

# High School Students with Intellectual Disabilities in the School and Workplace: Multiple Perspectives on Inclusion

Sheila M. Bennett

*Brock University*

Tiffany L. Gallagher

*Brock University*

## Abstract

Data collected from seven urban high schools in Ontario capture multiple voices in relation to inclusive practices in secondary schools and transitions into the workplace. Twenty-one students with intellectual disabilities (ID), 91 teachers, 67 educational assistants, 7 job coaches, 22 parents, 43 peers and 19 community employers completed surveys examining their beliefs about inclusion of students with ID in school/workplace, confidence/comfort in teaching/work, the impact of inclusion on individuals without disabilities, and the socialization and friendships of students with ID. Results indicate that participants hold similar values related to inclusion and the rights of students to appropriate educational program delivery. Overall, job coaches and parents embrace the most positive attitudes and beliefs about inclusion with parents particularly affirmative about inclusion experiences in both the classroom and workplace. Employers believe that students with intellectual disabilities are supported and interacting with others in the workplace. Teachers most often agree that students without disabilities experience positive effects as a function of inclusion. Cases in which there are discrepancies are also discussed.

## Précis/Résumé

Les données recueillies à partir de sept écoles secondaires urbaines en Ontario capter des voix multiples par rapport aux pratiques inclusives dans les écoles secondaires et les transitions dans le lieu de travail. Vingt-et-un élèves ayant une déficience intellectuelle (DI), 91 professeurs, 67 assistants en éducation, 7, 22 moniteurs de formation des parents, 43 et 19 pairs de la communauté employeurs

ont rempli des questionnaires examinant leurs croyances au sujet de l'inclusion des élèves ayant des ID à l'école / lieu de travail, la confiance / confort dans l'enseignement / travail, l'impact de l'inclusion des personnes non handicapées, et de la socialisation et de l'amitié des élèves ayant des ID. Les résultats indiquent que les participants ont des valeurs semblables liées à l'inclusion et les droits des élèves à la prestation du programme éducatif approprié. Dans l'ensemble, les entraîneurs et les parents d'emplois adopter les attitudes les plus positives et les croyances concernant l'inclusion des parents particulièrement positive sur les expériences d'inclusion à la fois dans la salle de classe et en milieu de travail. Les employeurs estiment que les élèves ayant une déficience intellectuelle sont pris en charge et d'interagir avec d'autres personnes en milieu de travail. Les enseignants le plus souvent d'accord que les élèves non handicapés éprouvent des effets positifs en fonction de l'inclusion. Les cas dans lesquels il ya des divergences sont également discutés.

## **Introduction**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP) adopted in December, 2006 and ratified by Canada on March 11, 2010, states that individuals with disabilities are entitled to support that facilitates full inclusion within educational settings, as well as, the larger community including work, leisure and independent living (United Nations, 2006). The CRDP makes explicit determination of the rights of individuals to personal autonomy, full participation in community, access to education and employment opportunities. Despite these statements and intentions, the interpretation and actualization of these rights within society is sometimes ambiguous. To assist in this pursuit, the Law Commission of Ontario (LCO) has released a draft framework that examines the overall legal framework within which laws, policies and programs for individuals with disabilities are set. The Law Commission notes that often, the rights as defined within a legal context can be, at a theoretical level well intentioned, but that the complexity of the system can inhibit the intent of the benefit and thus be counterproductive. Thus, the intent of the proposed LCO framework is to develop a holistic, principles-based approach that allows for the examination of existing laws and assists in the development of new ones (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012).

Within complex educational settings, differing orientations toward students with disabilities has led to a myriad of interpretations of what it means to provide inclusive opportunities for students with special needs, in particular those with intellectual disabilities. Regardless of differences in interpretation and implementation, schools share a common mandate, which is to prepare students to become participating adults within society. In order to meet this goal, school systems, particularly at the high school level, have been struggling with how to best facilitate the transition from student to engaged

and productive member of the adult community (Neubert & Moon, 2006; Rogers & Lavine, 2008).

An example of an implementation challenge comes from the province of Ontario where there are often disparities in service delivery for students with intellectual disabilities from one school board to another. Inclusive practices are often school board specific, with the philosophical and practical orientation of the community and professionals being an influential implementation factor. Within this current study we sought to collect and examine the perspectives of several informants in one such school board in relation to their inclusive and transition practices from secondary school settings into the workplace. Using an approach characterised by Stone and Priestly (1996) that honours emancipatory research, we sought to capture, not only the voices of education professionals and other adults connected to young adults with intellectual disabilities but also the voices of the students themselves in terms of how they perceived their educational experiences.

### **Attitudes and Beliefs about Inclusion**

Educators and employers have shown both positive attitudes as well as discussed challenges with regard to the inclusion of student with disabilities into classrooms and workplaces (Bunch & Valeo, 2004; Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Morgan & Alexander, 2005). In schools, effective leadership by the principal (Praisner, 2003), beliefs that all students can learn, and ownership of student learning by the teacher have all been shown as important factors contributing to successful inclusive practices (Silverman, 2007). Overall, educators continue to hold positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students in the regular class (Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans & Soulsby, 2007). Despite these

positive beliefs, issues persist in relation to lack of professional learning and resources, as well as classroom management concerns (Silverman, 2007; Woloshyn, Bennett, & Berrill, 2003). Within the workplace there is also evidence to suggest that employers, once they have had the opportunity to experience working with individuals with disabilities, see positive relationships developing as well as an increased willingness to employ others who have a disability (Fillary & Pernice, 2006).

### **The Inclusion of Students with Intellectual Disabilities in the Classroom and Workplace**

In a large number of school systems across Canada, the majority of students with intellectual disabilities are routinely included within the regular classroom. Within the province of Ontario approximately 50% of students with an intellectual disability (ID) spend all or part of their day in segregated settings (Bennett, Dworet, & Weber 2008). As mentioned earlier, this practice is often school board specific and dependent on the philosophical orientation and embedded practices within that school board. Capturing a cohesive overview of the inclusive experiences of students within school settings is difficult given factors such as differing nomenclature and definitions of what constitutes an inclusive setting. In general, however, evidence clearly suggests that students in inclusive settings experience academic and social successes beyond those that would be seen in segregated environments (Bunch & Valeo, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2001).

Unfortunately, there is a lack of effective school to community (including work and post-secondary community) transition planning for young adults with intellectual disabilities, along with limited employment opportunities. This lack of support often results in an inability for individuals with disabilities to obtain meaningful, well-paying

and sustainable employment (Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Winn & Hay, 2009). This population of graduates with disabilities falls well below the Canadian national employment rate as only 20% of student graduates find paid employment and the remainder are in unpaid employment (Galambos & Leo, 2010). This trend is similar in the United States (Certo, Luecking, Murphy, Brown, Courey, & Belanger, 2008) and Australia (Winn & Hay, 2009) where high levels of unemployment combined with limited access to inclusive community environments for adults with intellectual disabilities are all too frequent realities. Clearly, there remains much work to be done to address the disparity between employment rates for people with intellectual disabilities and the general population.

There have been examples of service delivery that have offered a glimmer of optimism for young adults with intellectual disabilities transitioning from school into the workplace. Focused initiatives that provide supportive employment opportunities during secondary school have demonstrated successful outcomes for students with regard to sustainable employment (Rogers, Lavin, Tran, Gantenbein & Sharpe, 2008; Shandra & Hogan, 2008). Employers report the development of positive relationships as a result of work placements as well as a willingness to hire others with disabilities as a result of their experiences (Fillary & Pernice, 2006). In this paper, we intend to offer a glimpse at one such initiative that holds social inclusion as a goal while it attempts to bridge the transition from high school to the workplace for students with intellectual disabilities.

### **The Impact of Inclusion on Individuals without Intellectual Disabilities**

The implications and effects of inclusion reach beyond students with disabilities to students without disabilities. Evidence suggests that students without disabilities who are in inclusive environments do not suffer academically as a result of being in inclusive classroom settings and there is also evidence that teaching practices that include differentiated instruction that addresses the needs of multilevel classrooms are more effective (Lawrence-Brown, 2004). Research also indicates that students without disabilities who are in inclusive settings demonstrate higher scores in measures of advocacy and display more tolerant attitudes towards diversity (Braham & Kelly 2004; Wiener & Tardiff, 2004). In employment settings, while challenges exist, positive results of inclusive hiring have been reported (Fillary & Prentice, 2006).

### **Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities and Social Inclusion**

Presenting multiple angles on inclusive practice and community transition is important to cast light on the multi-faceted nature of what it means for a young adult to belong both in school and beyond. While much of the literature with regard to transitions for students with intellectual disabilities focuses on employment (Rogers, Lavin, Tran, Gantenbein, & Sharpe, 2008; Shandra & Hogan, 2008), similar to Abbot and McConkey (2004) and Winn and Hay (2009) we define community as not only sustainable employment but also social involvement in community.

All of us have multiple identities, ties, and communities. Persons with disabilities are members of the broader community, with which they have a wide range of ties, as

well as reciprocal rights and obligations. The well-being of persons with disabilities, as citizens, as parents and family members, as workers and volunteers, as taxpayers and recipients of services, is closely connected to the well-being of the broader society. The reverse is, of course, true as well.

It is important to note that persons with disabilities, and the law as it affects them, cannot be considered as separate from this larger community context. Ontario Regulation 299/10 (Service Ontario, 2008) states that there are supports and services to promote the social inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities. This Act clearly articulates that service agencies must develop and maintain mission statements and practices that support the individual choices of persons with intellectual disabilities and provide opportunities in relation to recreation, social, cultural and religious activities.

Despite this legislation, within a social context, young adults with intellectual disabilities perceive barriers to social inclusion in their communities (Abbott & McConkey, 2006). National quantitative data from over 145,000 young adults with disabilities have demonstrated how socially desirable health-related variables are impacted by the inclusiveness of educational arrangements. The Statistics Canada Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (2006) surveyed the social and economic participation of persons with disabilities and the limitations and barriers they face. Regardless of the type or severity of disability, those individuals who have had highly inclusive educational experiences vs. those who have had low inclusive educational experiences are more likely to have graduated from high school, participated in community activities, have been employed and have a history of paid work, and have incomes above the poverty line (Crawford, 2010). The connection between participation in the community, social inclusion, and productive employment is clear.



### **Project Background**

Researchers were approached by school board personnel to partner in a collaboratively developed and administered project to examine transition into the workplace in relation to their inclusion model. Data were collected from all seven of the high schools within this school board. The research team was given full access to the students, staff, parents and community employers through the cooperation of the Coordinator of Student Transition. Data collection began in early Spring and concluded prior to the end of the school year.

### **Methodology**

This survey-design research explored how young adults with intellectual disabilities transition into the workplace by using an approach that centered on stakeholder perspectives. Of particular interest was the utilization of the voices of the students with intellectual disabilities as a primary data source, in relation to the examination of factors that result in the bridge for these young adults into independent work and community inclusion. The areas of focus were:

- placements, programming and instruction;
- attitudes and beliefs about inclusion;
- the impact of inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in the classroom and workplace;
- the impact of inclusion on students *without* disabilities;
- support, socialization and friendships of students with intellectual disabilities;
- confidence/comfort in teaching/work.

## Participants

Participants within this mid-sized, urban Ontario school board included high school students with intellectual disabilities (n=21), peers without disabilities (n=43), high school teachers (n=91), high school educational assistants (n=67), job coaches (n=7), parents and guardians of students (n=22), and community employers (n=20).

The students with intellectual disabilities (ages 16-21) were invited to participate along with their parents. These students ranged in terms of nature of intellectual disability (mild to profound) and some were non-verbal and not ambulatory. Some of the students with intellectual disabilities were completing their first work term, others had several work placement experiences. The peers (29 female; 14 male) without disabilities (ages 16-18) were randomly selected from among those classmates that attended classes with the students with intellectual disabilities. The peer group consisted of: 20 (grade 9); 7 (grade 10); 6 (grade 11); and 10 (grade 12). The majority of this peer group (i.e., n=33) had been in inclusive classrooms in both elementary and high school.

The teachers, educational assistants and job coaches were employed by the school board and teach in these high schools. These educators were directly working with the students with intellectual disabilities and were responsible for liaising with community employers and supporting the students in the workplace (half a day, five times per week). The majority of the teachers (55 female; 36 male) had either 11-20 years of teaching experience (n=27), 21-25 years of teaching experience (n=21) or more than 25 years of teaching experience (n=19). By contrast, the majority of the educational assistants (52 female; 15 male) had either 6-10 years of experience (n=23) or 11-20 years of experience (n=33). Job coaches (1 female; 6 male) gauged the amount of support that they provided to their students. Typically, at the beginning of a work term, intense support was required

and then this was gradually withdrawn as the students gained familiarity and competency on the job. Most of the job coaches had 6-10 years of experience (n=4). The majority of the parents who responded to the survey were mothers (n=18; n=4 fathers). The community employers (18 female; 2 male; majority between the ages of 20-40 years) were the supervisors of the students with intellectual disabilities that hosted their student work placements in the community. Most of the employers (n=13) had 3-10 years of experience in the workplace and prior experience hosting students (n=6, less than 3 years; n=6, 3-5 years; n=4, 6-10 years; n=4, 11-20+ years). These workplaces ranged from restaurants, to retail stores, to office settings.

### **Data Collection**

For this portion of the study, survey methods will be reported. There was a 32-question, 3-point Likert scale (of agreement-neutrality-disagreement) survey that was given to students with intellectual disabilities that asked them about school, their classmates and friends, their family, and their work. This survey was researcher designed and included questions such as, “I enjoy being at school,” “My classmates are nice to me,” “I like to spend time with my family,” “I am good at my job.”

The surveys for the teacher, educational assistant and job coach participants were identical, included 32-questions on a 4-point Likert scale (of agreement-neutrality-disagreement-not applicable) and queried them about school climate, educators, students with disabilities and their colleagues. This survey was adapted from two instruments: Sprankle (2009) and Riegert (2006). The survey used by Sprankle (2009) was based on a study of over 300 teachers and the survey used by Riegert (2006) was used with over 120 teachers. Items for the present study asked participants questions such as, “Every student

regardless of disability, should be instructed in general education classes,” “I feel that I can make a difference in the life of a student who has a disability,” “General education students benefit socially from their interactions with students with disabilities.”

The parent participants responded to a 41-question, 5-point Likert scale (of strong agreement-agreement-neutrality-disagreement-strong disagree survey that asked them about their child’s disability, education, school climate and social interactions. This survey was adapted from a study done by Elkins, van Kraayenoord & Jobling (2003) who surveyed over 350 parents of children with disabilities. The survey asked parents whether, “Inclusion offers mixed group interaction which will foster understanding and acceptance of differences,” “Inclusion necessitates extensive teacher retraining,” “My child has opportunities to participate in unstructured social gatherings outside of school with diverse friends.”

The peers of the students with intellectual disabilities responded to 27 questions on a 4-point Likert scale (of agreement-neutrality-disagreement-not applicable) related to interactions and experiences with inclusion as well as friendships with students who are disabled. This survey was adapted from Aragon (2007) and it included questions such as, “As the school year went on, I thought less about what a particular student could or could not do,” “I have social relationships with students with disabilities outside of school time,” “I would tell someone in another school that inclusion is a good experience.” The reported reliability of this survey (Cronbach coefficient alpha) was 0.73.

Finally, the community employers’ 20-question, 4-point Likert scale (of agreement-neutrality-disagreement-not applicable) survey was comprised of questions related to interactions and experiences with inclusion. Examples of questions from this survey which was adapted from Gething (1991) are, “After frequent contact I find I just

notice the person and not the intellectual disability,” “I don’t judge a student with an intellectual disability,” “I am aware of the problems that people with intellectual disabilities face.” Factor analyses (Forlin, Fogarty, & Carroll, 1999) confirm the validity of this scale with various participant samples.

Surveys were administered by two research assistants. Some of the students with intellectual disabilities required assistance interpreting the questions and/or responding on the hard copy instruments. The research assistants and, in some cases, the students’ educational assistants, provided necessary support for this process. All other participants completed the surveys independently. Their anonymous surveys were returned in a confidential manner.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began with conversion to collapse all participants’ survey responses into a common 3-point Likert scale. The surveys for the teachers, educational assistants, job coaches, peers and community employers were on a 4-point Likert scale (of agreement-neutrality-disagreement-not applicable). Response category, “not applicable” was not selected by participants, so it was excluded thus leaving a 3-point Likert scale. The parent survey was on a 5-point Likert scale (of strong agreement-agreement-neutrality-disagreement-strong disagree) that was collapsed to agreement-neutrality-disagreement. The scale on survey for the students with intellectual disabilities was a 3-point Likert scale (of agreement-neutrality-disagreement) so these data did not need to be converted. Participants who did not respond to particular question items were excluded.

Each of the survey items were categorized into a subscale that reflected the topic of question. The reliability of the subscale re-categorization was assessed using Cohen’s

Kappa ( $p < .05$ ). Kappa values for the six subscales were all substantial and ranged from 0.62 to 0.79. Not all participant groups were asked question items in all subscales:

1. Placements, Programming, Instruction
2. Attitudes and Beliefs about Inclusion
3. Inclusion of Students with ID in the Classroom and Workplace
4. Impact of Inclusion on Students without Intellectual Disabilities
5. Support, Socialization, and Friendships
6. Confidence in Teaching/ Comfort in Workplace

For each participant group, a subscale mean was calculated and these interval data were compared between groups using a One-way Analysis of Variance in SPSS 20.0 (IBM, 2012). Tukey post-hoc analyses were calculated when a significant effect was present.

## **Results**

Results are presented as a series of comparisons among the groups of participants for each of the six survey question subscales. There was one subscale (Placements, Programming, Instruction) which did not uncover statistically significant differences among participant groups. For the other five subscales, statistically significant differences among participant groups are elaborated and post-hoc results provide specific data comparing each participant category.

### **Placements, Programming, Instruction Subscale**

Question items in this subscale asked participants if they were aware of their school's philosophy about inclusion and whether students with disabilities feel welcome. Other question items also addressed perceptions about whether the school staff are

working together for inclusion and if teachers are effectively using individual education plans to deliver instruction in the regular classroom.

There were no statistically significant differences between the four participant groups (Teachers, EAs, Job Coaches, Parents) on beliefs about inclusive placements, individualized programming and the collaborative efforts of educators and family members as determined by One-Way ANOVA [ $F(3, 146)=2.54, p=.06$ ]. This result indicates similar values related to inclusion and confidence among the participants with respect to educational program delivery.

### **Attitudes and Beliefs about Inclusion Subscale**

Question items for this subscale queried whether participants believed that it was a right for every student to be instructed in the regular classroom and if they believed that students with disabilities contributed positively to the classroom. There were questions that asked the participants if they agreed with changing class placements if a classroom teacher doesn't want to teach a student on an IEP.

There was a statistically significant difference ( $p<.001$ ) between the six groups (Teachers, EAs, Job Coaches, Employers, Parents, Peers) on attitudes and beliefs about inclusion as determined by One-Way ANOVA [ $F(5, 214)=17.00$ ]. A Tukey post-hoc test ( $p <.01$ ) revealed that Employers ( $M=1.89, SD=.29$ ) are less likely to agree with statements that indicate positive attitudes and beliefs about students with intellectual disabilities than Teachers ( $M=2.23, SD=.35$ ), EAs ( $M=2.28, SD=.41$ ), Job Coaches ( $M=2.88, SD=.18$ ), Parents ( $M=2.80, SD=.22$ ) and Peers ( $M=2.55, SD=.56$ ). Both Teachers and EAs are less positive ( $p= <.01$ ) in their attitudes and beliefs compared to

Parents and Peers. Overall, Job Coaches and Parents have the most positive attitudes and beliefs about the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities.

### **Inclusion of Students with ID in the Classroom and Workplace Subscale**

This subscale also included question items that asked participants to agree or disagree with statements of whether students with intellectual disabilities assimilate and benefit from inclusion in either/or the classroom/workplace. This subscale also included questions that the participants responded to indicating their beliefs about whether students with disabilities learn positive behaviours from their peers without disabilities, and if all students realized social benefits from inclusion. Similarly, there were questions in this subscale about whether a student with multiple disabilities can achieve in a regular classroom.

There was a statistically significant difference ( $p < .001$ ) between the five groups (Teachers, EAs, Job Coaches, Parents, Peers) on this subscale as determined by One-Way ANOVA [ $F(5, 225)=11.03$ ]. A Tukey post-hoc test ( $p < .01$ ) revealed that Employers ( $M=1.81, SD=.60$ ) are less likely to agree with statements that indicate that students with intellectual disabilities are assimilating into the workplace than Teachers ( $M=2.57, SD=.37$ ), EAs ( $M=2.68, SD=.04$ ), Job Coaches ( $M=2.75, SD=.29$ ), Parents ( $M=2.88, SD=.19$ ) or Peers ( $M=2.41, SD=.77$ ). The only other significant difference was between Parents and Peers - the former were more likely to agree with statements about the positive effect of inclusion.

### **Impact of Inclusion on Students without Intellectual Disabilities Subscale**



This subscale queried participants about their perceptions of the effect (academic, social, emotional, attentional) that inclusion has on students without disabilities. The fourth subscale included specific questions that addressed the beliefs of the participants with respect to whether students without disabilities benefit from inclusion and whether they were positive role models. Participants were also asked whether inclusion has made students without disabilities more understanding and accepting of those that have disabilities. This subscale also included questions about participants' perceptions of whether students without disabilities lose instruction time as a result of the teacher spending more time with students with disabilities.

There was a statistically significant difference ( $p < .001$ ) between the four groups (Teachers, EAs, Parents, Peers) on this fourth subscale as determined by One-Way ANOVA [ $F(3, 198) = 58.943, p = .00$ ]. Tukey post-hoc tests ( $p < .01$ ) found that Teachers ( $M = 1.96, SD = .212$ ) as compared to Parents ( $M = 2.59, SD = .30$ ) and Peers ( $M = 2.78, SD = .68$ ) more often agreed with statements that students without disabilities experienced positive effects as a function of inclusion. There was not a significant difference between Teachers and EAs ( $M = 1.92, SD = .28$ ), however, EAs were significantly more positive than Parents and Peers. Job Coaches were excluded from the analysis due to lack of responses on this subscale.

### **Support, Socialization, and Friendships Subscale**

Questions in this subscale asked participants about the prevalence of friendships and social relationships between students with and without disabilities. There were also questions in this subscale that asked participants questions about the likelihood that students with intellectual disabilities were supported and engaged in positive social

interactions and genuine friendships with others. Finally, there were also questions about whether students feel isolated from their peers and whether they have opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities at school.

There was a statistically significant difference ( $p < .001$ ) between the six groups (Teachers, EAs, Job Coaches, Employers, Parents, Peers, Students with ID) on perceptions about Support, Socialization, and Friendships as determined by One-Way ANOVA [ $F(5, 228) = 30.850$ ]. A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that there was a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) that Employers ( $M = 2.95, SD = .22$ ) who are most likely to agree that students with intellectual disabilities are supported and interacting with others as compared to Teachers ( $M = 1.93, SD = .36$ ), EAs ( $M = 2.23, SD = .50$ ), Parents ( $M = 2.55, SD = .23$ ), Peers ( $M = 1.97, SD = .43$ ) and interestingly, the Students with ID ( $M = 2.57, SD = .32$ ). In addition, Students with ID were significantly more positive ( $p < .05$ ) than their Teachers, EAs, Employers, and Peers (but not their Parents). However, Parents were more positive ( $p < .05$ ) than Teachers, EAs, and Peers. Finally, EAs were more positive ( $p < .01$ ) than Teachers. Job Coaches were excluded from the analysis due to lack of responses on this subscale.

### **Confidence in Teaching/ Comfort in Workplace Subscale**

The final subscale included questions that asked participants to self-evaluate their preparedness to deliver instruction and support to students with intellectual disabilities. In the case of the parents and students themselves, they evaluated the instructional effectiveness and support of educators. Specific question items asked whether participants were willing to change their instructional methods to reach more students and use technology in instruction and to assess the progress of students on individual

education plans. Other question items asked participants to rate their confidence in their ability to accommodate for the instructional/vocational needs of the students with intellectual disabilities. In the case of the students themselves, they evaluated the support that they receive. Finally, participants were asked whether they are aware of the challenges that their children/students with intellectual disabilities face, whether they notice the student and not his/her disability and overall, if they believe that they make a difference in the life of a student with a disability.

The seven participant groups (Teachers, EAs, Job Coaches, Employers, Parents, Peers, Students with ID) were compared on the subscale of Confidence in Teaching/Comfort in the Workplace. There was a statistically significant difference ( $p < .001$ ) as determined by One-Way ANOVA [ $F(6, 234) = 4.316$ ]. A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that there was a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in that Parents are the most confident ( $M = 2.90, SD = .73$ ) compared to Employers ( $M = 2.45, SD = .31$ ) and Peers ( $M = 2.43, SD = .68$ ). As well, Teachers ( $M = 2.72, SD = .27$ ) are more confident ( $p < .05$ ) as compared to Peers.

### **Summary of the Subscale Results**

The lack of significant differences among the participants with respect to their beliefs about inclusive educational placements is not surprising given the inclusive practices that have been a reality in this school board for over three decades. Thus, participants hold similar values related to inclusion and the rights of students to appropriate educational program delivery. Overall, Job Coaches and Parents held the most positive attitudes and beliefs about the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities. Parents, in particular, were more likely to agree with statements about the

positive effects of inclusion for their children with ID in *both* the classroom and workplace. Parents also expressed confidence in their students' educational and work placement experiences. Complementing this was the perspective of the employers who were most likely to agree that students with intellectual disabilities are supported and interacting with others in the workplace. Finally, looking at the classroom as a whole, teachers most often agreed that students *without* disabilities experienced positive effects as a function of inclusion.

### Discussion

Results from this study share many parallels with the research literature. Certainly the notion that the inclusion of students in regular classes is a worthwhile endeavour resonates clearly throughout today's educational sphere (Bunch & Valeo, 2004; McPhail & Freeman, 2005). For these students with ID the consensus of this type of belief from multiple stakeholders is reassuring. An inclusive belief system that is supported by educators needs to be nurtured by strong leadership (Praisner, 2003; Theoharis, 2007) as well as a clear orientation and philosophical base (Dowse, 2009). It is important for educators to believe that they can make a difference in the life of a child (Silverman, 2007) and a common framework for the delivery of inclusive practice is certainly an asset. When a shared orientation and practice are combined within a school system, staff and parents have a consistent message that inclusion is important and can be successful. Participants in this study highlighted again the need for creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere and the importance of collaborative work. The utilization of teams to enhance service delivery in schools is not a new notion (Friend & Cook, 1992) but it is an important one to remember in an attempt to create inclusive settings in both

schools and workplaces. The sharing of information and the building of trust that results in positive relationships can do much to enhance the involvement of individuals with ID into all aspects of community.

As is true with many findings (Crawford, 2010), the educators in this study expressed that they were comfortable and positive about including students in terms of educational programming. They felt that through the use of solid teaching, which included the use of technology, they could provide effective and engaging learning opportunities for students. They also reported that the participation of students with ID in their classes had a positive impact on the whole class. The presence of diverse learning needs in a classroom can lead to enhanced delivery of curriculum and allow, not just academic gains for the entire class, but social gains as well in terms of a more tolerant and accepting environment (Freeman, 2000; Wiener & Tardif, 2004). Participants also felt that students with ID benefitted from interaction with diverse peers and that in a diverse class there were many opportunities for positive role modelling.

Overall, while there are many positive findings, there remain several concerns. Employers were less likely to agree with statements that indicate positive attitudes and beliefs about individuals with intellectual disabilities and that these students are easily assimilating into the workplace. This finding raises a caution for educators such as Job Coaches to ensure that placements are appropriate for their students and support procedures are in place. Programs that assist the transition of students from school settings to the workplace need to focus on the comfort level of employers and allow time for the students and employers to develop a relationship (Rogers, Lavin, Tran, Gantenbein, & Sharpe, 2008). In cases where these types of transitions are handled with care and planning, successful outcomes have resulted (Shandra & Hogan, 2008).

Another subscale to note was the final one that asked participants to gauge their confidence in supporting and accommodating students with intellectual disabilities with respect to their instructional/vocational needs. Interestingly, the parent participants were more confident than the professionals. This is in keeping with the literature in terms of the types of concerns that educators anticipate within inclusive settings. These types of concerns are often linked to lack of resources and poor collaboration (Woloshyn, Bennett, & Berrill, 2003). There is also a discrepancy between the educators' and employers' reporting of their confidence and ability to implement effective support for students with ID: while employers expressed confidence in the preparedness of students with ID to be in the workforce, educators expressed more trepidation. Ensuring that employers and educators collaborate with regard to the expectations and supports inherent in any transition plan is essential in ensuring that these types of concerns are effectively dealt with (Rogers et al., 2008; Shandra & Hogan, 2008).

In terms of social relationships, while overall a very positive attitude towards inclusion was noted, there were some discrepancies that are worthy of mention. An interesting finding was that students with ID were significantly more positive about their opportunities to socialize and form friendships than were their teachers, educational assistants, employers, and peers (but not their parents). Teachers and EAs were the least optimistic about these relationships. Why might the students with ID and their parents believe that inclusion had a positive effect on their socialization, while other participants reported less positive beliefs? What is needed to answer this question is a close examination of the perceptions of educators and peers with respect to what they believe are valuable relationships for students with ID. Additionally, the lived experiences of students with ID should continue to be a central component of research in the area of

inclusion as it is extremely important in moving forward and will provided much needed additional insight (Stone & Priestley, 1996).

There were limitations to this study that could be further investigated by other educational researchers. The context was limited to one school board that had long espoused a strong inclusive philosophy. This has likely contributed to some of the affirmative attitudes toward inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities. The participant sample could be expanded to include greater numbers, especially Job Coach and employers. In this study, the number of Job Coaches was finite – conducting this research in multiple school boards would provide more breadth to this participant sample. Finally, the re-categorized sub-scales of the survey instruments that were used require validation with large samples of participants.

### **Conclusion**

Within the field of inclusive education the issue of successful transitioning between school and community has been greatly explored (Butcher & Wilton, 2008; Fillary & Prentice, 2006). There is less research surrounding transitions to the workplace; consequently, this work sought to examine the attitudes and perceptions of students with ID as well as teachers, educational assistants, peers, job coaches, parents and employers in relation to both their inclusive experiences at school and their employment. As a result of this data collection interesting comparisons emerged with regard to the attitudes and perceptions of these multiple groups. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP) raises the awareness within society that individuals with disabilities are full members of society not partial participants. Ensuring that individuals with ID are supported within diverse communities, where there is space for

---

everyone through effective collaboration, planning and allocation of effective supports, is essential in ensuring that individuals with ID truly are part our community.



## References

- Abbott, S., & McConkey, R. (2004). The barriers to social inclusion as perceived by people with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities, 10*(3), 275-287.
- Aragon, L. (2007). *Inclusion of students with and without disabilities in two educational settings: the perceptions of the nondisabled students of this experience*. Dissertation from South Carolina State University. UMI Number: 3361377.
- Bennett, S., Dworet, D. & Weber, K. (2008). *Special education in Ontario schools (6<sup>th</sup> Ed.)*. St. David's ON: Highland Press.
- Bower, K. (n.d.). When to use Fisher's exact test. Retrieved on March 16, 2012 from [http://www.minitab.com/uploadedFiles/Shared\\_Resources/Documents/Articles/fisher\\_exact\\_test.pdf](http://www.minitab.com/uploadedFiles/Shared_Resources/Documents/Articles/fisher_exact_test.pdf)
- Brahm, N., & Kelly, N. (2004). Pupils' views on inclusion: Moderate learning difficulties and bullying in mainstream schools. *British Educational Research Journal, 30*(1), 43-64.
- Bunch, G., & Valeo, A. (2004). Student attitudes towards peers with disabilities in inclusive and special education schools. *Disability and Society, 1*(1), 61-78.
- Butcher, S. & Wilton, R. (2008). Stuck in transition? Exploring the spaces of employment training for youth with intellectual disability. *Geoforum, 39*, 1079-1092.
- Certo, N., Luecking, R., Murphy, S., Brown, L., Courey, S., & Belanger, D. (2008). Seamless transition and long-term support for individuals with severe intellectual disabilities. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 33*(3), 85-95.

- Crawford, C. (2010). *Inclusive education and the social and economic trajectories of adults with disabilities*. Conference Proceedings: Human Rights and Persons with Intellectual Disabilities Conference, Education and Employment Stream. April 21-22, 2010, Niagara Falls, ON.
- Dowse, L. (2009). 'Some people are never going to be able to do that'. Challenges for people with intellectual disability in the 21st century. *Disability & Society*, 24, (5), 571-584.
- Elkins, J., van Kraayenoord, C. & Jobling, A. (2003). Parents' attitudes to inclusion of their children with special needs. *Journal of Research in Special Education Needs*, 3(2), 122-129.
- Fillary, R. & Prentice, R. (2006). Social inclusion in workplaces where people with intellectual disabilities are employed: Implications for supported employment professionals. *International Journal of Rehabilitation Research*, 29(1), 31-36.
- Forlin, C., Fogarty, G., & Carroll, A.M. (1999). Validation of the factor structure of the Interactions with Disabled Persons Scale. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 51 (1), 50-55.
- Frederickson, N., Simmonds, E., Evans, L., & Soulsby, C. (2007). Assessing the social and affective outcomes of inclusion. *British Journal of Special Education*, 34(2), 105-115.
- Freeman, S. (2000). Academic and social attainments of children with mental retardation in general and special education. *Remedial and Special Education*, 21(1), 3-26.
- Friend, M. & Cook, L. (1992). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals*. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group.

- Galambos, L. & Leo, C. (2010). *Work experience transition program*. Conference Proceedings: Human Rights and Persons with Intellectual Disabilities Conference, Education and Employment Stream. April 21-22, 2010, Niagara Falls, ON.
- Gething, L. (1991). *Interaction with Disabled Persons Scale: Manual and kit*. Sydney: University of Sydney.
- Law Commission of Ontario. (2012). *Principles for the law as it affects persons with disabilities*. Background Paper (pp. 1-47).
- Lawrence-Brown, D. (2004). Meeting the needs of all students through differentiated instruction: Helping every child reach and exceed standards. *American Secondary Education*, 32(3), 34-62
- McPhail, J.C., & Freeman, J. G. (2005). Beyond Prejudice: Thinking toward genuine inclusion. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*. 20(4), 254–267.
- Morgan, R. & Alexander, M. (2005). The employer`s perception: Employment of individuals with developmental disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 23, 39-49.
- Neubert, D. & Moon, S. (2006). Postsecondary settings and transition services for students with intellectual disabilities: Models and research. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 39(4), 1-8.
- Riegert, J. (2006). Teacher attitudes on the effects of inclusion on students without disabilities. Dissertation from The Graduate School University of Wisconsin-Stout. Retrieved from: [www2.uwstout.edu/content/lib/thesis/2006/2006riegertj.pdf](http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/lib/thesis/2006/2006riegertj.pdf)

- Rogers, C., Lavin, D., Tran, T., Gantenbein, T. & Sharpe, M. (2008). Customized employment: Changing what it means to be qualified in the workforce for transition-aged youth and young adults. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 28*, 191–207.
- Praisner, C. (2003). Attitudes of elementary school principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 69*(2), 135–145.
- Service Ontario (2008). *Ontario regulation 299/10: Services and supports to promote the social inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities act*.
- Silverman J.C. (2007). Epistemological beliefs and attitudes toward inclusion in pre-service teachers. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 30*(1), 42–51.
- Sprankle, M. (2009). *Teachers' beliefs towards the inclusion of students with disabilities*. Dissertation from Wilmington University. UMI Number: 3361933.
- SPSS Software. (2012). *PASW statistics 20.0*. Chicago, IL: SPSS Inc.
- Statistics Canada (2001). Participation and Activity Limitation Survey. Retrieved on March 8, 2012 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-bin/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&survId=3251&SurvVer=3&SDDS=3251&Instald=16705&InstaVer=4&lang=en&db=imdb&adm=8&dis=2>.
- Stone, E. & Priestley, M. (1996). Parasites, pawns and partners: Disability research and the role of non-disabled researchers. *British Journal of Sociology, 47*(4), 699–716.
- Shandra, C. L & Hogan, D. (2008). School-to-work program participation and the post-high school employment of young adults with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 29*, 117-130.

- Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(2), 221-258.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Retrieved March, 09, 2012 from <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>.
- Wiener, J., & Tardif, C. (2004). Social and emotional functioning of children with learning disabilities: Does special education class placement make a difference. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 19(1), 20–32.
- Winn, S. & Hay, I. (2009). Transition from school for youths with a disability: Issues and challenges. *Disability & Society*, 24(1), 103-115.
- Woloshyn, V., Bennett, S., & Berrill, D. (2003). Working with students who have learning disabilities: Teacher candidates speak out. Issues and concerns in pre-service education and professional development. *Exceptionality Education Canada*, 13(1), 7–29.