle school movement.” The student went on to say, “If you can imagine what that would look like, you pretty much have James.” What stands out most about this unassuming man is his passion.

*James:* I don't want to make it sound like it's all touchy, feely because it's not, but that's a part of it. There are real research-based, data-driven reasons to have middle schools, but there are also moral, ethical reasons that inspire buy-in and change in the first place.... The first thing that pops in my head – you have to really believe young adolescents are valuable people, and you have to get away from the stereo-types of a bunch of hormone-driven kids and all that sort of thing.... In my opinion, more than any other age group, they are really at a, maybe delicate is the right word – time in their lives. We've known from research for a long time that apart from very young toddler-size children, the only other time during human growth and development that self-concept and self-esteem are flexible again is during the middle school years. So, there's some research showing that after eighth grade it's unlikely – you know, there are always some exceptions – but it's unlikely that there's much change in how people feel about themselves.

Whether leading young adolescents, college students, or professional development sessions for teachers, James' purpose-driven style of leadership perpetually facilitated change.

Throughout his career, he witnessed and influenced a national growth in middle schools from 101 in 1968 to over 15,000 currently. When he chartered the first middle-school teacher education program in his state, only five such programs existed nation-wide. At the time of

this interview, James pointed out, there were forty-eight middle-school teacher education programs in the state of Ohio alone. Other administrators echoed the importance of moral purpose in gaining buy-in for change:

*Beth:* First of all, you have to have a compelling reason why there should be change. For example, I couldn't just say, "This is the right thing to do for Jake, so do it!" You have to relay why it's the right thing to do and believe it yourself. As far as inclusion, ask teachers, "What if it were your child?"

*Greg:* You have to show them how the change is going to benefit children, and that's the bottom line. "How's it going to better serve our kids?" You have to have a vision.

At first glance, the assertion of administrators in this study seemed to parallel current literature in that the case for change must be compelling and associated with moral imperatives rather than compliance with authority. However, interview participants also held firmly to the seemingly contradictory belief that change must be mandated. In regards to inclusion, I cannot help but zoom back to the voices of countless parents grateful for experiences that they would have done anything to avoid. *I think it is important to acknowledge that parents are the first to experience a sense of panicky unpreparedness, and despite drastic measures that would forever change their family dynamics, they have **no choice** but to equip themselves with the necessary skills and attitudes to see it through.* Perhaps most appropriately, it is Cora's father, Steve, who best illuminated inclusion as a social justice issue. He maintained, at both a personal and a historical level, that such change always requires mandates.

*Steve:* In our case, we drew a line. “We’re going to be in an inclusive setting, and you are going to figure out a way to do this.” And it worked. Now, almost all of the kindergartens and first grades are inclusive. Kids with disabilities are in regular classrooms as their primary placement. That was the other thing that they’d never done. Cora’s homeroom teacher was a regular education teacher. In the early years, they weren’t even letting the eighteen-year-olds go to the high school. They were telling the parents, “We can protect them here.” It was patronizing. You know, if we didn’t have mandates or laws, there would still be segregation – black folks and white folks, and we’d still have gays and heterosexuals still getting sorted out in terms of rights and abilities. Women wouldn’t vote or inherit property.

Administrators, across the board, were in agreement with this philosophy, but also unanimously were proponents of distributive leadership. Rather than “either/or”, these leaders proposed to be “both” authoritarian “and” empowering of others” simultaneously. Although these two descriptions seem mutually exclusive, interview participants found both attributes quite necessary for navigating complex change. In order to make sense of this discrepancy, I once again must rely on the principles and language of new science, which *call the whole “either/or” way of thinking into question, and open the door for “both/and.”* As seen in the case of computer-generated fractals, *a simple equation is set in motion as the starting point for evolving feedback. As one solution is determined, it is fed back into the equation, so that another, different solution may develop.* The equation itself does not change; the freedom lies in finding the answers, in plotting the points. *Complex shapes emerge only as millions of solutions are plotted.* According to this data, leading organizations through change is strikingly similar. Administrators supply the equation. They

set the parameters. Within those parameters, the organization is free to find solutions. It collectively answers the question, “How are we going to get there?” *It is phenomenal what dynamic, effective, and “whole” organizations emerge when an explicit, yet simply expressed parameter is set and its members are given the creative freedom to make sense of it in their own way.* Everyone works toward solving the same equation; yet within those set parameters, there are countless solutions. Administrators in this study found ways to *both* lead effectively *and* blend into the background, allowing employees to say, “We did it ourselves.”

According to the data, a lot of the work of balancing distributive leadership while mandating change must be done upfront. *If you want people with you when you land, you have to have them with you when you take off.* Every administrator interviewed spoke of building consensus and creating a culture conducive to risk-taking prior to implementing change:

*Bryan:* It’s kind of the chicken or the egg. I think they kind of blend together. If you mandate change right out of the gate, and then try to build consensus afterwards, to me, that’s where it doesn’t work. You’ve got to have a lot of conversations ahead of time, and along the way the leader models, “The core of this thing is going to happen. It needs to happen.” Just not in the old school, authoritative leadership kind of way because: A - I just don’t see a whole lot of that anymore, and B - It’s just not that effective. But, there’s a fine line. Where I often see things break down is in what I call “site-based management gone awry.” In principle, it’s a good thing, letting people figure out what they want to do, but what can happen – if there are no parameters and a lack of effective leadership – is people just do what’s convenient

and what's comfortable to them. One of the big issues is just setting up these parameters. If you have those conversations upfront and everybody knows what is expected, you develop buy-in to the basic core beliefs about how things should be. Then, within the parameters of those core beliefs, people can do it different ways. They can still use professional judgment about teaching and what is effective, but there's cohesiveness and continuity of instruction.

*Melody:* It's like I have a vision, and it takes years. It really does. I don't think I've ever had anybody come in and say, "What are you doing?" I tend not to be one of those principals. At first, I always sit back and watch, and then I start asking questions. So, people usually know when something's getting ready to change. I will start giving the staff articles to read or send out research and have some discussions about it. I talk to the assistant principals and say, "Here's my goal, and here are some questions I want you to start asking," so they are on board with it. I've never been one of those people – unless it is something that is absolutely endangering the safety of a child – who says, "I know you've been doing it that way, but now we're doing it this way!"

If you start giving the information and the reasoning behind the change and opening up discussions and involving the school improvement team, people start talking and thinking. Then a few come in and say, "I've been thinking about what you said." Sometimes they come in with, "I've got this idea." They claim it as THEIR great idea, and that's what it needs to be to really work. Then we can move forward. You get those people who are already on board. Once you have those people, you get together with them and some naysayers, and you start talking about,

“Why is this better for kids?” and “How can we make this happen?” And everybody kind of knows what’s coming. Like decentralizing The Hub – that was a several years’ process. Otherwise, if I had just said, “Everybody move!” I would’ve just gotten anger. You slowly encourage people.

*James:* [On transforming junior high schools to authentic middle schools] You begin with having conversations, looking at the literature, visiting exemplary schools. It’s truly almost a reeducation process. The problem is you’re trying to get people to change their belief systems and attitudes, not only the way they teach. Getting the buy-in, the commitment and dedication to do that takes some time. When Judy [also an interview participant] was heading up the first middle school in Pinewood County, she had me come and talk and work with teachers before the school ever opened, and then that continued for five or six years. Ideally, we work that way.

*Judy:* Our vision was to develop a true middle school. Pinewood County had just consolidated three local high schools into one. Before this, each high school was 7th – 12th grade. Our new high school was to be 9th - 12th grade, which opened the door for the first middle school in our county. Our monumental task was to merge staff from three separate schools – some of them against their will – and at the same time implement a brand new approach to teaching adolescents.

About a year and a half before the consolidation, we set up leadership teams and committees. I found a lot of times suggestions can be made with questions rather than commands.

*Sometimes they come in with, “I’ve got this idea.” They claim it as THEIR great idea, and that’s what it needs to be to really work. Then we can move forward.*

Just asking questions often builds an atmosphere of respect and support and encouragement - which eventually becomes one of trust and safety. We became good friends with James. We shared the middle school philosophy all over the county. We had several meetings trying to get parents on board. We had lots and lots of conversations. We met with the Board of Education on several occasions. We shared with them the concept of teaming as opposed to departmentalization. We wanted them to know we were different.

*Greg:* There has to be a focus – specific goals you want to achieve, and THEN bring people to the table. You wouldn't want to try to implement a new plan without talking to your stakeholders, the teachers in the classrooms day in and day out. When leadership is passed to teachers it gives them a sense of ownership. It builds trust. It builds morale.

*Robert:* If the change was something I believed in, and maybe everybody wasn't on board with it, in some situations I just had to say, "Look, we have to do this. It's the right thing to do. We will do the best we can, and we will work together. For example, perhaps it is dealing with inclusion and determining a child's least restrictive environment. I would say, "Here's what the law says about what we need to do, and we have several ways of doing it. We are going to do what's best for this child. We are not going to put him in a separate room all day. That's not going to happen." So, as a leader, some of it almost has to be you having the vision, and then let them help figure out how to get there.... I've always believed that if the people affected help figure out the solution, it will work; and if somebody tells them a

solution, it usually won't. I tried every way I could to let them come up with their own answers.

*Judy:* I think so often when you have problems in school, you can hire consultants, you can bring in all these books, you can bring in all these programs, and what you really need is to let your teachers get together and come up with solutions themselves. I'm amazed at how many administrators are reluctant to share information because they are afraid of losing control, but teachers and school leaders have to have all the information in a timely fashion – if for no other reason than to feel good about it and keep up morale.

*Data reveal that the best leaders for change, without a doubt, are powerful, but choose to seek order rather than control.*

*Beth:* When you start out with any kind of change; you work to get the staff's input and ownership - like, when we implemented our RTI [Response to Intervention] program. I spent months before we started it talking to different groups and getting input, like from the EC department, regular classroom teachers, and support personnel... You get all the input you can. You get the buy-in up front. Now I want to say this right—You do that as long as you can, but there comes a point where you have to say, “This is what we're going to do.”

Despite being unconvinced that the “will is there” for teachers to put forth the effort necessary to implement meaningful inclusion, Ray, PCMS general education teacher, acknowledged that he would comply given explicit directions to do so. ... *What can happen – if there are no parameters and a lack of effective leadership – is people just do what's convenient and what's comfortable to them.*

*Ray: Doing it well definitely would require more work of teachers. You would have to have a whole new culture of planning, and that's hard and scary to think about....*

*It would rock the boat, but that's not always a bad thing....*

Actually, if I were told you need to be doing inclusion cooperatively across the board, and the EC teacher needs to be involved, then of course, I would do what I was told.

I think that is often the problem. The problem is we're not told. Teachers aren't told, "You have to do this." They don't make it non-negotiable. "This is non-negotiable. You need to do this."

**Provide ongoing and visible support.** The data revealed that staying involved and being highly visible prior to and well beyond the initial stages of implementing change are critical behaviors of administrators who affect sustainable transformations. It is also indicated that administrators must be knowledgeable and thoroughly understand the change initiative themselves before adaptive change occurs within an organization. In Bryan's position as Exceptional Children's Division Consultant for his state's Department of Public Instruction, he often leads professional development sessions on inclusion and co-teaching. "It's the one-shot, hit and run sessions that never work out", he says, "Okay, training's over – now go do it!" Throughout the interview, Bryan repeatedly stressed that implementing successful inclusion or leading for change in general, must be an ongoing process and requires engagement on the part of the administrator.

*Bryan: You think I would have learned this lesson after a couple zillion times. We go in somewhere to do training, and the whole faculty is there. They are all just kind of stone-faced. It's like training the guys on Mount Rushmore. So, part of training is judging people's feelings about the philosophy and all, and gauging buy-in. And we*

get no response. Finally someone has the courage to come to us during break and say, “We were just told to show up here because we’re doing inclusion in August.” There had been no discussion up front. It was all the idea of the principal.

So, let’s go back to, “What is the role of the administrator?” The administrator should be the instructional leader and the person in charge of cultivating a culture or environment where something like inclusive practices are the norm and seen as beneficial. When the principal just arbitrarily announces, “Well, we are doing inclusion next year, everybody show up Tuesday for training,” none of that has occurred.... If people see it as just some tacked on entity, then it doesn’t work because it’s not woven into what everybody is trying to do.

When questioned about a good example of change leadership, Bryan immediately brought up Janet (which led to her also being interviewed for this study). He first became acquainted with Janet, then principal of Bedford County Elementary School, while seeking to learn more about the Response to Intervention model for his dissertation. At the time of his research, Janet’s school was chosen as one of the original pilot sites in his state to implement this program. Bryan observed the process from the ground up:

My task was to go in and look at RTI, and what I ended up looking at was implementation and how Janet cultivated leadership within her school. Her leadership style was what made the whole thing work. First of all, before the program was ever launched, she spent an entire year solely having conversations with her teachers about their views on what education should look like for all children, including kids with disabilities. There was a lot of good back and forth dialogue about perceptions and ownership. And I think the other key part of the program’s

success was her active – very active – involvement in the whole thing. She developed a leadership team in which she remained an active member.

When asked how to motivate teachers to change and widen comfort zones, Janet's response was, "Be in there!"

*Janet:* You've got to be in there, and you've got to be their number one cheerleader. You cannot sit in your office. You cannot separate yourself from the classroom. I always said, "You do people work when people are in the building and paperwork when people are out of the building." You just have to be there. You have to be excited and validate what they are doing. When they see you are as involved as they are, you gain respect. I told them that I would never ask them to do anything that I would not be willing to do myself. And then you just have to live it.... At district level meetings, I would hear other administrators complaining about RTI. Now, it wasn't always a bed of roses for us either, but we were seeing students be successful. I believe that the difference was administrative support. At other schools, they didn't seem to buy into it from the top. Either they didn't understand the program, or they didn't stay involved enough with their staff. Their teachers were saying things like, "Here you are asking me to do one more thing!" Those administrators had not helped their faculty develop a vision. The end result of seeing the program through and putting in so much work up front was to make things easier out in the trenches, not harder. The goal was not to have those struggling students, but you had to get there. You had to see the big picture.

The philosophy that administrators must be knowledgeable and stay actively engaged when motivating organizations toward change was salient.

*Beth:* It takes lots of conversations. You can't just tell them to do something. You have to stay involved! You have to let them know you are one hundred percent with them, and also that you know what you are doing.

*Judy:* Introduce them to the vision; give them all opportunity to have all the knowledge they can, support them through it, coach, and cheerlead! Leadership is a service.

*James:* I've always thought one of the best ways to be a leader was to lead by example. It's one thing to talk about commitment. It's another thing to demonstrate that commitment.

Despite James's overwhelming success in spreading the middle school movement, he still lamented the incomplete implementation of the philosophy across the nation. His deep disappointment with having to teach the same middle school concepts as he did in the seventies was evident. Like Janet, he believes, much of it falls back to lack of buy-in from the top. This reasoning seemed to ring true for why change is so hard in general and may go far in explaining why inclusion within classrooms looks much the same as it did nearly four decades ago when the doors of education were first opened to millions of students with disabilities.

*James:* We've come so far. The movement has stayed alive and made it through a lot of rough times, and it's grown. So, this is a kind of the glass is half-full or half-empty kind of thing. The most disheartening thing is a lack of commitment to middle schools to be authentic and implement what we know through research. Part of it is principals who don't have a middle level background or any experience with a middle school before they take charge. They're good people – we're not talking about that,

but they have to relearn it. So, we are still training about teaming and advisory programs and things like that almost forty-five years later.

When directly asked about administrative training in implementing special education policy and procedures, answers of interview participants were particularly revealing.

*Jill:* We had school law. It might not have been a whole class, but it was definitely touched on. It's like any other class. Until the rubber meets the road, you know - a lot of it is, you live; you learn.

*Bryan:* The short answer is, "No." I had a sliver of some of it here and there. I've been to school forever – undergrad, Master's in School Psych, EdS, and Doctorate in Educational Leadership. The most exposure I had to any of that was really in my school psychology program.

*Beth:* A little, but not much – in the law course is about it. It wasn't like a special ed class.

*Judy:* We read the laws – PL 94-142... We really didn't have any training that I remember, but that was thirty-something years ago.

*Maggie:* When I was in college, I did not have a class that focused especially on inclusion, even as a special ed major. You know, it's going to have to start from the very foundations of what universities believe and know that is right. I don't think even preservice teachers – much less administrators – are getting as much as they should be. I mean, anybody can know a strategy, but how do you implement it, and what does inclusion really look like in practice? We've had interns at the middle school, and we start asking them things like, "Are you going to take the praxis in this, so you can have the option to co-teach?" And they say, "No, I'm just going to give

strategies and do the paperwork.” Well, that’s not what inclusion is, but that’s what they perceive it to be sometimes.

Administrative interview participants repeatedly stressed that implementing successful inclusion or leading for change in general, must be an ongoing process requiring knowledge of the change and engagement on the part of the educational leader.

**Analyze instruction rather than students.** In all 18 interviews, whether the participant was an administrator, teacher, parent, or student, an underlying consistency was either a direct or indirect reference to inflexibility in delivering instruction. In discussions of change leadership, these data highlight a problem that would be unique to educational systems as opposed to businesses and other organizations. Participants across the board suggested a linear tendency of schools to fit students into existing programs and compartments rather than adjusting programs to fit the needs of students. Tina’s description, which follows, of a successful school-wide breakdown of compartmentalization is this study’s only example of systematically changing instruction to meet the needs of students apart from individual challenges to the status quo. Bryan shared this dilemma as his main reason for being a proponent of Response to Intervention. He asserted that whether or not schools follow this particular model, the philosophy behind it should be universal.

*Bryan:* One of the main shifts in RTI is to get away from cataloguing what’s wrong with a child and deciding if they are “wrong enough” or perform poorly enough to go to this or that service. What RTI says is once you assess a kid’s performance then you analyze the instruction. You say, “How can my instruction change in order to improve performance?”, as opposed to, “If the kid tanks badly enough maybe he’ll

qualify for special ed.” And, there’s a constant self-assessment going on about what I can be doing differently or more intently in order to improve this kid’s performance.

He also addresses this issue on a school-wide level:

It’s the same kind of thing when I go into a school; I get nervous when a principal says proudly to me, “We do nothing but inclusion here.” If you do “nothing but that,” the law still says you’ve got to comply with least restrictive environment and a continuum of services. At one high school, for example, they went into a model where they did “nothing but” consultation. The special ed teachers were what they called liaisons to the different departments. One EC teacher went to Social Studies, one to Language Arts, one here, one there.... They were doing some good things within this model. The problem was when a student showed up with a significant reading disability, and he really needed to be given some explicit instruction. They said, “Well, no, we don’t do that here. We’ve got this model, and I’ll see your son 15 minutes a month and keep checking in with his teachers and case managing.” But, there was no delivery of explicit instruction. It scares me to death when I hear these blanket statements like, “Starting now, we are doing ALL inclusion or ALL consultation.”

The closest description to a non-linear, non-compartmentalized school in this study came from Tina, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction in Clem County. In the elementary school she described, not only are binaries between general and special education being deconstructed, but also roles of adults in the building are contextual and indefinite. Tina questioned the logic of assuming that one teacher alone could deliver all the services necessary to a whole classroom of students with a plethora of needs. “One person,” she

relates, “can’t carry that much knowledge.” She continued, “You wouldn’t tell a doctor to go out there and operate on somebody’s brain just because he’s a doctor. Doctors have different skills and specialize in different areas.”

Doctors, however, have the luxury of performing on only one patient at a time. Patients rotate around to different doctors. Since it is impossible for individual students to rotate around to individual teachers—much less diagnose their own condition or discern the skill sets of each adult—Barker Elementary School in Clem County flips this concept on its head.

*Tina:* Every school – well, almost every school – has what they need in the building to meet all those needs if they could just figure out a system to put the correct energy together. You have to be able to collaborate and access everybody and everything in the building to make that happen.

By carefully assessing both student needs and the strengths of the faculty, the principal at Barker Elementary guides the collaboration and rotation of her teachers and support personnel to where their services are most needed throughout the school day. Her goal is to use every resource in the building to its fullest potential.

*Tina:* It’s like how I collaborate at my job at the central office, but on a much larger scale. I don’t know everything. I work with enough brilliant people, though, that if we sit down and work on a problem together, there’s not a doubt in my mind that we can come up with a solution. I may not be able to do it by myself, but who cares as long as the problem is solved. Everybody should be able to feel that way in a school. At the end of the day, it’s about helping kids.

The principal at Barker Elementary School has created that kind of culture—a place where teachers feel confident and safe enough to risk sharing their own strengths while depending on the strengths of others to compensate for their weaknesses. “I can do this, but I can’t do that.” The best teachers I’ve ever seen are the ones who are most excited when kids don’t have to leave their classroom and support comes in to integrate services into what is already being done. They just seem to have a bigger vision of what school really is and what it means to educate a child. *We are less than we are meant to be without each other.* We are even kind of following her model on a district level now. We gave her the latitude to do new things, and we said, “She’s on to something, and we are going with it.”

*Me:* So, how does it work, and how does the principal nurture and establish that culture of looking at things differently?

*Tina:* She’s brilliant, and she’s as stubborn as a mule. She begins with figuring out what kids need and then fills in those gaps. She stays aware of teacher gifts. She really knows how to pull the best from people and how to match up those teacher strengths with student needs. She’s broken down jobs. I don’t know who teaches what at that school. I can’t tell you. Somebody says, “Who teaches third grade?” And I’m like, “I know she does the math part, but then he comes over and does third grade reading.” It’s a fluid system. There’s one class in particular with a lot of needs. So, anytime anybody’s got a second, she’s got those teachers plugged in doing stuff to support those kids that need it the most. At some point in time, there may be an EC teacher in a classroom working with regular kids. Don’t tell anybody I said that! Or, there may be a reading specialist in there rotating kids through based on

what their data says their needs are. She's really jumped out there, but everybody started keeping up. They have a really tight system of assessment going on in that school. They are adjusting all the time. It's the RTI model – but big time!

Another thing, in our county, we have been able to repurpose some positions, and there is an “instructional support coach” now at each elementary school. That person's time and energy is also spent in the places that need it most. It might be with a new teacher. It might be with a teacher who, based on all kinds of assessments, has real needs in that classroom.... Some grade levels may not get this person at all because they are meeting needs on their own, or they may get some planning time with that person to figure out how to better differentiate, but not direct services to their kids. So, for some people that may not feel fair, but that's just how it has to feel because the focus is on kids.

How does she know where help is needed? That's the other piece that makes her so strong. Before anybody else had ever figured out what formative assessment and authentic assessment and those kinds of things looked like, she had done it. She's been doing that for five years, and we've been watching how she is growing this school. It does make some people uncomfortable. Without the data, it would be hard to convince very traditional community members and board members why someone seems out of pocket—that it's okay not to know exactly what grade a teacher is teaching. It's okay, because look at the data. Without the data, it's nothing more than a whim.

As I listened to Tina describe Barker Elementary School, connections formed with how other administrative interview participants also nudged, at times pushed, people out of

their comfort zones. The following section focuses on nourishing gifts within a system, while dealing with the inevitable resistance of implementing organizational change. *“If we don’t change, we don’t grow.... Growth demands a temporary surrender of security.”*

**Nourish growth while dealing with resistance to change.** Many conversations with administrators brought to mind a long-time favorite quote about Duke Ellington by writer and jazz enthusiast, Nat Hentoff (2009):

Ellington talked to me about his music. He composed with each musician in the band particularly in mind. “You keep their weaknesses in your head as you write,” he said, “and that way you astonish them with their strengths.”

Not only are these words powerful to me as a teacher, they are also more than applicable to how educational leaders in this study orchestrated and inspired change within their systems. Several of these administrators amazed and kept others motivated by helping them realize hidden strengths and capabilities. *Before experiencing life as a butterfly, a caterpillar would never set out to fly.*

*Melody:* I think it’s my job to kind of facilitate all the strengths of people in the building and find those who are willing and able to lead. Sometimes they have the knowledge, but they don’t have the confidence [*through a smile she continues*]. Sometimes they have the confidence, and they don’t have the knowledge. It’s usually the first. They say, “I could never do what you do.” And I say, “Yeah, you could.” So, I just start giving them opportunities to share and present. I’ve really tried to turn us away from, “Here we are giving you this information; go out and do,” to “This is what our school improvement team decided as our focus.” Also, I stay aware of what teachers are doing in their classrooms. I may say, “I really like what you did with

this. I need you guys to present at the next faculty meeting.” Then, there are coworkers talking about what’s going on instead of me saying, “You should do it like this…”

*Janet:* I believe there are innate gifts inside each of us, and if we’re not feeding into them, we can burn out. I try to create a culture where no one is an island. No one is allowed to be an island; we are going to be a team. We are all going to use our gifts to support others, while others use their gifts to support us.

Again these administrators implied a balance, a “*both/and*” kind of relationship, between authoritarianism and empowerment of others. They remain the composer, wisely keeping the *weaknesses of each musician in the band particularly in mind*, in order to foster astonishing results. Often such keen insight allowed interview participants to proactively avoid negative situations rather than reactively confront them. They also encouraged their “bands” to keep practicing new skills by reminding them, every once in a while, to stop and enjoy the music.

*Tina:* As an administrator, it is your responsibility to know when there are struggles happening, and then it is your responsibility to figure out what you are going to be able to do within that school and within your power to support those kids in that classroom. If a teacher’s not feeling good about what she is doing, or some don’t have the skills, people, or resources they need, it’s your responsibility to take that information and turn it around. It may look really different than anything you’ve done before, but it’s your job as an administrator. Every kid in that class is depending on you to help that teacher do something.

*Judy:* [On merging teachers from three high schools into one middle school] One thing I did that first year was carefully and very purposefully choose teachers for

teams. I broke up teachers from the same schools. And then I mixed up teams quite often, even after that first year. If you're not careful those teams will turn into little cliques, and they can forget they're not in competition with one another – that everybody's working together. You have to help them out of their comfort zones. Also to remind everyone we were all “in it together,” we planned a lot of bonding activities and social times. We had afternoon teas with cookies. We tried to have really nice dinners to show appreciation. Social experiences are big! I used to think they were ‘froufrou,’ but I don't think that anymore. They're important. At the end of that first year, we had a school-wide celebration. There was this wonderful culminating experience. I think that's when everybody felt like, “We did it! We made it!” It turned into an annual event.

*Janet:* In my opinion, if the adults aren't happy, the students don't stand a prayer. Just like the kids, the adults need nourishment too. I tried to do special things for the faculty because I knew how hard they were working at implementing this new program [RTI]. We tried to have things like duty free lunches. That's a big deal – huge! We tried to stay really conscious of the needs of the adults. I think sometimes that gets left out.

*Beth:* [On choosing Jake's teachers for inclusion] Honestly, as an administrator, if I had somebody who really was saying, “I can't do this,” they probably wouldn't have had Jake to start with because I would have been setting him up for failure. I had to be very careful. It absolutely has to be the right person.

*Maggie:* [Also on choosing teachers for inclusion] Yes, yes, yes, they were chosen on purpose. Because when the schedule is made, you look at each teacher, and say,

“Okay, who is going to be the best with these particular kids, and who may not do so well in that setting.” Then, the ones who may be more reluctant at first, after observing some successes, may become more willing to take risks themselves.

Despite their best efforts, administrators interviewed also shared experiences of dealing with individuals within their organizations who were resistant to working within set parameters. Once again the data from this study, as well as current change leadership literature seems counterintuitive in that naysayers, at least up to a certain point, are considered an asset. In order to work out the kinks, an administrator must be made aware of them. Cultivating an atmosphere of trust is essential.

*Janet:* Because of what we were trying to accomplish, we had to be very honest with each other. We developed a leadership team with representatives from each grade level. If one of the members of this team knew someone that was stressed or feeling a lack of support, that type thing, it was expected of that individual to let the group know; and then we worked on solving the problem. A lot of it was just knowing, and then doing something about it. The faculty knew if they took something to their representative, it would be brought up. They trusted it would get from point A to point B, and problem-solved. The team would say, “You might not like what we’ve done, but we’re trying to help.” A good example – I had a second grade teacher who would call it like she saw it. There was never any guessing with her. She was definitely one of our strengths. She would say, “Hold on a minute – this is what we’re seeing out in the trenches.” Because she was willing to speak up, we knew about it.

*Judy:* I identified key personnel that I could trust to come and give me the pulse of the faculty, so we could make adjustments as necessary. They might come in my office, shut the door, and say, “I think you need to know this.” Then, go out the door, and never say another word. Honest folks – no axes to grind – just wanted everything to be successful.

*Greg:* Usually if folks are resistant, they speak out. And they have all kinds of opinions. Those are the people you have to bring along. You’re not going to change their attitudes or mindset overnight. And it may be that they don’t need to be a direct part of it initially. They still need to be part of the big picture – serve on committees and things. They will be listening and seeing things start to happen. If it’s a good program, it’s going to kind of sell itself over time.

It is important to note, however, the sharp distinction data revealed between working with those resistant to change and those who were decidedly against it. According to this study, the parameters within which sustainable change can freely evolve are non-negotiable. *The equation itself does not change; the freedom lies in finding the answers.* Eventually, every successful change-leader interviewed dealt either directly or indirectly with members of their organizations not working toward collectively answering the question, “*How are we going to get there?*”

*James:* If you are going to be a real leader – an effective leader anyway – you have to clearly establish, “This is where we are going. This is what’s going to happen at this school. This is why it’s going to happen, and we want you to be a part of it. If you feel it’s out of line and that sort of thing, you can request a transfer without any discrimination” – and mean it. Say, “This may not be the right place for you.” It has

to be a well thought out mandate, one that is based on research and successful practice. There has to be a plan, but there really has to be that understanding that it's going to happen. Sometimes people need to move on out; but remember, we are talking about only 1 or 2 percent who say, "I am not going to do it, and I don't care what you do." Some will transfer on their own.... Others, if ineffective, still need to move on – retire, or be let go. And that takes a lot of courage on a lot of peoples' part. When I was a principal, I had one person that I did everything I could for, but I could not get a change to happen, so I helped get her fired. It was amazing what a difference in the school with just that one person gone. But, that was after multiple years; it was not all of a sudden.... You know, I haven't found that many people are that defiant, if they understand what they are being asked to do, and why they are being asked to do it. And if you can take away the fear factor – build their confidence.

*Judy:* Sometimes, when you have a weak link, that weak link has to be guided in another direction. If you are going to work together that closely with the faculty, you cannot afford a weak link. And the faculty will not put up with it. They will flat out not put up with it. I had one teacher, after she realized how we were going to do things, who chose not to stay. She asked for a transfer. That's fine. I pretended to be very upset, but it was a good thing for everybody. I had another teacher who decided at the end of that first year not to come back. I had really those two weak links that had to decide to make other career choices.

*Tina:* [on the principal's leadership style at Barker Elementary School] She's got guts; she really does. And she has to because there are a few people on her staff that

still want to go in the room and shut the door and do their own thing. She says, “This is how we do things at this school, and if you can’t be happy, and if we can’t keep our focus on kids, then this may not be the place for you.” And that’s a tough thing to do in a little place.

Despite apparent obstacles, the leaders who implemented successful, sustainable change within their organizations by setting in motion a simple equation, steadily witnessed order develop within chaos. *There is never a straight path to order, but it inevitably displays itself in beautiful patterns that develop over time, often evoking a feeling of awe.... As in a fractal, what we first see as setbacks or tensions could actually become integral pieces of the bigger picture making it even more meaningful.* As solutions were plotted, strange attractors indeed emerged, slowly and collectively seeming to draw the right people toward the right actions.

A common theme throughout this study is building confidence and community by taking away fear of the unknown.

*Tina: You have to experience it. It’s almost like one of those desensitization things where you have to look at the airplane, touch the airplane, sit down on the airplane, and finally take off and fly in the airplane.*

*Steve: I think the answer is more exposure, more exposure, more exposure. And of course, just the opposite is what’s often done.*

When asked specifically how to lessen the anxiety of teachers dealing with change, the words “exposure” and “experience” were as prevalent in the responses of administrators as those of parents. *Before experiencing life as a butterfly, a caterpillar would never set out to fly.*

*James: I don’t know any magic way to do it, but my quick answer would be knowledge. I’ve found over the years that after people understand what the middle*

school concept is, it's almost impossible to be against it. Part of it is seeing it in action. Sometimes when I arrange school visits, I ask the principal to send the ones who are really questioning it. Let them go see it for themselves. Don't try to sugarcoat it. Let them stay all day, so they can really gain an understanding of how and why the school operates. It's about exposure. They have to experience it.

A leader sets the stage for metamorphosis. By doing everything possible to nurture an environment conducive to change – a place safe enough to build a chrysalis – they prepare organizations to fly. Exposure to the knowledge and resources necessary to take risks, during this pupa phase, leads to unfathomable experiences. When asked how she thought teachers learned to “do” inclusion, Beth's response is also as good as any explanation for how butterflies learn to fly:

*Beth:* I guess this is going to sound awful, but they learn to do it... by doing it. Like with Jake, you have to get a little success, and then that success builds... You know, I'm still thinking about that question. They do have to do it and experience it, but you also, as an administrator, have a part. You have to give them resources, certainly I mean resources to work with, but I also mean like time. Give them time to do some different kind of planning.... And I think mostly, you have to make them believe that you have confidence that they can do it. They have to believe that you think they are capable of doing it.

*Beautiful IS something maybe you didn't expect that happens, but it far from just happens. It has to be purposely set in motion.*

## **Concluding Notes**

*Although classical science leads us to believe small differences average out and that the universe is unaffected by slight changes, Lorenz proved, through a series of computerized equations, that something as seemingly insignificant as a butterfly flapping its wings on one side of the planet could cause a tornado on the other side of the world.* Therefore, it seems reasonable to believe that something as seemingly insignificant as engaging in any one of the actions specified in this section, or sharing someone's story, or providing an experience that slightly affects the attitude of even one person, can set in motion the aspiration of Sapon-Shevin (2007) to reconceptualize all aspects of school in order to foster sustained, meaningful inclusion as this dissertation proposes. With this research, I flap my wings.

## **Chapter 5: Findings and Recommendations**

In Chapter 5, I analyze the findings described in Chapter 4 by drawing further connections among the participants' stories and key concepts in the literature reviewed. In this chapter, each research question is addressed. My guiding questions were:

1. Does the process of inclusion strengthen individuals' understanding of commonality?
2. Does the process of inclusion contribute to a single cohesive unit in the classroom?
3. Why are some settings more successful than others in creating a sense of inclusion?
4. How can educational leaders support sustainable change in inclusive settings?

The findings in this study continue to be linked with change leadership and theories of new science. In addition, I discuss the implications of this study and offer suggestions for further research.

### **Introduction**

Just as this dissertation began with an examination and acknowledgement of my personal lenses, it further invites participants and readers on a similar, parallel journey. This research proposes that the fractal of inclusion is astonishingly more than we can take in from our individual perspectives. Beginning to see the whole of how we fit together within a much larger context necessitates a collective acknowledgement of the individual lenses we each peer through. These individual lenses at once limit us while at the same time allow us

to offer our own unique contribution to the emerging shape of chaos, more aptly referred to as the “shape of wholeness” (Briggs & Peat, 1989). Although it comes naturally, looking through any one lens is daunting and threatening in today’s turbulent world. However, what dazzlingly different thoughts and images emerge when we step outside comfort zones and begin to look collectively at our worldviews rather than through them? We begin to see intricate connections and interdependence.

While this study zooms in on inclusion as the practice of including all learners in the regular public school classroom, it is only a point plotted on the fractal of inclusion at the grandest scale. It is one of a myriad of possibilities for working toward a solution to the nonlinear equation of making “many” equal to “one” in today’s seemingly chaotic society. Through inclusion, we realize we are less than we are meant to be without our differences. It is necessary for musical compositions that each of the eighty-eight keys on a piano keyboard produces a different sound. In this dissertation alone, 26 uniquely individual letters of the alphabet make up over 60,000 words. The same is true with people. Our whole is not identical to the sum of our parts. It is something new. *In order to draw from this abundant source of supply, we must learn to appreciate our underlying unity expressed as diversity. We must make an effort to get to know people different from ourselves.* Zohar and Marshall (1994), proclaim:

Each member of an emergent relationship finds himself or herself *enriched* by participation in the collective, able to draw on skills or knowledge beyond his or her own individual capacities (p. 107).

We accommodate for weaknesses by relying on one another’s strengths.

This dissertation is an invitation to participants and readers to also reach up and push their glasses back on top of their heads and blink. It encourages letting fuzzy images of new philosophical perspectives come into focus. No one should get rid of his or her glasses. It is because of them that we possess individual perspectives that enable us to offer unique contributions to something much bigger than ourselves. Acknowledging them, however, allows us to see that there is something much bigger than ourselves in the first place.

As modern philosophers, political thinkers, and sociologists are applying new scientific discoveries and insights from the quantum world to everyday concerns about self and society, this research seeks to apply them to education. It illuminates our educational system as theorized. It exposes the prevalence of western educational organizations to see through a post-positivist lens which consciously or not, greatly affects our beliefs and actions. The emphasis is that inclusion is more than a process; it is an attitude that demands a change of perception.

As this study developed it became apparent that information on the “how” of inclusion, as well as the “why” is readily available for those who seek it. My line of questioning shifted from, “how” or “why,” to “what” would make teachers want to discover and implement changes necessary to make inclusion successful? What makes it worth the commitment and effort required to merge general and special education? What makes it worth the frustration and challenge of change? As quoted by Dewey and Sigler (1997) in *Science, Technology, and Society*, renowned physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer suggests, “The history of science is rich in example of the fruitfulness of bringing two sets of techniques, two sets of ideas, developed in separate contexts for the pursuit of new truth, into touch with one another” (p.35). This study is no different.

Based on this research, I believe the simple answer to these hard questions is gaining clarity of the whole – seeing the fractal.

### **Does the Process of Inclusion Strengthen Individuals’ Understanding of Commonality?**

This research finds that the process of inclusion does indeed strengthen individuals’ understanding of commonality. However, it also indicates that a strengthened understanding of likenesses necessitates expanding our vision of education in today’s mechanistic society. Likewise, implementing inclusion thoughtlessly will not produce desired results. According to data, in order to better understand commonality through the process of inclusion, schools must look to families as models, provide purposeful inclusive experiences, and take away fear of the unknown.

**Look to families as models.** Data in this study show that, the implementation of meaningful inclusion in schools is sporadic and a relatively new phenomenon. Therefore, families provide the best models for gaining insight into this question. The most salient theme discovered about inclusion from these in-depth inquiries is that it requires unwavering commitment. Committing to seeing it through, no matter what, is the first and most crucial step in the process. Even parents, at first, zoom in on horizontal differences and experience fear and resistance to change. However, “[i]ntimacy with difference fosters its accommodation” (Solomon, 2012, p. 6). For parents and siblings who make a conscious, irrevocable decision to experience and get to know a family member with different support needs, two common occurrences seem to transpire. First, that they come to an appreciation that all people are much more alike than they are different. Secondly, they express a humble gratefulness for an experience that enabled them to grow in ways they never would have chosen, considered, or thought possible. As Jackie states, referring to Eli, “It’s a big,

extraordinary life because of him.... [It's] so much bigger than I would've ever wanted or felt comfortable having." Special education parent participants conveyed that looking *through* their individual situations, from the beginning, appeared daunting and threatening; but looking back *at* them evokes dazzlingly different thoughts and images. They express that the lens with which they viewed family was limiting. Indeed, identifying with an expanded view of family enlarged their own identities with powerful consequences enabling coherence.

**Provide purposeful inclusive experiences.** At one point in his interview, Cora's father, Steve, directly addressed inclusion as an issue of social justice. From a historical perspective, identifying with an expanded view of humanity, in any way, likewise enlarges personal identities with powerful consequences and certainly results in a deeper understanding of commonality. In a mechanistic society, intent on imposing linear identities, learning to look for such nonlinear wholeness is a skill that must be honed. Fostering exposure and genuine experiences among different types of people must be purposeful. The results of a study on desegregated high schools in the 1970's by Wells, Home, Revilla, and Atanda (2004), reveal that graduates not only grew in ways quite similar to the parents in this study, but also had similar obstacles once their own points of view were enlarged. Wells et al., (2004) found:

The vast majority of graduates across racial and ethnic lines greatly valued the daily cross-racial interaction in their high schools. They found it to be one of the most meaningful experiences of their lives, the best—and sometimes the only—opportunity to meet and interact regularly with people of different backgrounds. (p.6)

Interviews of graduates from a range of ethnic backgrounds including blacks, whites, Latinos, and Asians reflected the significance desegregation had on shaping each individual's

view of race, as well as, helping them get over the fear and distrust of people different from themselves. One graduate expressed:

Growing up in a racially integrated school, I think, was invaluable for me. I just feel... it helped my people skills. It gave me the ability to relate to just about any person and feel good... and to be sincere, not putting on an act... I can't put enough value on it. (Wells et al., 2004, p. 7)

However, the study went on to say that despite a fundamental change in the people who lived through desegregation, the impact was much more limited on society at large. It seems, as with inclusion, that the understanding of commonality must be individually and personally experienced. Outside of institutions where other options are not easily accessible, such as in families or desegregated classrooms, most of society remains Newtonian in structure – distinctly separated by imposed lines and boxes. Newton's mechanistic view of the universe still influences human behavior, learning, communities, and social institutions. Raising awareness of commonality must quite purposefully go hand-in-hand with any organizational reform promoting issues of social justice. bell hooks (1996) admonishes, "There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures" (p. 193). In other words, adaptive, sustainable change – above and beyond implementing technical changes – is imperative. Fullan (2011) clarifies: "Adaptive challenges and social complexity are one and the same" (p. 18).

**Take away fear of the unknown.** A common theme throughout this study is building confidence and community by taking away fear of the unknown. Across the board, parents and administrators alike cited "exposure" and "experience" as the antidote to fear and

anxiety, the remedy for seeing “other” rather than “us”. *The closer we are to true inclusion, the more visible are our connections. Our interdependence takes shape.* Although school systems may not share the same motives as families, and less appears to be at stake, the potential benefits of becoming less fragmented and more holistic are likewise inconceivable. Possibilities are unimaginable the more our circles of compassion and inclusion are widened. Who knows the greatest expression of humanity, if we all extended an unconditional commitment to inclusion beyond those closest to and most like ourselves?

*A human being is part of a whole, called by us the “universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty (Einstein, n.d.).*

### **Does the Process of Inclusion Contribute to a Single Cohesive Unit in the Classroom?**

This study indeed highlighted specific incidences when the process of inclusion contributed to a single cohesive unit in the classroom. Again, however, as Bryan (State Exceptional Children’s Division Consultant) elaborates, “It’s got to be done well to show results.” *Meaningful inclusion is not about being “someplace;” it is about being “somebody.”* Cohesiveness does not occur through merely sharing space. It occurs as all learners participate actively and meaningfully in the classroom and school environment.

**Meaningful participation.** Quite obviously, Maggie’s description of Dylan’s inclusive experiences at Pinewood County Middle School revealed that mutual bonds were

formed as special education merged with general education. Not only was Dylan's attitude changed, so was the attitude of his general education teacher and his general education peers. Dylan formed natural supports that most likely will follow him throughout his high school career, much like the friendships fostered by Cora's fourth grade teacher. It is not enough that inclusion positively affect a child with support needs; for cohesion to occur, there must be a kind of group metamorphosis. There needs to be a realization of oneness – that there are no disposable parts. There must be meaningful participation. Steve and Maggie expound:

*Steve:* It's not just how the teacher's attitude affects the child. It is how it affects the whole class. Cora still has friendships that began in fourth grade. We did lots of sleepovers that year. She just walked in graduation with that same class. They were friends all the way through. One in particular, a regular education student, they still go out to dinner sometimes. It started in the fourth grade. That teacher modeled acceptance, and the kids followed by example. Kids don't have any other place to learn it. Natural supports kick in because the attitude of the teacher.

*Maggie:* For Dylan, it has given him more friends, even those 'popular' kids. They were his friends to some degree before, but now when his team does something, they come and find him. They don't want to leave him out. They remember him.

Sometimes Dylan doesn't want to go – social settings are hard for him. He's nervous and not sure what to do, and he'll say, 'Uhhh, I don't know about that.' But those kids will come and get him, and say, 'It will be okay, Dylan. Come with us!'

Sadly, this study found a disproportionate number of examples where cohesiveness never occurred in settings where inclusion was supposedly sought. Instances—such as, Eli playing alone on a separate playground, Cora eating lunch away from the cafeteria and

spending a lot of second grade in the hallway, and Bret being uncomfortable in all but a few settings—point toward a lack of meaningful participation of students with special needs among general education peers in their school environments. However, data from this research make it clear that prior to evaluating the results of the process of inclusion, one must evaluate the process itself. *Sapon-Shevin (2007) notes, “It has been said that there is no good way to do the wrong thing. But it is also true that the right thing done poorly or thoughtlessly is unlikely to be successful” (p. xvi).* The following section highlights aspects of successful and unsuccessful attempts at creating cohesive environments when general and special education are merged. *It doesn’t have to be “either/or;” “both/and” is well within the realm of possibility.*

### **Why Are Some Settings More Successful Than Others in Creating a Sense of Inclusion?**

Data reveal that the success or failure of creating a true sense of inclusion is largely determined not only by how well it was planned and implemented, but also by how willing stakeholders are to think outside of compartmentalized boxes. Three main factors are common to successful inclusive settings: a willingness to change and adapt, provision of alternate assessment measures, and non-territorial classrooms.

**Willingness to change and adapt.** This research strongly suggests that most initial conditions necessary for meaningful inclusive experiences require a different mindset or approach to education altogether – a challenge to the status quo. Successfully creating a sense of inclusion requires change and letting go of linear, predetermined expectations of success. While examining characteristics of inclusive settings, it must be acknowledged that without leaders skilled in navigating organizational change, it is unlikely that positive transformations in classrooms will be sustainable.

After earning his doctorate at the University of Illinois, special educator Marc Gold pioneered a revolutionary approach to teaching people considered to have severe and profound disabilities. His philosophy for educating students with significant support needs came to be known as the “Gold Rule.” It states, “A lack of learning in any particular situation should first be interpreted as a result of inappropriate or insufficient use of a teaching strategy, rather than inability on the part of the learner” (Gold, n.d., p.3). This study reflects his directive. Data challenge educators to reflectively analyze their instruction rather than their students. Without exception, instances of successful inclusion in this body of research hinged on the attitudes of teachers and their willingness to make it work by adapting to the support needs of the child. Jackie lamented, in the case of her son, Eli, that there was an underlying expectation that he adapt to fit into existing programs rather than the other way around. She stated:

They’re at this narrow place. For whatever reason, they can’t do anything different. I’ve talked to them about curriculums that have been shown to help children with Down syndrome, and they’re like, ‘No, we’re not doing that. This is the curriculum, and it’s what we are going to use.’ Period.

Steve shared similar sentiments when describing the relentless struggle to keep Cora out of a separate setting: “I think because we weren’t putting her in the Hub, they really didn’t have a system to provide an EC teacher for a kid who’s going to be included.”

Beyond adapting instruction and working to provide a continuum of services in the general classroom rather than a continuum of placements, stakeholders must also be flexible in the way success is measured. This study also finds that successful teachers and administrators think outside the box when considering assessment measures for a student

with special needs in a general education setting. In addition to content acquisition, it is paramount that socialization skills, vocational skills, and self-advocacy – which lead to a more meaningful quality of life beyond graduation – are taken into consideration. An example of such innovation was Cora’s cosmetology teacher in high school.

*Susan:* The cosmetology teacher was fantastic. And Cora’s really good at it. She’s not going to be able to learn all the stuff to take the exam, but she does nails; she can French braid hair. The teacher had the flexibility to recognize when they were doing heavily academic things—they did some detailed anatomy in that class, which I didn’t expect—Cora could just get up. She just knew. She would go launder the towels and put them away. She had jobs in the classroom that were real, purposeful things that had to be done. And she also got work credit toward her occupational diploma.

**Non-territorial classrooms.** Likewise, data indicate both special education teachers and general education teachers in successful inclusive settings are not territorial and make the most use of the different models of co-teaching. Their classrooms and schools often differ sharply from “the way things have always been done.” Special education teachers must develop skills in collaboration and consultation, which are vital in offering support in the general education classroom. At the same time, general educators must overcome fear of the unknown and develop confidence through experience that they are teachers of children, not teachers of a specific subject or ability level. Although there is a place for professional development, differentiating instruction and developing a repertoire of teaching strategies do not deviate very far from what is necessary for effective teaching in general. In order to meet the unique needs of all learners, this study underscores the importance of teachers to share

freely of their strengths while humbly relying on the abilities of one another to accommodate for personal weaknesses. Tina (Tom's mother and administrator in Clem County) concurs:

The best teachers I've ever seen are the ones who are most excited when kids don't have to leave their classroom and support comes in to integrate what is already being done. They just seem to have a bigger vision of what school really is and what it means to educate a child.

It has been said that it is amazing what a man can accomplish who does not care who gets the credit. *We are less than we are meant to be without each other.*

### **How Can Educational Leaders Support Sustainable Change in Inclusive Settings?**

As I came to understand inclusion as an adaptive challenge requiring adjustments in attitudes, values, and behaviors in order to thrive in a new environment, concepts found in change leadership literature became a framework for this study (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Although much is written about successful organizational change under complex conditions, a gap in current research seems to be directly linking leadership in a culture of change to the process of inclusion. By examining theories of leadership in relation to tensions surrounding the merger of general education and special education, this study seeks to help educational leaders more proactively set the stage for success. Both relevant literature and data from this study indicate common strategies of successful leaders in gaining buy-in from all stakeholders, which is necessary for organizational transformation. When specifically linked to inclusion, these include: setting inclusion as a direct and purpose-driven goal, seeking order rather than control, and providing ongoing and passionate support.

**Setting inclusion as a direct and purpose-driven goal.** Even when specifically sought, only two out of nine interview participants had direct experience restructuring for

inclusion on a school-wide level as administrators. Although other educational leaders in this study dealt with specific students and situations, only Bryan and Melody clearly set an administrative goal to reconceptualize an existing institution, the Hub. Bryan reflected on his administrative experiences with inclusion in Harper County:

When I got there, students in that self-contained center stayed on a K-8 campus through the age of twenty-two, and one of my goals was to move that forward and get to transition those kids up to their age-appropriate peers at the high school.

This goal, for Bryan, was purpose-driven. Successful organizational change in this study, as well as in the literature, begins with a leader passionate about a cause, and both indicate that in order for transformations to take place, it is essential that peers be connected by a moral purpose (Fullan, 2011; Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Having a sense of purpose provides inspiration and energy and is vital to the practice of leadership. The change has to not only be a priority of the leader, but also must be woven into the mission of the organization at large.

Many parallels can be drawn to inclusion from James' experiences as a charter member of the national middle school movement. Despite his overwhelming success in affecting change in this area, James still lamented the incomplete implementation of the philosophy across the nation. Throughout his interview a deep disappointment with having to teach the same middle school concepts as he did in the seventies was evident. He believes much of the problem falls back to lack of buy-in from the top. In this study, his reasoning holds true for why change is so hard in general, and it goes a long way in explaining why inclusion within classrooms looks much the same as it did nearly four decades ago when

millions of students with disabilities walked through school doors for the first time. His words are more than relevant:

*James:* We've come so far. The movement has stayed alive and made it through a lot of rough times, and it's grown. So, this is a kind of the glass is half-full or half-empty kind of thing. The most disheartening thing is a lack of commitment to middle schools to be authentic and implement what we know through research. Part of it is principals who don't have a middle level background or any experience with a middle school before they take charge. They're good people – we're not talking about that, but they have to relearn it. So, we are still training about teaming and advisory programs and things like that almost forty-five years later.

Similarly, as data reveal, educational leaders in this study had little administrative training in implementing special education policy and procedures. Coupled with a lack of personal experience with disability throughout their own education or within their own families, it is unlikely that most school administrators start out as either the “Ninja Warrior” or “Evangelical Missionary” of the inclusive school’s movement. As James indicates, it is not a question of whether or not they are good leaders, but rather more simply a lack of exposure and experience. Due to this fact, not only is it unlikely that including learners with more significant disabilities within the general education setting is of top priority to the majority of school administrators, in all probability it is barely on their radar. Current shifts in policy to more closely align special education law with general education law are perhaps making inclusion a more visible and thought about concern. *Sailor (2009) confirms:*

*This shift in emphasis in general education reform presents a window of opportunity for the emergence of a shared educational agenda, one that holds potential for*

*capturing the innovative elements of improvement and reform in federal categorical programs such as special education as well as elements in general education. (pp. 8-9)*

Awareness is key. The widespread growth of middle level education programs in universities across the nation has no doubt had a tremendous impact on the number of teachers and administrators familiar with best educational practices for young adolescents. Maggie, special educator at Pinewood County Middle School, addressed the need for more exposure to best practices of inclusion as pre-service teachers and educational leaders at the collegiate level. She reasoned, “You know, it’s going to have to start from the very foundations of what universities believe and know that is right.” Beyond that, if those affected by disability continue sharing stories and challenging the status quo, more and more students, teachers, parents, and administrators will become cognizant of their plight. In turn, it is hopeful that inclusion will become a much more purposefully driven goal of educational leaders. It has been said that justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.

**Seeking order rather than control.** Although data from this study closely correlated with the change leadership literature, one difference – though subtle – was striking. Despite being in accordance that the case for change must be compelling and associated with moral imperatives rather than compliance with authority, participants in this study also held firmly to the seemingly contradictory belief that change must be mandated. Although these two standpoints seem mutually exclusive, administrative interview participants found them both invaluable and quite necessary for navigating change. By allowing for creative freedom, within explicitly set parameters, change leaders in this study

relinquished control and instead embarked organizations on a relentless pursuit of order.

Although the path to order is never straight, if everyone in a system works toward a common goal – if everyone is unconditionally committed – this research suggests that together they can ultimately realize their greatest expression. Tina (Tom’s mother and administrator in Clem County) confidently discussed the ability of schools to meet the unique needs of each child served:

Every school – well, almost every school – has what they need in the building to meet all those needs if they could just figure out a system to put the correct energy together. You have to be able to collaborate and access everybody and everything in the building to make that happen.

Within those set parameters, distributive leadership is imperative for change according to this research. Robert (assistant principal of Savington Elementary School in its early years) expressed, “I’ve always believed that if the people affected help figure out the solution, it will work; and if somebody tells them a solution, it usually won’t.” Through mutual transparency and openness between administrators and teachers, problems and concerns can be acknowledged and addressed before they escalate. Many technical issues, such as scheduling of students and planning time, may be worked out collaboratively. Fullan (2002) offers that high-profile, charismatic leaders often get in the way of sustainability, while those more empowering of others can, with humility, build enduring greatness (p.19). Again Lao Tzu’s wisdom came to mind:

*The worst leaders are those despised. The next worst leaders are those praised. The best leaders are those who are barely noticed and the people say, “We did it ourselves.”* (Shinagel, n.d.)

**Providing ongoing and passionate support.** Not only must leaders begin a change initiative with passion, they must see it through the same way. “It’s the one-shot, hit and run sessions that never work out”, said Bryan, “Okay, training’s over – now go do it!” Throughout his interview, Bryan (State Exceptional Children’s Division Consultant) repeatedly stressed that implementing successful inclusion or leading for change in general, must be an ongoing process requiring engagement on the part of the administrator. Across the board, leaders focused on being both visible and encouraging which helped with accountability, as well as the establishment of a supportive environment.

In this study, administrators placed great emphasis on nourishing growth and celebrating successes along the way. Kegan and Lahey (2009) referred to this as creating a “holding environment” (p. 155). By establishing rituals and ties that bind people together, leaders offset forces of division and dissolution enabling organizations to maintain a collective focus. Judy agreed stating, “Social experiences were big! I used to think they were ‘froufrou’, but I don’t think that anymore. They’re important.” The idea conveyed by most administrators was that people who felt appreciated often did more than was ever expected. I choose to think of this “holding environment” as another secure place for building a chrysalis. In safe organizations, people are more likely to step outside of their comfort zones. Successful leaders are attuned to the strengths and weaknesses of members within their organizations. By preparing them with necessary skills and knowledge and helping them accommodate for individual weaknesses through leaning on one another, a skilled leader sets up the entire organization to be amazed at its collective strengths. As in a fractal, this example of leadership sets the stage for similar patterns to emerge between teachers and students in inclusive classrooms all over the building.

## **Study Limitations and Strengths**

To the best of my ability, I accurately reflected perspectives of the eighteen individuals who participated in my study; however, these perspectives may not represent how all administrators, teachers, parents, and students experience inclusion or deal with organizational change. It is important to note that the participants and settings chosen are in certain respects like all other people and classrooms experiencing a merge of special education and regular education (Schram, 2006). Findings are not generalizable as descriptions of what other classrooms do, but descriptions and theories generated may be transferable and useful in making sense of similar processes or situations. By purposefully selecting sites and participants that offered the most promise of illuminating the case, this research study strives to carry the potential for broader relevance.

Geographic location was an additional limitation. As I was conducting my literature review, I became intrigued with articles that made reference to a few schools in the country that successfully serve all students, even those with the most extensive support needs, in general education in their grade level. As I explored the works of both Wayne Sailor (1991, 2009), professor at the University of Kansas in the Department of Special Education, and Mara Sapon-Shevin (2007), professor of Inclusive Education at Syracuse University, I learned of such schools in Washington, D.C. and Syracuse, New York. These schools are fully inclusive and have undergone comprehensive reforms in order to focus on a continuum of services for students with disabilities in general settings rather than a continuum of placements. Much would have been added to this study, if it had been feasible for me as a researcher to visit either one of these places and/or conduct interviews with administrators, parents, teachers, and students who were completely immersed in the merger of general

education and special education. No one in this current study experienced full inclusion of persons with extensive support needs without being pulled-out of general education at least part of the school day, especially for more heavily academic subjects.

### **Study Implications**

This research sheds light on the process of sustainable change in inclusive settings, while challenging the binaristic nature of general education versus special education. By highlighting adaptive, sustainable change, beyond technical and mandated change, I believe this research begins to provide leadership strategies for proactively supporting inclusive settings rather than reactively dealing with frustrations and tensions that occur from more integrated classrooms. In many ways, this study challenges our assumptions that the way we see things within our own contexts is complete.

Beyond making visible that we all are indeed “theorized” (St. Pierre, 2011) and proposing a grander perspective from which participants and readers can look *at* rather than *through* our current educational system (Kegan & Lahey, 2009), I believe this research has great potential to inform policy. Elmore (1979) distinguishes between two approaches to policy implementation analysis, forward mapping and backward mapping. He outlines the logic behind forward mapping, which assumes that implementation is controlled from the top: “It begins with an objective, it elaborates an increasingly specific set of steps for achieving that objective, and it states an outcome against which success or failure can be measured” (p. 603). He goes on to say, “[t]he most serious problem with forward mapping is its implicit and unquestioned assumption that policymakers control the organizational, political, and technological processes that affect implementation” (p. 603).

Backward mapping assumes the opposite: “the problem-solving ability of complex systems depends not on hierarchical control but on maximizing discretion at the point where the problem is most immediate” (Elmore, 1979, p. 605). My review of relevant literature concerning the shift in policy of what it means to be a “highly qualified” teacher of special education began to highlight where the problem is most immediate. Research at the source of implementation is an exercise in backward mapping, and it carries the potential to be particularly revelatory to policy makers and educational leaders.

Based on tensions expressed in my own school, I feel it important at this pivotal point to help educators and policy-makers make sense of the changes that are taking place. Stakeholders must be allowed to express concerns and collaborate with each other to work through difficult issues. Otherwise, this model of inclusion is set up to fail. Heifetz et al. (2009) remind us, “Adaptive challenges are typically grounded in the complexity of values, beliefs, and loyalties rather than technical complexity and stir up intense emotions rather than dispassionate analysis” (p. 70). As we seek to understand the conceptions and misconceptions that educators hold of inclusion, as in this study, we can further make sense of how this understanding is influencing behaviors in the classroom.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This qualitative collective case study, which addresses a gap in the literature on change leadership and the process of sustainable change in inclusive settings, does not present a comprehensive exploration of schools that are reconceptualized and fully immersed in a merger of general and special education. In Bryan’s interview (State Exceptional Children’s Division Consultant) a lack of empirical data in support of more inclusive classrooms is directly addressed:

There's not a lot of research out there that shows that specific skill levels are really increased by inclusive practices. And I think the reason for that is that people haven't gotten a really good handle on what good inclusive practices look like. People say, 'Show me the results, and then I'll do it.' Well, it's got to be done well to show results.

Although Barker Elementary School in Clem County is on the path of offering a continuum of services in general education settings rather than a continuum of placements for students with support needs, based on this research alone it is not evident that this includes students with more significant disabilities or that separate placements are obsolete. Further studies involving schools where research-based, best practices concerning inclusion have been implemented over time, could begin to provide more significant evidence on how students in both general and special education are affected. Such research could also begin to make visible and widen the concept of specific skill levels—including academic, social, and vocational—achieved by all students.

Studies of any schools or classrooms attempting to move closer and closer toward true inclusion may continue to make more visible our connections and offer administrators further insight into linking change leadership to this process.

### **Conclusion and Resolve**

*Blue Like Jazz, a philosophical and spiritual self-examination by Donald Miller (2003) opens with, "I never liked jazz music because it doesn't resolve." The author relates a short anecdote about observing a man playing the saxophone outside a theater. The musician didn't open his eyes for fifteen minutes.*

*After that (Miller says) I liked jazz music. Sometimes you have to watch somebody love something before you can love it yourself. It is as if they are showing you the way. I used to not like God because God didn't resolve. But that was before any of this happened (p. ix).*

I believe it fitting that this dissertation open and close with a reference to jazz music. In *The Quantum Society: Mind, Physics, and a New Social Order*, Zohar and Marshall (1994) repeatedly refer to the familiar example of a jazz jam session “to make the emergent holism of group identity more accessible” (p. 106). The authors state:

In a jam session, each of the musicians plays as an individual. Each ‘does his own thing,’ in his own way. Yet as they play together a pattern emerges that gives some larger, group structure to the sounds produced by each individual. No one musician knows where the piece is going as they play. It ‘gets composed’ or built up *as they play together* (p. 106).

Tina’s description of Barker Elementary School as a fluid system epitomizes this “free-flowing, ever-changing, creative movement” (Zohar & Marshall, 1994, p. 109).

*Tina:* She’s broken down jobs. I don’t know who teaches what at that school. I can’t tell you. Somebody says, ‘Who teaches third grade?’ And I’m like, ‘I know she does the math part, but then he comes over and does third grade reading.’ It’s a fluid system.

Zohar and Marshall (1994) go on to say:

The creativity of a quantum system... rests on its duality. It rests on the fact that neither all the individual characteristics (particle-like potential) nor all the relational characteristics (wave-like potential) are fixed in an extreme position. The freedom

possessed by such a system is an *internal* freedom. The whole system, its identity, its ‘character,’ its expression, and its receptiveness, is somewhat unfixed, inside and out. It is in a state of flux and becoming.... This internal freedom *thrusts* the system into ‘community’... where the indeterminate, relational aspect acquires its identity as it relates. (p. 109)

This dissertation on inclusion is about resolve. The creativity of a system that merges general education with special education “rests on its duality,” and within the set parameters of “everybody belongs” there is an *internal* freedom. When inclusive settings are purposefully set into motion, a kind of metamorphosis takes place and though “*growth demands a temporary surrender of security,*” both entities free themselves to achieve their greatest expression. *Before experiencing life as a butterfly, a caterpillar would never set out to fly. Beautiful is something maybe you didn’t expect that happens.*

## References

- Adyashanti (2012). *The way of liberation: A practical guide to spiritual enlightenment*. San Jose, CA: Open Gate Sangha, Inc.
- Anderson-Levitt, K. (2006). Ethnography. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Andrews, A. (2009). *The butterfly effect: How your life matters*. Naperville, IL: Simple Truths.
- Anfara, V. A., Brown, K. M., & Mangione, T. L. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher*, 31(7), 28-38.
- Billingsley, B. S. (2007). Recognizing and supporting the critical roles of teachers in special education leadership. *Exceptionality: A Special Education Journal*, 15(3), 163-176.
- Bilton, A. (2002). *An introduction to contemporary American fiction*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2008). *Reframing organizations artistry, choice, and leadership* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Briggs, J., & Peat, F. D. (1989). *Turbulent mirror: An illustrated guide to chaos theory and the science of wholeness*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

- Capelluti, J., & Brazee, E. (2003). Teaming at the middle level: Promising practice or unfulfilled promise. *Principal Leadership, Middle School Education*, 3(5), 32-37.
- Capra, F. (1983). *The turning point: Science, society, and the rising culture*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Crockett, J. B., & Bays, D. A. (2007). Investigating instructional leadership for special education. *Exceptionality: A Special Education Journal*, 15(3), 143-161.
- Davis, W. E. (1989). The regular education initiative debate: Its promises and problems. *Exceptional Children*, 55, 440-446.
- Delano, M. E., Keefe, E. B., & Perner, D. (2009). Personnel preparation: Recurring challenges and the need for action to ensure access to general education. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 33(4), 232-240.
- Dewey, J., & Sigler, J. A. (1997). *Science, technology, and society*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Dunlap, T. (2015, April 02). Spotlight TEDx talk: Why separating kids with disabilities from their peers hurts instead of helps. Retrieved from <http://tedxinnovations.ted.com/2015/04/02/spotlight-tedx-talk-why-separating-kids-with-disabilities-from-their-peers-hurts-instead-of-helps/>
- Dunn, L. M. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded-is much of it justifiable? *Exceptional Children* 35, 5-22.
- Einstein, A. (n.d.). Letters of note: The delusion. Retrieved from <http://www.lettersofnote.com/2011/11/delusion.html>
- Elmore, R. F. (1979). Backward mapping: Implementation research and policy decisions. *Political Science Quarterly*, 94(4), 601. doi:10.2307/2149628

- Friend, M., Reising, M., & Cook, L. (1993). Co-Teaching: An overview of the past, a glimpse at the present, and considerations for the future. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 37(4), 6-10.
- Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. S. (1998). Competing visions for educating students with disabilities: Inclusion versus full inclusion. *Childhood Education*, 74(5), 1-2.
- Fullan, M. (2002). The change leader. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 16-20.
- Fullan, M. (2008). *The six secrets of change: What the best leaders do to help their organizations survive and thrive*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2011). *Change leader: Learning to do what matters most*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gallagher, D. J. (1998). The scientific knowledge base of special education: Do we know what we think we know? *Exceptional Children*, 64(4), 493-502.
- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Gold, M. W. (n.d.). *Try another way: Training manual*. Champaign IL: Research Press.
- Haisch, B. (2006). *The God theory: Universes, zero-point fields and what's behind it all*. San Francisco, CA: Weiser Books.
- Halle, J. W., & Dymond, S. K. (2009). Inclusive education: A necessary prerequisite to accessing the general curriculum? *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 33(4), 196-198.

- Harbort, G., Gunter, P. L., Hull, K., Brown, Q., Venn, M. L., Wiley, L. P., & Wiley, E. W. (2007). Behaviors of teachers in co-taught classes in a secondary school. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*, 30(1), 13-23.
- Harkins, S. B. (2013). Full-inclusion as a lived experience: The school career of Martin Schaeffer. *i.e.: Inquiry in Education*, 4(1), Article 5, 1-19.
- Hawking, S., & Mlodinow, L. (2010). *The grand design*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Heifetz, R. A., Linsky, M., & Grashow, A. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Hentoff, N. (2009). Duke Ellington. *Bible.org*. Retrieved from <https://bible.org/illustration/duke-ellington>
- Hildebrand, U. (1988). Das universum - hinweis auf gott? *Ethos*, 10.
- hooks, b. (1995). *Killing rage: Ending racism*. New York, NY: H. Holt and Co.
- Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (2013, February 28). Plugging one text into another: Thinking with theory in qualitative research. Retrieved from <https://brighton.rl.talis.com/items/22A66A89-619F-0E3E-F389B238D0782180.html>
- Karasoff, P., & Kelly, D. (1989). What makes integration work? *STRATEGIES Bulletin*, 1(1), 1-2.
- Kauffman, J. M. (1993). How we might achieve the radical reform of special education. *Exceptional Children*, 60, 6-16.

- Kavale, K. A. (2000). *Inclusion: Rhetoric and reality surrounding the integration of students with disabilities* (Report No. 2). Des Moines, IA: The Iowa Academy of Education.  
Retrieved from [www2.education.uiowa.edu/html/iae/iae-z-op-kavale-1-2.pdf](http://www2.education.uiowa.edu/html/iae/iae-z-op-kavale-1-2.pdf)
- Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. L. (2009). *Immunity to change: How to overcome it and unlock potential in yourself and your organization*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- King, S. E. (2000). *On writing: A memoir of the craft*. New York, NY: Scribner.
- Ledbetter, C. S. (2013). *The search for truth: What one believes should be based on truth, truth should not be based on what one believes*. Shelby, NC: Clyde Ledbetter.
- Leo, E., & Barton, L. (2006). Inclusion, diversity, and leadership perspectives, possibilities, and contradictions. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 34(2), 167-180.
- Mamlin, N. (1999). Despite best intentions: When inclusion fails. *The Journal of Special Education*, 33(1), 36-49.
- Martin, E. W., Martin, R., & Terman, D. L. (1996). The legislative and litigation history of special education. *The Future of Children*, 6(1), 25-39.
- Matthew 7:7. (2007). In *NIV Bible*. London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Maugham, W. S. (1944). *The razor's edge: A novel*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Co.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- McLeskey, J., & Henry, D. (1999). Inclusion: What progress is being made across states? *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 31(5), 56-62.

- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, D. (2003). *Blue like jazz: Nonreligious thoughts on Christian spirituality*. Nashville, TN: T. Nelson.
- National Center for Learning Disabilities. (n.d.). What is RTI? Retrieved from <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti>
- Nirje, B. (1992). *The normalization principle papers*. Uppsala: Centre for Handicap Research, Uppsala University.
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2009). *North Carolina's equity plan for highly qualified teachers*. Retrieved from [www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/fbs/arra/sfsf/reporting/teacherequityreport2009.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/fbs/arra/sfsf/reporting/teacherequityreport2009.pdf)
- Paul, J. L. (2005). *Introduction to the philosophies of research and criticism in education and the social sciences*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Pine, R. C. (2013). *Science and the human prospect*. Retrieved from <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~pine/book1qts/chapter8qts.html>
- Pugach, M. C. (2001). The stories we choose to tell: Fulfilling the promise of qualitative research for special education. *Exceptional Children*, 67(4), 439-453.
- Quigney, T. A. (2009). The status of special education teachers at the secondary level: Effects of the “highly qualified teacher” standard. *American Secondary Education*, 37(2), 49-61.
- Reeves, D. (2007). Leading to change: Closing the implementation gap. *Educational Leadership*, 64(6), 85-86.

- Sailor, W. S. (1991). Special education in the restructured school. *Remedial and Special Education, 12*(6), 8-22.
- Sailor, W. S. (2009). Access to the general curriculum: Systems change or tinker some more? *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 33*(4), 249-257.
- Salisbury, C. L., & McGregor, G. (2002). The administrative climate and context of inclusive elementary schools. *Council for Exceptional Children, 68*(2), 259-274.
- Sapon-Shevin, M. (2007). *Widening the circle: The power of inclusive classrooms*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Schram, T. H. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Sheehy, G. (1976). *Passages: Predictable crises of adult life*. New York, NY: Dutton.
- Shinagel, M. (n.d.). The paradox of leadership. Retrieved from <http://www.dce.harvard.edu/professional/blog/paradox-leadership>
- Solomon, A. (2012). *Far from the tree: Parents, children and the search for identity*. New York, NY: Scribner.
- Sowell, T. (1995). *The vision of the anointed: Self-congratulation as a basis for social policy*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Spencer, N. (2000, March). On the significance of distinguishing ontology and epistemology by Neville Spencer. Retrieved from <http://www.ethicalpolitics.org/seminars/neville.htm>
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2011). Post qualitative research: The critique and the coming after. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 611-625). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Steger, M. B. (2009). *Globalization: A very short introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Stewart, I. (1996). *From here to infinity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Turnbull, H. R., & Turnbull, A. P. (1998). *Free appropriate public education; The law and children with disabilities* (5th ed.). Denver, CO: Love Publishing Company.
- Turnbull, H. R., Turnbull, A. P., Stowe, M., & Huerta, N. (2007). *Free appropriate public education: The law and children with disabilities* (7th ed.). Denver, CO: Love Publishing Company.
- US Dept of Education. (2005, January 19). Archived: Introduction: No Child Left Behind. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/index.html>
- Ward, T. (2009). Voice, vision, and the journey ahead: Redefining access to the general curriculum and outcomes for learners with significant support needs. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 33(4), 241-248.
- Wells, A. S., Home, J. J., Revilla, A. T., & Atanda, A. K. (2004, October 14). TC Media Center from the Office of External Affairs. Retrieved from <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/news.htm?articleId=4774>
- Wheatley, M. J. (2006). *Leadership and the new science: Discovering order in a chaotic world* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Wiesel, E. (1992, April 19). When passion is dangerous. *Parade Magazine*, p. 21.
- Wiesel, E., Mauriac, F., & Rodway, S. (1969). *Night*. New York, NY: Avon Books.
- Winzer, M. A., & Mazurek, K. (2000). *Special education in the 21st century: Issues of inclusion and reform*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Zigmund, N., Kloo, A. M., & Volonino, V. (2009). What, where, and how? Special education and the climate of full inclusion. *Exceptionality: A Special Education Journal*, 17(4), 189-204.

Zohar, D., & Marshall, I. N. (1994). *The quantum society: Mind, physics and a new social vision*. New York, NY: Morrow.

## **Appendix A: Lay Summary**

### **Introduction**

I am Jodi Grubb, a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Appalachian State University. I am conducting a qualitative research study in which I will describe, analyze, and interpret the process of inclusion from multiple perspectives in order to understand its effects. Traditionally schools are quite compartmentalized. Teachers, as well as students, are isolated by classrooms, subjects, abilities, and specialty areas. Recent federal and state guidelines challenge this culture of segregation. New standards based education and accountability provisions written into current legislation push toward more collaborative, inclusive settings by mandating that the general education classroom is the academic home base for many students with disabilities. Some schools seem to merge general and special education more successfully than others. In addition to examining effects of inclusion on both special and regular education, I hope to discover emerging patterns in successful settings. Such insight may provide leadership strategies for proactively supporting teachers and students as they attempt to meet the guidelines of becoming more integrated and less compartmentalized.

### **Procedures and Confidentiality**

Because inclusion—the practice of including all learners in the regular public school classroom—has in some way affected you or your child, I am asking for your participation. As part of your participation in this study you are being asked for an interview. Since this study is meant to understand this situation from your perspective, there are no right or wrong responses. To be correct you only have to honestly express your personal opinions, ideas, and feelings. Interview participants include administrators, general and special education

teachers, parents of both general and special education students, and college age students who had extensive experiences in inclusive situations. This will ensure that I am able to elicit responses from participants who, more than likely, perceive the process of inclusion and what is happening in the classroom quite differently. I intend to conduct individual interviews for a minimum of one to two hours. As themes and patterns emerge throughout my research project, it may be necessary to follow up with another interview or phone conversation. With permission, each interview will be conducted using a digital voice recorder, and transcripts will be made following each visit. I am the only person who will have access to these interviews; transcriptions will be available to my five-member dissertation committee. In order to assure anonymity, pseudonyms will be assigned prior to publication of material.

### **Benefits and Risks**

My vision for this study is to gain insight into the “whole” by searching for emerging patterns and similarities in the stories of seemingly dissonant voices. Risks are no more than those encountered in daily life.

### **How the Results Will Be Used**

Besides being submitted to fulfill requirements for the Reich College of Education Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University, the information may be used for educational purposes in professional presentations and publications. Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Jodi Grubb  
(336) 977-9712  
(336) 384-3591  
jodi.grubb@ashe.k12.nc.us

## Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

I agree to participate as an interviewee in this research project, which concerns sustainable change in inclusive settings. Interviews will last approximately one to two hours. As themes and patterns emerge throughout the research process, I may be asked for a follow-up interview. I understand that my comments will be audio recorded and transcribed. The research is to be conducted by Jodi Grubb, a doctoral student at Appalachian State University and used to fulfill requirements for the Reich College of Education Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. The interview(s) will take place between June and August 2013. I understand that risks associated with my participation are no more than those encountered in daily life. I also know that this study may provide insight in developing leadership strategies for proactively supporting inclusive situations and increasing awareness of commonality among all people.

I give Jodi Grubb ownership of the tapes and transcripts from the interview(s) she conducts with me and understand that tapes and transcripts will be kept in her possession. I understand that information or quotations from tapes and/or transcripts may be used for educational purposes in professional presentations and publications, in addition to fulfillment of course requirements. In order to assure anonymity, pseudonyms will be assigned prior to any publication of material. I understand I will receive no compensation for the interview.

I understand that the interview is voluntary and I can end it at any time without consequence. I also understand that if I have questions about this research project, I can call Jodi Grubb at (336) 977-9712 or contact Appalachian State University's Office of Research Protections at (828) 262-7981 or [irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu). I may also contact Dr. Susan Pogoloff, dissertation committee chairperson, at [pogoloffsm@appstate.edu](mailto:pogoloffsm@appstate.edu).

---

Name of Interviewer (printed)

---

Name of Interviewee (printed)

---

Signature of Interviewer

---

Signature of Interviewee

---

Date(s) of Interview (s)

## Appendix C: Interview Questions

### Administrators

1. What does inclusion mean to you? Describe an example of inclusion in your setting or a setting you have overseen.
2. In your setting, do you observe students – with and without disabilities - actively participating and engaged in inclusive settings?
3. What is your perception of the role of EC teachers in an inclusive setting?
4. What is your perception of the role of general education teachers in an inclusive setting?
5. Were you provided training in special education policy and its implementation in educational leadership programs?
6. Have you had experience merging general and special education settings? If so, can you describe this experience?
7. How do you help and/or support teachers dealing with change in their classrooms?
8. In your opinion, how can teachers be motivated to try something new in their classrooms?
9. What is the most difficult issue you have faced regarding inclusion? What do you think contributed to this issue being so difficult?
10. What is your best experience involving inclusion? Do you have a story you can share? What do you think contributed to this being a positive experience?
11. Have you faced challenges in adjusting to the policy shift regarding highly qualified teachers?
12. Have your teachers received training concerning this shift in policy?

13. Have teachers had input in changes caused by the policy shift?
14. How can leadership be distributed and/or collective? Can you give examples from your setting?
15. How can people help preservice teachers prepare for inclusive settings? / How do you think a person learns to “do” inclusion?
16. Do you perceive any benefits of inclusion for special education students and teachers?
17. Do you perceive any benefits of inclusion for general education students and teachers?
18. How do you help build relationships among disconnected teachers (teachers with different specialty areas, subject matters, grade levels...)?
19. How do you deal with “naysayers” – people who question inclusive practices?
20. What is the “big picture”/ vision for your school regarding inclusion? How is it communicated to staff?
21. Do you have a story/experience about someone with a changed attitude or perception of “difference” after experience in an inclusive setting?

### **Parents**

1. What does inclusion mean to you?
2. How has your son/daughter been involved in inclusive settings?
3. What is the hardest issue you have faced regarding inclusion? Do you have a story you can share? What do you think contributed to this issue being so difficult?
4. What is your best experience involving inclusion? Do you have a story you can share? What do you think contributed to this being a positive experience?

5. How do you define successful inclusion?
6. What is it like starting over each year in a new classroom?
7. How do you think a teacher learns to “do” inclusion?
8. What would you most want to say to a teacher or administrator questioning inclusive practices?
9. Do you have a story/experience about someone with a changed attitude or belief of “difference” after experience in an inclusive setting?
10. Can you put into words what happens when all students are actively participating in a setting?
11. What do you perceive as benefits of inclusion for special education students and teachers?
12. What do you perceive as benefits of inclusion for general education students and teachers?
13. What input have you had on classroom settings for your child? What input has your child had?

### **Teachers**

1. What does inclusion mean to you? Describe inclusion in your school and/or classroom. Who is in the room? What happens? Are lessons co-taught? Do you have common planning time with another teacher in this setting? How would you make this situation ideal?
2. What is the role of EC teachers in an inclusive setting?
3. What is the role of general education teachers in an inclusive setting?

4. Do students – with and without disabilities - actively participate and become engaged in inclusive settings in your school/classroom?
5. Are lessons differentiated to meet the needs of individual learners? Can you describe an example of differentiation in your classroom?
6. What is the hardest issue you have faced regarding inclusion? What do you think contributed to this issue being so difficult? What other tensions do you feel?
7. What is your best experience involving inclusion? Do you have a story you can share? What do you think contributed to this being a positive experience?
8. How has the policy shift regarding highly qualified teachers effected your classroom? What input have you had on changes within your setting? What support has been provided? What support do you still need?
9. Have you had training regarding this shift in policy? If so, what type of training was provided?
10. How can people help preservice teachers prepare for inclusive settings? How do you think a person learns to “do” inclusion?
11. Do you have a story/experience about someone with a changed attitude or belief of “difference” after participating in an inclusive setting?
12. How much interaction do you have with teachers outside your classroom?
13. What do you perceive as benefits of inclusion for special education students and teachers?
14. What do you perceive as benefits of inclusion for general education students and teachers?

## College Students

1. What does inclusion mean to you?
2. How have you been involved in inclusive settings/situations?
3. Has having a relationship with a peer with a disability affected you personally?  
How?
4. Outside of the school setting, did you participate in activities with a peer with a disability? If yes, can you describe the activity?
5. Which classes did you have in common with students with significant support needs?  
If the answer is only elective courses (p.e., art, music...): Do you believe students with significant support needs would add to or take away from academic courses?
6. Do you believe students with significant support needs can actively participate in middle school and high school academic courses?
7. What is the hardest issue you have faced regarding inclusion? Do you have a story you can share? What do you think contributed to this issue being so difficult?
8. What is your best experience involving inclusion? Do you have a story you can share? What do you think contributed to this being a positive experience?
9. What would you most want to say to a teacher or administrator questioning inclusive practices?
10. Do you think students with more significant support needs should be included in academic courses? Why or why not?
11. Do you have a story/experience about someone with a changed attitude or perception of “difference” after experience in an inclusive situation?

12. What do you perceive as benefits of inclusion for special education students and teachers?
13. What do you perceive as benefits of inclusion for general education students and teachers?

## Vita

Jodi Grubb is a special education teacher at Ashe County Middle School in Warrentonville, North Carolina. She has taught for 23 years in a variety of settings and has worked with students from birth through age 21. She taught fifth grade and kindergarten before finding her home in special education. She has worked as an infant development specialist; a teacher at the primary level in a public separate school setting for students with moderate to severe disabilities; an inclusion teacher at the middle school level; and in self-contained classrooms for students with significant disabilities, ranging in age from 12-21 in a regular public school setting.

Dr. Grubb actively advocates for students with disabilities in her community. She created Project “P.L.A.Y.” (Parks and Leisure for all Youth) in 2004, organizing a committee to plan and fund an inclusive playground for the children of Ashe County. In 2011, she also began “Imagine,” an annual inclusive musical program in which students from all over the county celebrate diversity through the performing arts.

Dr. Grubb was selected as a North Carolina Teaching Fellow at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where she earned her B.A. in Early Childhood Education. She received a Master’s degree in Cross-Categorical Special Education from Appalachian State University. Dr. Grubb completed the Educational Leadership doctoral program at Appalachian State University in August 2016.