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Inclusion of Students with Disabilities: A Case Study of A Private, Primary School in an Urban City in Southern India

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by

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Dedication

For

Amma and Appa

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Sundar

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Inclusion of Students with Disabilities: A Case Study of a Private, Primary School in an Urban City in Southern India

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Significant changes have been observed in educational reforms in the Indian subcontinent over the last two decades. During this time period, educational policies began to be influenced by international developments in education (Hodkinson & Devarakonda, 2011). According to Singal (2006a), the Indian government endorsed the objective of the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994), which was to ensure policy changes to "promote the approach of inclusive education, namely enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs". This time period also marked the beginning of the usage of the term "inclusive education" in educational policies in India; however, a guideline to defining inclusion and actual implementation of inclusion in schools has not yet been realized (Singal & Rouse, 2003). There are few schools implementing inclusion in India; many practices are reflective of those developed and used in schools in developed countries. Inclusive practices developed in schools in Western countries may not suit the needs of schools in the Indian context. This case study was designed to explore how one primary school in India adapted and implemented inclusion. The perceptions and experiences of the principal, teachers and parents regarding inclusion were also explored in the context of inclusive practices of the school. Multiple sources of data collection including in-depth interviews, observations, document

review and focus group were used to answer research questions. Data analyses were used to identify themes and categories to answer research questions using techniques identified by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Findings are presented as follows: (1) an introduction to the school, (2) implementation of inclusion in India, and (3) knowledge and perceptions of stakeholders regarding inclusion. Findings indicate that the school practiced a social model of inclusion to suit their needs and based on the availability of resources. Parents of children with disabilities played an important role in implementing inclusion. Goals for inclusion, school and classroom practices, as well as participants' perceptions regarding inclusion were consistent with their experiences and implementation of social inclusion. Participants' had mostly positive perceptions, but expressed some limitations about inclusion. Implications for future research, practice and policy are also discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Education for students with disabilities has been undergoing constant reform during the last few decades. In the United States, laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990, IDEA 1997) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) have mandated placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms if those classrooms are determined to be the least restrictive environment (LRE) for these students. Inclusion is not one type of placement or practice applied to all students with disabilities; rather, it is a continuum of services, as reflected in the literature. It could refer to anything from "facilitating regular classroom integration through cooperative teaching and collaborative consultation" (Whinnery & King, 1995, p.1) to full inclusion, which is described as "a policy/practice in which all students with disabilities, regardless of nature or severity of disability and need for related services, receive their total education within their general education classroom in their home school" (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 1993, p.594). For the purposes of this study, inclusion is defined as "children identified with special education needs receiving their education in the general education classroom with required supports in place" (Alur & Bach, 2010, pp. 7-8). The children identified with special needs may receive part or all of, their education in the general education classroom.

Historically, while the broad concept of inclusion began as a social reform to reduce discrimination against persons with disabilities and to provide equal opportunities, the change was also reflected in schools and classrooms. Researchers have studied

different aspects of inclusion in the classroom, especially the academic benefits of inclusion for students with and without disabilities (Banerjee & Dailey, 1995; Brucker, 1994; Rea, McLaughlin & Walter-Thomas, 2002). Other benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities include increased academic motivation (Banerjee & Dailey, 1995) thereby allowing for greater participation in classroom activities (Savich, 2008). Researchers have also documented increased positive self-image (Banerjee & Dailey, 1995; Rollins, 2008) and enhanced social and affective outcomes for children with disabilities (Banerjee & Dailey, 1995; Fredrickson, Simmonds, Evans & Soulsby, 2007). However, according to Hallahan and Cohen (2008), inclusion may not always be effective for students with disabilities because it doesn't give them sufficient time to receive individualized, intensive instruction, which they require.

Researchers have also examined the effect of inclusion on teacher practice. In a study conducted by Pugach (1995), observations in five school sites showed that general education classroom instructional practices drew upon special education expertise; inclusive practices generally pointed to increased collaboration between general and special education teachers as well as an increased student placement in the general education classrooms. Hallahan and Cohen (2008) reported that one of the negative effects of inclusion on teacher practice was that special education teachers spent less time in providing individualized instruction and more time in completing paperwork or collaborating with the general education teachers.

Context

The field of special education in India, through its evolution, has drawn upon the research and practices of the West. While there is extensive research in the West regarding inclusion and its implementation, few studies have been conducted in India, most of which have been conducted within the past ten years. These include survey studies regarding teacher perceptions of inclusion (Dev & Belfiore, 1996; Hodkinson & Devarakonda, 2011; Parasuram, 2006; Sharma, Moore & Sonawane, 2009; Singal, 2008), and implementation of inclusion (Alur & Bach, 2010; Singal, 2006a; Singal, 2006b). Singal (2005) conducted a literature review regarding inclusion in India. She determined that the Indian research literature base on inclusion, its implementation and effectiveness is deficient, and is not easily accessible due to which there is dependence on non-empirical sources to understand the context and implementation of inclusive education in the Indian subcontinent.

In the Indian context, special education has grown as a field in the recent times, as have the laws governing services for people with disabilities. The main laws currently in effect that address the rights of individuals with disabilities include the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995, the Rehabilitation Council of India Act of 1992, the Mental Health Act of 1987, and the National Trust Act of 1999. According to the Ministry of Law & Justice (1987), the Mental Health Act of 1987 relates to the care and treatment of persons with mental illness; it also deals with issues related to any property possessed by persons with mental illness; this Act is a revision of the Indian Lunacy Act (1912). The Rehabilitation Council

of India Act (1992) deals with professional and resource development in the field of rehabilitation services, and the National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability Act of 1999 provides for independent living of persons with the certain types of disability in addition to addressing their legal guardianship. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995 (also known as PWD Act) is an umbrella legislature that provides for equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in the education and employment sectors, as well as promotes creation of a barrier-free environment for these individuals.

While there are laws in place to provide services for persons with disabilities, estimating the number of individuals in need of services is difficult in a large country like India. Several factors contribute to this difficulty. Identification of disability is one factor because the process of identification of disability is still evolving in India (Mukhopadhay & Mani, 2002). Another related issue is the use of different definitions of disabilities in surveys, leading to numbers that are not comparable (Bhanushali, 2011). According to the PWD Act (1995), a person with a disability is "a person suffering from not less than forty percent of any disability certified by a medical authority" (Community Based Rehabilitation Manual, 2011 p.1). There are specific definitions for each disability provided by the PWD Act of 1995.

Various organizations have conducted surveys of the incidence and prevalence of persons with disabilities in the last two decades. In their discussion regarding issues of incidence and prevalence in India, Mukhopadhay and Mani (2002) refer to a number of

survey reports. According to them, the number of people with physical disabilities is estimated to be 16.15 million by the NSSO 1991. An individual with physical disabilities is an individual with one or more of the following disabilities: visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech impairment, hearing and speech impairment or locomotor disability. Another definition is provided in the Plan of Action (1992) for implementing the National Policy on Education (1986), according to which, disability refers to locomotor handicap, hearing handicap, speech handicap, visual handicap, mental retardation and learning disability (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2005). The number of school age children (5-14 years) with a disability according to this definition was estimated to be 15.06 million. Of this population, children with learning disabilities and mental retardation constituted 60% (Community Based Rehabilitation Manual, 2011).

In 2001, the Indian National Census included questions regarding people with disabilities for the first time, after an earlier but unsuccessful attempt (Community Based Rehabilitation Manual, 2011). According to this source, the number of people with physical disabilities was estimated to be 22 million. According to Bhanushali, (2011), the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) of 2002 presented an estimate of 18.5 million individuals with at least one disability. He discusses the differences in the definitions used by the Census of India and National Sample Survey, and contends therefore that they may have resulted in the widely different estimates in the disability counts. In the NSSO 2002 survey, a person with disability is defined as one with "restrictions or lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. It excludes illness/injury of recent origin resulting

in temporary loss of ability to see, hear, speak or move" (Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation, 2003). The Census of India on the other hand, had a more general definition for each disability, which did not exclude illness/injury clauses. For example, visual impairment is defined as "a person who cannot see at all, or has blurred vision even with the help of spectacles" (Office of the Registrar General, 2006). In the definition given by Census of India, persons who have a visual impairment in one eye are also counted in the survey; this definition could also include people who have some temporary visual problems and have not had the opportunity to have their eyes tested. According to Bhaushali (2011), these variations in definitions may be one of the reasons for varied estimates provided by different institutions and organizations.

One of the goals of education is to provide equal opportunities to all children. In order to provide equal opportunities to all children under the age of 14 in India, the Department of School Education and literacy started a program called the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA, Education for All; District Primary Education Programme, 2001). Given the issues in identification and estimating the number of people with disabilities, and in light of limited resources and large population of school-age children, one of the greatest challenges in developing countries like India is meeting the educational needs of all students and especially students with disabilities. Pedagogically, the most challenging and daunting task for educators is to determine what works for children with different strengths and weaknesses, as well as identifying the different needs of children in their classroom (Malanaphy, 2005). Currently, practitioners rely on literature in the West to determine successful practices to be implemented in classrooms.

Special Education Services

According to Adams (2010), schools in India fall into one of three categories: Government, Semi-Private and Private. Government schools are funded and administered by the central or state governments. Semi-private schools are partially funded by the Government (central or state), and by their own funding system. Private schools are fully managed by private organizations, individuals or a group of individuals. Within each category, there are general education only schools, special schools only, and inclusion schools.

Apart from special schools, the most common form of special education service available to children with disabilities in India is the resource room program (Myreddi & Narayan, 1999). Students with mild or moderate intellectual impairment, physical/motor impairments, visual impairments and hearing impairments are most commonly educated in resource room programs. According to Vannest, Hagan-Burke, Parker and Soares (2011), students in resource room programs are provided instruction for part of the day (usually 50% or more) in a special education setting. Additional instruction is provided in certain subject areas such as mathematics and language as required for the individual child. In some resource rooms programs in Southern India, resource room teachers focus on developing skills such as braille, orientation and mobility skills for children with visual impairment, or sign language for children with hearing impairment, along with subject areas.

Inclusion is gaining recognition in developing countries like India. Inclusion in schools range from partial to full inclusion (Alur & Bach, 2010). However, access to

extensive special education services and resources are somewhat limited to the larger, more urban cities (Myreddi & Narayan, 1999). Typically, inclusive education programs enroll children with mild disabilities. Children with severe and children with profound disabilities still receive special education services predominantly outside of the regular school, in special schools or residential day care centers. Some schools, however, volunteer to take students with moderate to severe disabilities in their inclusion programs (Personal communication, October 10, 2010). There may be some differences in the implementation of inclusion in Government (public) schools compared to private schools due to organizational differences. There are not many formal records or studies of how inclusion is implemented in these schools or of their outcomes. The success of these schools is communicated by word of mouth, if it is communicated at all.

Study Overview

Both in the United States and in India, across studies, researchers tend to use different definitions of inclusion; schools implementing inclusion may also conceptualize inclusion in different ways leading to widely varying inclusive practices. This makes studying the process of implementation of inclusion a very complicated task. Currently, there are no studies that describe how inclusion is implemented or what inclusive education practices are in place in India (Singal, 2006a). Furthermore, there is a need to understand the perceptions of educators, as well as their classroom practices in inclusion schools. To begin to understand inclusive practices in India, this study examined the use of inclusion in primary grades in a private school in an urban city in Southern India.

The research questions guiding this study were:

- What is the nature of inclusive practices of a private, primary school implementing inclusion?
- What does the principal know about, and what are her perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion?
- What do general education teachers know about, and what are their perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion?
- What do parents know about, and what are their perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion?

Qualitative case study approach was used to explore the knowledge and perceptions of essential stakeholders regarding inclusion in India in general, and specifically in the context of inclusive practices of the school. For this study, participants were the principal, general educators, and parents of children with disabilities from a private, primary school implementing inclusion. This school was selected since the inclusion program in the school was considered to be successful by professionals in the educational community, based on their experiences. There is no formally documented research based on the practices of this school. Additionally, inclusion in the school ranges from partial inclusion to full inclusion, and children with different categories of disabilities ranging from mild to severe are enrolled.

Through participants' voices and lived experiences, this study explored essential stakeholders' (principal, teachers, parents) goals and philosophies regarding inclusion, how they perceived and implemented inclusion and their roles in the process. It also

helped gain insights into the complex factors associated in implementing inclusion in a school in the context of educational system and socio-cultural aspects.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviewed the literature regarding inclusive education in India. The chapter begins with a history of education and special education in India, followed by legal mandates in special education and an introduction to inclusive education. Research on inclusive education in India is presented in the next section. Literature regarding the inception of inclusion is presented, along with studies regarding the perceptions of stakeholders in schools in the Unites States. The chapter concludes with making a case for this exploratory study.

Education in India

India has not only a rich cultural history, but also an educational history that dates back to ancient times. Balasundaram (2005) traces this history of the educational system in India. She discusses as well as compares inclusion from ancient forms of education to modern education in India. This development in the educational system can be divided roughly in four periods: the ancient system of education, the pre-British time, the British system of education, and post-independence period.

The pre-independence era in Indian education

The first three periods, viz. a viz., the ancient system of education, the pre-British time and the British system of education are discussed in the pre-independence era. Education in ancient India dates back to the *Vedas*, which are ancient educational texts in Sanskrit, pertaining to Hindu religion. Ancient education was mostly religious and spiritual in nature. According to Mukerji (1966), this spiritual and religious education focused on providing a person with the knowledge and skills to be productive in the

society, as well as develop individuality (pp. 2-3). According to Balasundaram (2005), inclusion was truly practiced in the educational system of the ancient times; individuals with differing abilities were given an opportunity to be productive members of society, be it in the form of learning, or doing simple work. This was evident in the fact that all people, including individuals with physical and mental disabilities, had the opportunity to learn skills so that they may contribute in some way to the society.

In the pre-British period, when the Indian colonies were ruled by Hindu and Muslim emperors, the structure of education was based on the caste system. According to this structure, there were four groups of people- the *Brahmins* who were the scholars, the *Kshatriyas* or the warriors, the skilled workers, traders and businessmen who were called the *Vaishyas*, and the *Sudras* who were considered the lowest sector and whose duty it was to provide services to people of the other castes. According to this system, a person inherited the caste of their forefathers, and performed the duties expected of them. Scholars have interpreted this period of education in different ways (Balasundaram, 2005; Mukerji, 1966). According to Mukerji (1966), the modern world interprets the caste system differently, and has created prejudice against certain individuals based on caste. However, in the ancient times individuals from various different castes performed various duties expected of them, and this kept the society running smoothly. He contends that in ancient Indian society, individuals were rational, and there existed a high level of civilization that did not interfere with the running of the society based on caste distinctions (p.3). However, in her paper, Balasundaram (2005) posits that the caste system may have lead to the dismantling of the inclusive practices that have been part of

the educational system in the past. Mukerji (1966) also notes that for both Hindu and Muslim kings and emperors, education was a religious duty that they followed to the letter (p.3).

There were many significant developments in the field of education during the British period in India. The East India Company controlled large portions of the country between 1750s until 1857, after which there was direct British rule called the British Raj. Until the early 1800s, there was no significant impact on the educational system in India by the East India Company. According to Ghosh (2003), the Charter Act of 1813 mandated the development of a British system of education in India; until 1853, there was a lot of confusion and debate between the British system of education, and the Indian Sanskritic education system (p.18). The year 1835 marked the beginning of emphasis of English education in India. English education was promoted to the upper class members of the society with the intention to provide them with education so as to better serve the British Raj (Balasundaram, 2005). This caused much disparity in the access to education for the people of India. Until the year 1919, there were many changes in the educational system; the Central Government did not make educational decisions; rather, the provinces were responsible to make choices suited to their needs (Mukerji, 1966, p.6).

The post-independence era in Indian education

The first three decades of 19th century records many important developments in the history of education in India, especially for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Individuals with disabilities were mostly given care and education by charitable institutions (Balasundaram, 2005). According to Balasundaram (2005), the first special

education school for individuals with visual impairments was started in 1826 in Varanasi. The British system of education however, brought about many changes in access to, as well as kind of education that people received, pushing away the notion of inclusive education that existed in the pre-British period. The British system of education was geared toward a system that was suited to the children of the employees of the East India Company who were posted in India. This system of education was available to certain elite members of the Indian society, and was mostly developed in the interest of educating people to work for the British Empire.

The post-British effects of education are felt to this day; however during the post-independence period (after 1947), there have been significant developments in the area of education, and especially in special education and provision of inclusive education for children with disabilities. In 1974, the Integrated Education for the Disabled Child was launched in India, and this propelled many other changes in the following decades. The initial stages of mainstreaming involved children with physical disabilities only.

According to Timmons & Alur (2004), the National Policy on Education initiated in 1986 was instrumental in addressing issues regarding mainstreaming of children with mild disabilities, special schools for children with severe disabilities, vocational training as well as teacher preparation programs that focus on children with disabilities. However, they contend that a large part of efforts are taken up by voluntary organizations and NGOs, and with limited funds, they are unable to sustain providing educational services for individuals with disabilities; this leaves around 98% of individuals with disabilities without appropriate services.

According to Balasundaram (2005), India joined the United Nations in the Education for All (EFA) program, which propagated education for all children, including children with disabilities. The legislation that truly reflected inclusion of all children with disabilities was the People With Disabilities Act of 1995. According to this, all children including children with disabilities have the right to free and compulsory education. While there is support and promotion for inclusive education, the cascade of services (special education, community-based rehabilitation, home-based education, distance education and so on) still exists, owing to large and diverse populations and limited resources (Balasundaram, 2005).

Special Education in India

India is a country of many cultures, ethnicities, religions and languages, being an exemplar of unity in diversity. A government elected by the people rules the country; it is a secular, socialist, democratic republic. The Constitution, which was developed in 1950 when the country was declared Republic provides not only for fundamental rights of people, but also the right to free education for all individuals, including individuals with disabilities, and other minority groups, up to the age of 18 years (Department of Education, 2005). The vast population, as well as the varied social, cultural and economic factors however, present challenges in the field of education and especially in special education and rehabilitation. According to the World Bank Report (2005), the percentage of people with disabilities in an Indian population of one billion is estimated to be 4-8%. The wide range in estimate has been reported to be due to the different instruments used, different definitions of disability, and a lack of consensus regarding issues concerning

mental health. Considering even the lower estimate of 4%, it makes the number of persons with disabilities 40 million. According to the NSSO (1991) report, there is at least one member of a household with a disability in approximately 8.4% of rural households and 6.1% of the urban households in India. This, combined with other minority statuses such as gender and socio-economic status, puts these individuals at a further disadvantage.

Legislation and Policy in Special Education

Education developed rapidly in India during the post-independence period. The Government of India developed new legislation in the field of education. According to the National Human Rights Commission Disability Manual (2005), while there were self-advocacy groups trying to fight for rights of individuals with disabilities, legislation protecting the rights of all individuals with disabilities was only established in the 1990s with the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995, also known as the PWD Act. The disability-related legislation in India that came into practice over the last two decades are the *Mental Health Act of 1987,* the *Rehabilitation Council of India Act of 1992* or the *RCI Act,* the *PWD Act of 1995,* and the *National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act of 1999*. Despite these developments as well as changes in the field of education for persons with disabilities, an important issue that persists is the lack of sufficient trained professionals in the field of special education and rehabilitation. According to an article in the Times of India (TNN, 2010), the estimated number of professionals needed in the field of special education and rehabilitation in the

year 2012 is estimated to be 12.5 lakhs (1.25 million). Currently however, there are less than half that number available.

The Mental Health Act, 1987. This legislation was developed for the protection of human rights of persons with "mental illness caused by mental disorders other than mental retardation". This act contains ten chapters discussing various definitions and provisions for individuals with mental illness. It also contains information for health care and service professionals. Chapter VII of the Act deals with human rights protection of persons with mental illness. Rastogi (2005) discusses the objectives and positive aspects of the Act in his analysis of the Mental Health Act of 1987. According to him, the Act replaced offensive terminology used in the Lunacy Act of 1912. This is one of the first steps taken in most fields dealing with minority and under privileged, as well as prejudiced groups; offensive terminology is replaced with more appropriate terms. This Act also provides an authority to keep tabs on establishment and maintenance, as well as licensure of institutes developed for the care of individuals with mental illness.

This Act had some fundamental weaknesses in that institutional care was the only solution for individuals with mental illness it provided, while referring to human rights issues. Procedures regarding care of these individuals or where they should receive treatment and so on are not standardized; it is left to the discretion of some professionals and family members. Despite these drawbacks, it was the beginning of the development of other legislation for these individuals (Rastogi, 2005).

The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992. The Government of India established the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) in 1986 under the Ministry of

Social Empowerment and Justice (Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, 1992). In 1992, the RCI was given the status of a statutory body; one that would aim to regulate rehabilitation and related issues in India and thus the Rehabilitation Council of India Act emerged. According to the National Human Rights Commission (2005), the aims of the RCI Act are "to standardize training courses for professionals dealing with people with disabilities, to prescribe minimum standards of education and training of professionals, to maintain and regulate these standards uniformly in the country, to promote research in special education and rehabilitation and to maintain a central register for registering professionals after completion of training at recognized institutes" (p. 34). In addition to these, the RCI also seeks to gather information in the areas of education and training related to disability, special education and rehabilitation in India and abroad, as well as conduct and support ongoing professional development programs in collaboration with various organizations (Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, 1992).

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. According to this legislature, every child is entitled to free and compulsory education until the age of 18 (Ministry of Law and Justice, 1996). According to *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (Education for All) program established by the Government, all children including children with disabilities between the age groups of 6 and 14, are entitled to eight years of free elementary education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2000). According to Disability India Network (2011), the National Policy on Education of 1986 provides for a continuum of special education services ranging from home-based instruction to full inclusion, as well as vocational

rehabilitation programs for children with disabilities. The PWD Act of 1995 however, pushes for inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms with the provision that the Government must also provide special equipment or books for free. Local governments or governing bodies are instructed to provide part time functional literacy classes for persons with disabilities above the age of 16. Besides these benefits, the PWD Act also focuses on providing individuals with disabilities access to higher education in colleges and universities while providing scholarships for these individuals. Yet another focus of this legislature is to improve disability identification techniques.

Another important facet of the PWD Act is in the area of employment of persons with disabilities. According to this Act, government offices are to identify posts that may be reserved for persons with disabilities. Three percent of jobs in government offices may be reserved for persons with disabilities; one percent each for persons with visual impairment, hearing impairment and physical impairment (Ministry of Law & Justice, 1996). According to the National Human Rights Commission Disability Manual (1995), the PWD Act also focuses on non-discrimination of persons with disabilities in the society. Steps are taken to ensure that transport and building facilities are adapted to suit the needs of persons with disabilities. Measures are also taken to sponsor and promote research in prevention and rehabilitation of disabilities.

The National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999. According to the Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs (1999), the National Trust Act of 1999 also focuses on providing equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation. The objectives

of this Act include empowering individuals with disabilities by providing "adequate standard for living" to live independently in the community as well as providing necessary supports for these individuals in living with their families. In case of individuals who do not have family support, this Act provides for alternate measures. This may include foster homes, independent living, community living, day care facilities or identifying and appointing guardians for the care of individuals with disabilities. According to this legislation, while private institutes are allowed to set up these community-based facilities, they need to be approved by the Government; the final authority lies with the Government.

Inclusion in India

In understanding inclusive education in India, it is also essential that disability and special education be understood from the Indian perspective. Disability, from the Indian perspective has undergone many changes over time, as in the international scenario. There have been religious explanations, explanations of charitable trusts as well as reformists who have struggled for the rights of people with disabilities.

According to Baquer and Sharma (1997), the PWD Act of 1995 includes seven categories of disability in India: blindness, low vision, locomotor disability, leprosy cured, hearing impairment, mental illness and mental retardation. While the more developed countries of the world include individuals with learning disabilities and behavioral/emotional disturbances in their account of individuals with disabilities, India does not account for these groups of people in their statistics of individuals with disabilities (Pandey &Advani, 1995, p.15).

The population of India as of May 2001 was 1,027,015,247; the number of females per 1000 males, also known as the sex ratio was 933:1000 ("Database on prevalence", 2002). According to the World Bank report (2002), only 2.8% of the population of one billion in India was urban and 4-8% of this population is said to have one or more disability (See Table 1). It was also reported that the prevalence of locomotor disabilities is highest among children age 0-4. According to Alur (2003), 98% percent of people with disabilities do not receive services that they may otherwise be eligible for.

Table 1

Disability-specific data (India)

Type of Disability	Percentage of total population with disability (%)
Physical Disability	41.32
Visual Impairment	10.32
Hearing Impairment	8.36
Speech Impairment	5.06
Locomotor Disability	23.04
Multiple Disabilities	11.54

Source: World Bank (2002).

Disability statistics in India typically reflect other factors like socio-economic status (rural vs. urban), gender, medical conditions leading to disabilities as well as age-related disabilities. "The magnitude of the problem of disability is vast and its impact is very severe on the individual, families and community" ("Database on prevalence",

2002). Knowing the prevalence and incidence of disability may aid in assessing the needs, and in meeting those needs based on available resources.

Inclusion (or inclusive education) has become an important term in the field of education in India since the 1990s. According to the glossary of terms provided by the Disability India Network, inclusive education is "an educational philosophy aimed at 'normalizing' special services for which students qualify. Inclusion involves an attempt to provide more of these special services by providing additional aids and support inside the regular classroom, rather than by pulling students out for isolated instruction. Inclusion involves the extension of general education curricula and goals to students receiving special services. Finally, inclusion involves shared responsibility, problem solving, and mutual support among all the staff members who provide services to students" ("Glossary of Terms", n.d.).

As in the international scenario, researchers and scholars have interpreted inclusion in many different ways, and in order to study inclusion, an understanding of the context and implementation is essential. While the use of the term inclusion has gained significance in the field of education, its roots run deeper in a human rights' perspective. Inclusion for individuals with disabilities meant equal access to opportunities and full participation in a society as contributing members (National Human Rights Commission, 2005). In India, the Ministry of Social Welfare is entrusted with the responsibility of providing opportunities for, and uplifting the minority groups- women, people with disabilities as well as people from lower castes amongst others. Over time, the legislation changed slowly to include people with disabilities. According to Parasuram (2002), one

of the important responsibilities of the Ministry of Social Welfare was to provide assistance and grants to voluntary organizations that provided rehabilitation services for people with disabilities. According to Singal (2006), a fourth of educational institutions are non-governmental organizations or private organizations. However these agencies typically are forced to follow what funding agencies want them to do and are typically run by persons without disabilities. Self-help institutions on the other hand are typically managed and supported by people with disabilities (Baquer & Sharma, 1997, p.17). This second group of people take a human rights perspective, and promote full inclusion. It is important that people with disabilities participate in promoting inclusion. Inclusive education is part of the larger concept of inclusion of minority groups (Cheng & Beigi, 2011); however, most commonly, 'inclusion' has begun to reflect inclusive education. According to Alur and Bach (2010, p.7-8), "inclusive education means an approach to early childhood, primary and secondary education, where all children learn together in regular classrooms. Every child is supported to meet his or her particular needs and to maximize their unique potential". Experts in the field of inclusive education also claim that inclusion doesn't simply refer to placing children with disabilities in a regular education classroom (Alur & Bach, 2010).

The initial notion of including children with disabilities in regular education programs came in the form of the Integrated Education of the Disabled Children (IEDC) through the Ministry of Human Resource Development (1992a). The National Policy on Education in 1986, which was revised in 1992 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1992b) further strengthened inclusion of children with disabilities in

general education classrooms. According to this program, children with locomotor disabilities and other mild disabilities should be provided education in regular schools and teachers should be trained to teach these children in their classrooms (Pandey & Advani, 1995, p. 82).

In her literature review regarding inclusion in India, Singal (2005) reports that the literature documenting the implementation of inclusion is limited, and that it is not easily accessible. However, while the body of literature is deficient, it is not completely absent. Literature regarding inclusion in India reflects upon various topics including, but not limited to implementation and challenges of inclusive education (Singal, 2006a; Singal, 2006b), policies regarding inclusion and providing inclusive education services (Kalyanpur, 2008), perspectives of teachers regarding mainstreaming and inclusive education (Dev & Belfiore, 1996; Hodkinson & Devarakonda, 2011; Parasuram, 2006, Singal, 2008), and perspectives of family members regarding inclusion (Rao, 2001).

One of the most discussed issues in the international literature is the interpretation of the term inclusion. Integration and inclusion are often not differentiated, and researchers use both to refer to inclusive education (Aggarwal, 2004). Researchers also contend that individuals with disabilities face many barriers- physical, intellectual, social, psychological and emotional due to some limitation in their physical or intellectual functioning (Alur & Bach, 2010). However, attitudinal barriers are the most limiting as far as these individuals are concerned (Alur & Bach, 2010, p. 8; Baquer & Sharma, 1997, p.22). The attitudes of various individuals in the society, professionals who work with individuals with disabilities and policymakers are a big factor in the success or failure of

the implementation of inclusion. It, therefore, is not only important in implementing a program, but also to make sure that the individuals involved in the implementation have positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, as well as towards the program being implemented.

In their book, Alur & Bach (2010) describe the development of the Spastics Society of India, an organization that caters to the needs of children with developmental disabilities, provides assessment, early intervention and home management programs besides other services, and the subsequent movement to the development of inclusive education through the development of the National Resource Center on Inclusion-I (NRCI-I). They also discuss personal experiences and challenges they faced in this regard. In their quest for promoting inclusion in schools, they describe the attitudes of administrators and teachers in schools concerning inclusion. Teachers typically preferred that children with disabilities remain in special education schools (p.91). Alur and Bach (2010) discuss other perceptions that teachers hold about including children with disabilities in regular education classrooms, which are reflected in literature not only in India but in the United States as well. Some of these perceptions are that teachers lack training and time as well as resources for inclusion (Hudson, Graham & Warner, 1979; Myles & Simpson, 1992).

Yet another important concern that may arise in Indian schools (that may not be the case in schools in more developed countries such as the United States or United Kingdom) is the class size. Many Indian schools have large class sizes, especially State Government schools. In her personal experience in general education schools, the

researcher taught classes with about 55 students in a 12th grade classroom, and over 100 students in a primary classroom in a public (State Government) school. Certain schools have smaller classes, and so it may be easier to promote inclusion in these schools.

Alur and Bach (2010) discuss inclusive education as being a pedagogical change- a process that is slowly developed through various stages which includes identifying students who are ready for inclusion, preparing parents and students for the transition, identifying schools and finally preparing schools for inclusive education (p.100).

Perceptions of teachers regarding inclusion in India

While the concept of inclusive education is being implemented in some parts of India, documented information is sparse and difficult to obtain. The literature reviewed for this study reflects this concern, and the need to conduct more exploratory and methodologically rigorous research. While the literature on inclusive education in India reflects mixed attitudes towards inclusion, it does tend to be more negative than positive. Two studies determined the attitudes of pre-service teachers (Sharma, Moore & Sonawane, 2009) and general education teachers (Parasuram, 2006) using the same scale, the *Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES)*, developed by Wilczenski in 1992. In the Sharma, Moore and Sonawane (2009) study, participants included 478 candidates enrolled in a B.Ed (post graduate) program in a suburban city in Western India. Demographic information was collected from participants, along with two surveys: *Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education Scale* (ATIES) developed by Wilczenski (1992), and *Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale (CIES)* developed by Sharma and Desai (2002). Results of this study indicated that overall, participants had generally negative

attitudes towards inclusion for children with disabilities. While they had some positive attitudes on including children with physical and sensory disabilities (visual and hearing impairment), they had negative attitudes towards including children with emotional and behavioral difficulties in regular education classroom. It was also determined that teachers with higher degree qualifications had more positive attitudes than teachers with lower degree qualifications. Parasuram (2006) reported similar results in her study regarding perceptions of general education teachers using the ATIES in an urban city in Western India. Results indicated that teachers had somewhat negative attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities. As part of this study, the author also discusses variables that affect teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Results indicated that factors such as age, gender, work experience and level of education of teachers did not impact their attitudes towards inclusive education. The only factor that had a positive impact on attitudes was acquaintance with an individual with disability. Participants who knew someone with a disability showed more positive attitudes regarding inclusion than participants who didn't. Parasuram (2006) contends that the results of this study reflect the fact that inclusive education is relatively new to India, and participants of her study did not have students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Forlin, Loreman, Sharma and Earle (2009) discussed concerns teachers had regarding inclusion. The authors reported that teachers were most concerned about a lack of resources, which included funding and support personnel. Other concerns raised by the participants were the non-acceptance of children with disabilities by peers, followed by increased workload for general education teachers. They were least concerned about the

possible decline in academic standards due to the inclusion of children with disabilities. Some of these factors are addressed in studies conducted in the United States and show similar concerns by teachers (Myles & Simpson, 1989; Myles & Simpson, 1992).

Since developing countries like India adapt inclusive practices based on literature from the West, I present a brief review of legal mandates and literature regarding inclusion in the United States.

Inclusion in the United States: From segregation to inclusion

According to the U.S Census Bureau (2005), there are approximately 4.7 million children (10.9%) between the ages 6 and 14 that have some disability. According to Knoblauch and Sorenson (1998), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) mandates that "in order that a child be placed in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and receive special education services, he/she must (1) have one of more of the following disabilities: autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, hearing impairment, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment (chronic or acute health problems), serious emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury and (2) require special education services" (p.2).

Winzer (2009) discusses the definition of special education as it evolved over the years. While the key element of these definitions seemed to be regarding providing equal opportunities to students with disabilities, there definitely seemed to be a change in special education practices over time. The definitions have changed from a deficit- or medical model to a social empowerment one. For example, Martens (1946, p.226) says,

"the purpose of special education programs is to serve all children who have serious problems of physical, intellectual, or emotional adjustment". However, Winzer & Mazurek (2000) define special education as "an extremely complex social and conceptual system designed to assist all children to reach their full potential" (p.24). It is evident from these definitions that the focus has moved away from a deficit-model; providing an equal platform for all children, irrespective of the differences in their abilities. The changing trend from segregation to inclusion meant a change in the organizational structures of schools. This change in trend not only impacted special education, but general education too. It meant a reform in the entire system of education (Winzer, 2009). According to Winzer and Mazurek (2000), the ideal behind the inclusion movement was a broad social justice and empowerment one. It was to protect the rights of all students, rather than a single group.

Legal mandates

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) amendments of 1997 ensured that students with disabilities had access to participation and progress in the general education curriculum. It also mandated that state education agencies (SEAs) identify and evaluate all children suspected of having a disability or at-risk for a disability as well as to make free appropriate public education (FAPE) available to these children. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 increased accountability for all students, including minority students and students with disabilities. It required that students with disabilities participate in statewide reading and math testing procedures, that they meet the same standards as those for students without disabilities, and that their results be

included in the overall state progress reported every year. It also required that states develop grade-level academic content and achievement standards that all students, including students with disabilities, must meet.

According to the IDEA 1990, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) mandates every public agency to ensure that, "to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are non-disabled. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of disability is such that education in general classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily". Inclusion and mainstreaming are among the many practices that address this requirement of placing students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

Research regarding inclusive education in the United States

Characteristics of individuals with disabilities may vary greatly based on the type, as well as the severity of the disability. Researchers have studied various aspects of implementing inclusion in schools and classrooms. These include, but are not limited to, the impact of inclusion on academic achievement of students with and without disabilities (Banerji & Dailey, 1995; Peetsma, Vergeer, Roelveld & Karsten; 2001), the social impact of inclusion on children with and without disabilities (Cole & Meyer, 1991; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998), teacher perceptions of inclusion (Houck & Rogers, 1994; Myles & Simpson, 1992), parent perceptions (Green & Shinn, 1994), student perceptions (Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cogen & Forgan, 1998; Whinnery & King, 1995),

principals' and administrators' perceptions of inclusion (Carter & Hughes, 2006; Daane, Beirne-Smith & Latham, 2000; Dyal & Flynt, 1996), self-efficacy of teachers in inclusive education classrooms (Brady & Woolfson, 2008) as well as impact of inclusion on children without disabilities (Banerji & Dailey, 1995; Peetsma, Vergeer, Roelveld, & Karsten, 2001). A number of studies also compare inclusion programs with resource room programs (Whinnery & King, 1995) or other special education programs (Cole & Meyer, 1991; Marston, 1996). Many studies seek to study the effectiveness of inclusion (Hunt et al., 2001; Marston, 1996). However, the results of these studies are predominantly mixed, and hence inconclusive. One of the reasons for this may be the variations found in the definitions of inclusion used in the literature.

Inclusion and its impact on academic achievement and social outcomes. Academic achievement and social outcomes of inclusion have been of considerable interest to researchers. These two factors have been studied over time, as reflected by the literature. While mixed results have been reported, results of studies mostly indicate that inclusion has a positive impact on academic achievement of children with and without disabilities, as demonstrated by many researchers (Banerji & Dailey, 1995; Peetsma, Vergeer, Roelveld & Karsten, 2001). Inclusion also impacts social outcomes for students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Cole & Meyer, 1991; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998).

Moore, Gilbreath and Maiuri (1998) discuss the impact of inclusion on children with mild and severe disabilities in their literature review. They report that most of the research on the impact of inclusion focuses on children with mild disabilities, moderate

to severe disabilities or on children without disabilities in the general education classroom. According to their report, students with mild disabilities benefit most in inclusion classrooms- both academically and socially. Children with more moderate-severe disabilities show some academic, as well as behavioral and social benefits. However, this margin is comparatively smaller. While the research on impact of inclusion on students with disabilities shows mixed results, the research regarding the impact of inclusion on students without disabilities does not reflect any negative impact. They also report that the research does not reflect that the curriculum or instructional time for students without disabilities are in any way affected by the presence of students with disabilities in the classroom.

Manset and Semmel (1997) conducted a synthesis of 11 articles on the impact of inclusion on the academic outcomes of students with mild disabilities. Their criterion for selection of studies included school-wide implementation of inclusion, as well as the use of some measure of academic outcomes in the studies. Eight different models of inclusion were implemented in the 11 studies. Students at-risk for or with mild disabilities were provided instruction in the mainstream classroom. The curriculum in these studies involved providing direct and intensive instruction for children with disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Supports for general education teachers in these programs included collaboration/consultation with a special education teacher, project staff providing inservice instruction for the general education teachers, as well as bringing experts into the classroom in order to provide additional supports. In some studies, researchers also altered the staff-student ratio by either increasing the number of teachers,

or decreasing the number of students. Other characteristics of these programs were the use of peer-supported instruction and collaboration by these inclusion programs. Manset and Semmel (1997) report that pre-posttest design was typically used to evaluate the efficacy of the inclusion program in each of the studies. They found that researchers reported mixed results for the impact of inclusion. While many of the studies did report some gains in reading, language art and math for students with disabilities in inclusive education, there were two studies that did not report in significant gains in language art and reading between inclusive and pullout programs. They report however, that there is lack of statistical significance in the gains for students with disabilities reported by some of the studies; however, they do report a positive gain for students without disabilities in inclusion programs. They conclude in their review that while inclusion may benefit some students with mild disabilities, the research supporting this as a viable solution for all students with disabilities is inconclusive. They also suggest that these studies do not provide in-depth descriptions of the schools, the interventions in place and so on. Such information, if provided, could lead to some insight on specific factors that support or inhibit successful implementation of inclusion.

In a review of studies of academic and social-emotional effects of inclusion on students with mild and moderate disabilities, Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) reported results similar to those of Manset and Semmel (1997). They selected articles between 1999 and 2009, which used either a pretest/post-test design or large samples of children. They acknowledged that the studies use different definitions of children with special educational needs. Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) found that a majority of the studies

indicated a slightly positive impact of inclusion on academic achievement of children with disabilities. Results of the review also indicated that there are a small number of studies that report no effect or a negative effect of inclusion on students with disabilities. Additionally, the authors reported that there are fewer studies that compare the effects of inclusion to special education placement, and that such a comparison may provide a better understanding of the actual effects of inclusion. The effects of inclusion on students without disabilities were also discussed in the review; most studies indicated that there is a positive effect of inclusion on students without disabilities. This is consistent with other studies in the literature as well (Banerji & Dailey, 1995; Peetsma, Vergeer, Roelveld & Karsten, 2001). Both Ruijs and Peetsma (2009), as well as Murawski and Swanson (1999) indicate that there is lack of quantitative data in studying the effectiveness of inclusion on academic achievement of students with and without disabilities.

In yet another extensive literature review, McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998), report on the impact that inclusion has on skill acquisition and social outcomes for students with and without disabilities. They contend that placement in a general education classroom alone does not facilitate inclusion, and that skill acquisition and social skill development may be promoted through small group activities. This is consistent with the results found in other studies as well. For example, Cole and Meyer (1991) compared the social skill development in addition to educational outcomes of children with severe disabilities in integrated and segregated settings over a period of 2 years. A total of 25 students between 6 and 21 years, whose IQ was estimated to be 30 or

less, were selected for the study. The Assessment of Social Competence, which is used to measure 11 functional aspects of social competence, and the Topeka Association for Retarded citizens (TARC; Sailor & Mix, 1975), which assesses 4 behavior areas (self-help skills, fine and gross motor skills, expressive and receptive communication skills, as well as appropriate and inappropriate behaviors) using a 194-item checklist, were used. Data collection also included observations of student- environment interactions in each setting. Results of this study indicated that while children in integrated and segregated settings did not show significant differences in educational outcomes, students in the integrated settings developed better social competence skills as compared to students in the segregated settings.

While most studies reported neutral to a slightly positive impact of inclusion on children with disabilities, results of a few studies indicated a negative effect of inclusion on students with disabilities. Zigmond et al. (1995) conducted a review of three multi-year studies involving six schools implementing inclusion. She describes one school year over which changes in the schools were implemented in each school. The schools moved from providing special education services toward mainstreaming children with disabilities in the general education classroom. The reading measure of Basic Academic Skills Sample (BASS) was used across projects (on a sample of 145 students across the three sites) in order to get an aggregate score since all projects had otherwise chosen different measures of achievement. Results of the study indicated that children with learning disabilities did not make significant gains in achievement in the restricted schools implementing inclusion. Zigmond et al. (1995) also report that the achievement

of children with LD was far below that of average peers. The data also indicated that only 40% of the students with LD made any gains in reading, and that the magnitude of the gain was far less than that of typically achieving peers.

Similar results were also indicated in a study conducted by Marston (1996) in Minneapolis Public Schools. In this study, the researcher compared students' academic outcomes in inclusion only, pull-out only and combined service models for students with mild disabilities. Pre-test and post-test in reading were administered to 240 students (33 students in inclusion only settings, 36 in pull-out only settings and 171 students in a combined services setting) with IEPs. Results indicated that there was no statistical significance in reading achievement between students in these different settings. The author contended that there is a need for a continuum of services rather than the availability of only one type of service.

In considering the impact of inclusion on the outcomes for students with severe disabilities, the results of studies in the literature indicate that there is some general benefit in developing social skills in these children. Mixed results are reported regarding the impact of inclusion on academic skills of children with severe disabilities (Cawley, Hayden & Cade 2002; Downing et al., 1996; Hunt & Goetz, 1997; Hunt, Doering, Hirose-Hatae, Maier, & Goetz, 2001; Staub et al., 1996).

Hunt and Goetz (1997) conducted a review of 19 studies that investigated the effectiveness of inclusion for children with severe disabilities. The studies were selected based on the following criterion (a) participants were students with severe disabilities (or other stakeholders like teachers, peers, parents or students with severe disabilities) (b)

students were enrolled fulltime in the general education classroom, that is, it was a full inclusion model (c) studies in which inclusion was a background variable with other interventions occurring were excluded. The authors found that the reason there were very few studies that evaluated the educational outcomes of students with significant disabilities in the inclusion classroom was probably because inclusion was more of a result of social justice reforms than educational reforms. One of the studies discussed in the review was a single subject study of an inclusion classroom (Hunt, Doering & Hirose-Hitae, 2001). The results indicated that consistent support and implementation of instruction lead to positive outcomes for students with disabilities in developing academic skills, self-confidence as well as interaction with peers. The study involved developing a Unified Plans of Support (UPS) for three students with significant disabilities in an inclusion classroom. The key elements of this involved identifying the needs of the students, developing supports to increase academic and social outcomes of the students, collaboration and accountability. Data on student performance was gathered through observations, UPS team reports as well as work files of the students. Classroom engagement and interaction were also measured. This was done using partial interval recording using the Interaction and Engagement Scale (IES) (Hunt, Alwell, Farron-Davis & Goetz, 1996). Results of the observational data indicate that student interaction and engagement increased after providing the UPS. Hunt et al. (2001) also found upon analysis of student work, that students with disabilities were performing significantly better after the implementation of the support system in the general education classroom

in writing, spelling and math. The UPS program aimed at providing additional support and resources for the general education teacher in an inclusion classroom.

In a qualitative case study conducted by Downing et al. (1996) regarding inclusion of 3 students with severe intellectual disabilities, the author reports that while there was some improvement in social skills, self-control as well as academic skill development, the children still indicated significant difficulties at the end of the school year. The authors also report that although the students received a lot of support in the general education classroom, they were significantly below grade level. As a part of the study, teachers of students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms were interviewed. Results of these interviews indicated a change in perception of participants over time regarding the benefits of inclusion. As reported by the authors, a greater benefit was perceived for children without disabilities than for students with disabilities. These results regarding skill development of children with disabilities were also reflected in the study conducted by Cole et al. (2004) with students with mild disabilities. This study compared four groups of students: students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms, students with disabilities in pullout programs, students without disabilities in inclusion programs and students without disabilities in non-inclusive, traditional classrooms. They used the BASS pre-test and post-test in reading to compare the academic outcomes of the three groups of students. The results of this study indicate that the reading scores of students without disabilities in inclusion classrooms were the highest. Reading outcomes for students with disabilities did not significantly differ in inclusive and pullout programs as indicated by other studies (Marston, 1996).

Cawley et al. (2002) examined the science achievement of students with and without disabilities in inclusion and traditional classrooms. Participants included 114 students with LD or severe emotional behavioral disorders in a junior high school. There were two grade 7 and grade 8 general education classes and 2 special education classes with students from grade 7 and 8. One of each of the general education classes was selected for inclusion. The academic achievement for this study was measured by the district science test as well as the final average for the class. Cawley and his colleagues (2002) determined that the pass percentage of students with disabilities (69%) was comparable to that of general education students on the district wide test. The results also indicated that the behavior problems of the students with severe emotional behavioral difficulties did not affect the classroom. It was also noted that inclusion could impact students without disabilities, in that the number of referrals in the inclusion classroom was lower than the traditional classroom.

Instruction in Inclusive Education Classrooms. In inclusive education settings where children with and without disabilities spend significant time of the instructional time in the same classroom, there are some characteristics that are typically observed. According to the literature review conducted by Manset and Semmel (1997), the different programs implemented different practices including structured teaching practices, individualized instruction, frequent testing, intensive instruction, as well as reducing class size, increasing the number of teachers, using peer-supported instruction. Additionally, curricular modifications were also suggested as opposed to simply providing consultation and/or inservice training in classroom instruction methods (pp. 174-175).

Jenkins and Jewell (1994) examined the effects of an alternate approach to teaching called the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) developed by Stevens, Madden, Slavin and Farnish (1987) in reading and language arts in comparison to a control school. Components of this approach included peer tutoring, cross-age tutoring (children of older grades with fluent reading tutor children in primary grades in reading and language arts), direct instruction, partner checking, as well as supplementary instruction for children with disabilities in regular classrooms. One of the focuses of the CIRC curriculum was an emphasis on not separating students into groups based on reading abilities as well as using the same instructional materials for all children in the classroom. Pre-test and post-test design was used; measures used included the Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT), Basic Academic Skills Samples (BASS), Passage Reading Tests, Gates-MacGinite Reading Test and the Walker-McConnell Scale of Social Competence and School Adjustment (SSCSA). Results of the study indicated that students who received the CIRC curriculum showed some significant effects in areas of reading and language. While the teachers encountered some problems in eliminating reading groups, as well as issues in peer tutoring lessons, there were some academic and social gains observed in the treatment group as compared to the control group.

The literature reflects different teaching strategies implemented in different studies regarding inclusion. The next section discusses the impact of inclusion on general and special education teachers.

Inclusive education practices and its impact on general and special education teachers. One advantage of inclusive education practices that impacts the

implementation itself is that inclusion helps ensure a strong and communicative relationship between the major stakeholders involved. McPhail and Freeman (2005) contend that for integration or inclusion be realized in its fullest sense, it is essential that personnel involved in the process open their minds to the idea of inclusion, erasing the label "disadvantaged" (quotes used in original text). Researchers have also identified some disadvantages that inclusion has presented to students with LD. According to Hallahan and Mercer (2001), the debate on inclusion led to the focus on *where* (italics added) students are educated; this seemed more important than what was being taught. In an effort to illustrate some of the disadvantages of full- inclusion, the author reports that collaborative teaching, although sometimes effective, takes away precious time from the special education teacher, which may otherwise be used for instructional purposes. Also, preparing novice special education teachers to work with teachers who have had many years of teaching experience in a general education classroom may present a challenge for teacher preparation programs.

The 2008 National Council on Disability's report documented that the academic progress made by students with disabilities has increased in inclusion classrooms; there is a higher graduation rate among students with disabilities. Perceptions of state-level staff members regarding academic achievement indicated that since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), the academic achievement of students with disabilities has increased considerably, although they also contend that it cannot be solely attributed to these policies. Staff members also reported that NCLB has promoted

increased inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide assessments, particularly of students with severe cognitive disabilities.

Perceptions of inclusion. Perceptions of key stakeholders and how these may affect the implementation of inclusive education practices for students with and without disabilities is an important factor in the implementation of inclusion. Many researchers have studied the perceptions of the various stakeholders involved in the process of inclusion: students with and without disabilities, parents, teachers, administrators, principals, and other personnel working with students. Since teachers share a big responsibility in the implementation of inclusion, their perceptions and attitudes towards inclusion contributes as an important component in the implementation of inclusion programs (Kochaar & West, 1996).

Teachers' perceptions of inclusion. Since students spend the majority of their day at school with the teacher, teachers hold a great responsibility in the implementation of inclusive education practices. Research on teachers' perceptions regarding inclusion indicates that they are generally supportive of placing students with disabilities in inclusion classes (Idol, 2006; King & Youngs, 2001). However, there are some studies that indicate that general education teachers feel they are unprepared and fear working in inclusive classrooms (Idol, 2006; Kochaar and West, 1996).

Findings of a synthesis of teacher beliefs (Pajares, 1992) indicated a strong relationship between teacher perceptions and their planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices. More positive perceptions of teachers regarding inclusion were reflected in better classroom practices and instructional decisions. The author noted

however, that many of these studies used self-reported data or survey instruments, which may not be able to capture the various perceptions that teachers may hold, as well as the context in which these perceptions may be embedded. Many research scholars have studied both general and special education teacher perceptions of inclusion and have reported mixed results, with teachers having both positive and negative perceptions. Based on a comprehensive synthesis, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) reported that general education classroom teachers are generally supportive of the notion that inclusion is beneficial to students with disabilities academically, socially and emotionally; however, this varied with the disability condition, the severity of the disability and the intensity of inclusion. Similar results have been reported in other studies of teacher perceptions of inclusion (Houck & Rogers, 1994; Myles & Simpson, 1992).

In a qualitative study conducted by Scruggs and Masteropieri (1994) regarding the variables associated with successful mainstreaming, one variable identified was disability-specific teaching skills that the participants acquired through varied sources. The three teachers in the study reported that they did not have any preservice training in these skills; rather the teachers acquired the skills through experience with students with disabilities, collaboration with special education teachers and specific guidelines provided to them by the authors. Concerns raised by teachers in implementing inclusive education practices included lack of skills, training, time and resources necessary for the successful implementation of mainstreaming/inclusion. These concerns are consistent with other literature on teacher perceptions regarding inclusion and its impact on

students with and without disabilities conducted in the last few decades (Hudson, Graham & Warner, 1979; Myles & Simpson, 1989; Myles & Simpson, 1992).

Parents' perceptions of inclusion. The role and involvement of parents impacts the implementation of any program; their perceptions are therefore important in such a process. Researchers have studied the perceptions of parents of students with disabilities over the years. Interview data from 21 parents of children placed in resource room settings (Green & Shinn, 1994) indicated that majority of the parents had negative views regarding full integration of their children into inclusive education classrooms. Parents perceived that special education services provided the extra support that their children needed in order to remain on par with other students of the same age/grade level, and that resource room settings provided for social development and increased self-esteem among their children. The authors reported that the parents focused on affective attributes like teachers' caring, rather than academic success, in describing the success of the resource room program. Leyser and Kirk (2004) reported similar results in their survey of 437 parents regarding their views of inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms. Parents were generally supportive of the concept of inclusion, indicated that it had benefits for children's self-perception and believed that it promoted better understanding of individual differences. Parents of younger children and of children with mild disabilities were more supportive of inclusive educational practices. However, parents also raised concerns regarding the availability of individualized instruction in a general education classroom that was otherwise available in special education classrooms, the preparation of the general education teacher in

handling students with and without disabilities and the teachers' skills associated with providing special accommodations for their children.

To summarize, the literature regarding inclusion in the United States reflects that researchers have studied many facets of inclusive education in the last few decades. Research in India however, is very limited. The majority of the studies published are survey studies regarding perceptions of teachers in inclusion programs. There is a need to understand how schools adapt inclusive practices as well as how inclusive education is perceived by stakeholders who play an important role in implementing inclusion in schools.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how inclusion is perceived and implemented in in a private, primary school in an urban city in Southern India. Specifically, the researcher sought to understand essential stakeholders' knowledge and perceptions of inclusion in India, and especially in the context of implementation of inclusive practices in the school.

The research questions that guided this study were:

- What is the nature of inclusive practices of a private, primary school implementing inclusion?
- What does the principal know about, and what are her perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion?
- What do general education teachers know about, and what are their perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion?
- What do parents know about, and what are their perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion?

In order to explore the inclusive practices of a school and gain insight into the knowledge, perceptions and experiences of essential stakeholders, qualitative methods were used in this study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), qualitative research is "an umbrella term used to refer to several research strategies that share certain characteristics" (p.2). Qualitative research focuses on understanding a phenomenon in its social and cultural context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). According to Lichtman (2006), one of the most important theoretical distinctions between qualitative and quantitative

research is that of the nature of reality. In qualitative research, the researcher brings some frame of reference into data interpretation, thereby constructing a reality based on the researcher's lens and/or biases. In quantitative research however, the study is designed so that a reality close to the one that is hypothesized may be observed, provided the study is carefully designed in such a manner.

Experts in qualitative research have described various characteristics of qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Minichiello & Kottler, 2010). Some of the salient characteristics are:

- Qualitative research is naturalistic. Data collection in qualitative research occurs in the natural setting of the phenomenon under study. The social and cultural contexts of study are an integral part of the data gathered. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), a qualitative researcher uses fieldwork to observe occurrence of actions or events, since they are best understood in the natural setting in which they occur. Data for this study will be gathered in four inclusion classrooms. The laws governing education of persons with disabilities, the school, the administrators and teachers- all provide for the social and cultural context of data.
- There are multiple methods of inquiry in qualitative research. The two most important methods of data collection used in qualitative research are in-depth interviews and observations. Other methods of data collection include photographs, videos, personal/public documents, archival records and so on. The observations provide 'thick descriptions' (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995) of

actions in the natural setting in which they occur. The data obtained through these methods is descriptive (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

- Qualitative research is emergent. This means that as qualitative data is gathered, it could lead to further questions and thereby further data collection. This also reflects that qualitative research is dynamic and evolving as the study progresses.
- The role of the researcher in qualitative research is of utmost importance, since it is an influencing factor in not only the data collection process, but in the interpretation of data as well (Creswell, 2003). The researcher is the tool for data collection in qualitative research. There is an iterative process involved in data collection between the tool for data collection, viz. a viz. the researcher and the interpretation of the data. While discussing the role of the researcher, it is essential that the issue of research bias be discussed. This will be discussed in the next section.
- Yet another important characteristic that distinguishes qualitative research from quantitative ones is that it is holistic. That is, in qualitative research, a phenomenon or situation is studied in relation to its context in order that a complete picture may be obtained. The relationship between quantifiable variables is an important part of quantitative research, while qualitative research focuses on descriptions; "understanding how something is, and getting to understand it" (Lichtman, 2006, p.11).
- Inductive and deductive processes may be employed in qualitative studies. While the traditional approaches to research are typically deductive, qualitative research

is typically inductive. This means that the observations lead to more general theory/hypotheses development (if any). Unlike quantitative research, they do not test hypotheses, but employ a bottom to top approach. Specific observations that help identify a pattern in the phenomenon or event under study, that is, moving from a specific to a more general realm is an inductive process.

A case study approach was best suited for this study because it allowed for in-depth study of one private, primary school implementing inclusion using multiple sources of data such as interviews, observations and focus group. These were used to gain insights into the inclusive practices of the school and stakeholders' perceptions of inclusion in context of these practices.

Research Design

A phenomenon does not carry any significant meaning by itself. The individuals and events, which are a part of the phenomenon, interact to create meaning. According to Merriam (1988), a case study comprises of an "in-depth study of a bounded system" (p. 40). Case studies are particularistic and descriptive (Merriam, 1988); in other words, it is the study of a particular situation or event.

In this study, the case was defined as inclusive education in one primary school. The essential stakeholders' (principal, parents, teachers) knowledge, perceptions and experiences within the school implementing inclusion were explored. Multiple methods of data collection including interviews, focus group, observations and document analysis were used in this study. By engaging in conversations and observing how inclusion was implemented in classrooms, the perceptions and experiences of different stakeholders in

light of the philosophy of inclusion in the school, implementation of inclusion and the roles of essential stakeholders were explored.

There are few studies conducted by researchers regarding inclusion in India; many of these focus on teacher perceptions of inclusion and reflect the predominant use of survey methodology. While the results of some of these studies indicate that teachers have both positive and negative perceptions regarding inclusion, they do not provide a socio-cultural background of general education, inclusive practices, experiences of teachers or their roles in the classroom; this could limit the interpretation of their perceptions in these studies. The purpose of my study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of essential stakeholders in the context of inclusive school practices of one school implementing inclusion using case-study method.

Sampling

For the purposes of this study, I selected one primary school implementing inclusion. I explored the school practices of inclusion, and how the principal, teachers and parents of children with disabilities perceived inclusion in the context of school activities, and lived experiences of these individuals.

Study Site

I selected this city for the study because it is considered it is considered one that has an increasing number of schools enrolling children with disabilities in Southern India. There are many schools, and better access to general and special education resources in this city. It also has many special education centers that provide assessment and remediation for children with different types of disabilities

Prior to the study, I identified potential school sites using the following selection criteria:

- The school must implement inclusion at the primary grade level (Grades 1-4 or 1-5).
- The school may implement any model of inclusion (partial, full).
- The classrooms may have students with varying types and severity of disabilities.

Once schools were identified based on these criteria, I contacted the principals of the schools and provided information regarding the study. The consent letter used for participant school is provided in Appendix A. Using random sampling, I selected one school at the middle school level for a pilot study. This school implemented a full inclusion model for the majority of the students at the middle school level. Since I had established rapport with the school principal and some of the teachers during the pilot study, the same school was selected using convenience sampling for the current study.

School information. Shyamala School (pseudonym*)* was a private school, with students from pre-KG until grade 12. The school had opted to adopt inclusion voluntarily, without any compulsion due to the law or any other pressures.

There were a total of 29 children with disabilities in grades 1-4 with varying types and severity of disability. Categories of disabilities included Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Learning Disabilities, Behavior Disorders, psychological problems and Downs' Syndrome. There were two sections per grade (except grade 3, which had three sections); each section was assigned one class teacher. Some of the children with disabilities remained in the classrooms 100% of the day, others for 50% or

less of the school day. All children with disabilities received special education or other support outside the school and in private organizations.

Selection of participants

Once the school site was identified, I obtained the permission of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to recruit participants in order to begin data collection. I first contacted primary grade teachers and provided details regarding the purpose of the study along with the proposed methods of data collection. Of the teachers who agreed to participate in the study, five teachers were randomly selected. Once teacher participants were selected, I sought potential parent and student participants from the classrooms of participant teachers in order to closely examine and understand inclusive practices, perceptions and experiences of participants as they related to each other. I then randomly selected five parents for participation in the study. Student participants were initially selected in order to record any significant events or interactions between children with and without disabilities. However, due to large class sizes, seating and noise levels, I could not conduct many observations specific to children with disabilities in the classroom.

The principal. Prior to being a principal, Mrs. Sita was a teacher. The school correspondent, having interacted with her, felt that she would make an excellent teacher, and asked her to teach Kindergarten grades. She started working as a teaching after having received an undergraduate degree. She then received a degree in Bachelor of Education, followed by a postgraduate degree, at which time she became a language

teacher for middle and high school students. She was a teacher for 11 years before becoming principal of Shyamala School.

Teacher participants. Ms. Anu had an undergraduate degree in computer science and became interested in teaching when her child began going to school. She stated that being a teacher had convenient work times, and that she was able to go home early to take care of her family and child. She added that even though this was her first year, she was enjoying it, and was very happy. Taking care of her young son made her feel that she could handle young children easily; that they listened to whatever she said. "Since I was 19 or 20 years old itself [*sic*] I was interested in teaching; only thing is (the) profession I started was different", she added.

Ms. Anu was the least experienced of all the teachers; it was her first year teaching. Prior to beginning her teaching career, she did not know much about children with disabilities or how to teach them. She said that due to a lack of any prior teaching, and especially being in an inclusive class, she was slowly learning to make adjustments in her classroom. She also talked about her lack of training in special education or inclusion. She mentioned that there was a special educator who came to the school and gave a questionnaire regarding children with dyslexia, but did not follow up after that. She had not attended any in-service training either.

Ms. Jayashree took up a career in teaching after her first masters degree since it had a more convenient schedule to be able to take care of her family while working. She felt that since her children would have their holidays during summer, being a teacher, she could spend that time with her family. After having taken up a career in teaching, she

joined a second masters program. When asked about why she became a teacher, she said she loved working with children because the classroom atmosphere was a very happy one, that children were very honest; they did not lie, and she liked the openness in children.

Ms. Jayashree had worked in other schools prior to working at Shyamala School. She was initially a middle and secondary school teacher. This was her first year here, and her first year as a primary teacher. She had had some experience working with children with disabilities. She added that there was a special educator at her previous school who would do most of the teaching; the general education teacher therefore did not have the responsibility of teaching children with disabilities. She also said that classes in her previous school had 1-2 children with disabilities, while some classes in the current school had as many as 5-7 children with disabilities that one general education teacher had to handle, in addition to the 30+ other children.

Ms. Jayashree indicated that she did not receive any training in teaching children with disabilities, either in inclusive settings or special education classrooms. When asked about inservice programs, she talked about two programs she had attended; one related to children with disabilities, and the other, a spiritual program. She described how the spiritual program helped her as a teacher, especially in dealing with children. Describing the program, she said, "We should love everybody and be true to everybody. Even if they commit mistakes, we are not supposed to corner the children. We have to teach them". She felt it was the teacher's duty to make the children understand right and wrong, and that the teacher should have no ego. She also talked about an in-service program

conducted by a private organization. This was regarding children with learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysgraphia) and strategies to handle them in the classroom. However, when asked for further details, she reflected that she did not remember more details regarding the program.

Ms. Banu's had an undergraduate degree in social sciences; her experience with children with disabilities and inclusion began when she started teaching at the current school; she did not have any personal experience or interaction with individuals with disabilities before that. She had to learn skills to handle children with disabilities on the job; she had not received any pre-service or in-service teacher training in either special education or inclusive education.

When asked about why she became a teacher, she said she liked to work with children. She put herself in the place of parents of children with disabilities and that motivated her to teach an inclusive class. She also said she liked working in her current school, and that there was a certain satisfaction she felt, teaching an inclusive classroom.

Ms. Roopa also had an undergraduate degree in computer science. When asked about why she started teaching said, "Previously when I completed my B.Sc., I didn't think of this; I thought of computer profession". However, 3 years after she had started teaching, she pursued a Masters degree. She did not train to be a teacher professionally.

Five of her eight years of experience were in the current school. She had taught computer science to high school students, and English, geography and science to middle school students during her initial 2 years at the school, after which she was a primary teacher for 3 years. When asked why she was transferred from secondary to primary

grades, she said that the principal wanted young people to handle children. She also added that as a computer science teacher, she did not interact with children a lot (except two periods a week) and therefore her "real" experience with inclusive classroom in the current school was after she moved to the primary classes and had to handle them all day long, as a class teacher. In addition to being class teacher, Ms. Roopa was also the subject teacher in another classroom.

Ms. Roopa had some experience teaching an inclusive classroom in a different school. However, she added that the structure was different; the school had a special educator to whom children with disabilities would be sent to during the afternoon, while they stayed in the general education classroom during the morning classes. The ratio of students to teachers was around 20:1, and there were usually not more than 2-3 students with disabilities per class. While she had some experience in teaching children with disabilities, she commented, "Previously, I haven't seen anything this mixed. I have seen only very mild disabilities", indicating that she had a more mixed group of children in the current school, and that her experiences and perceptions had vastly changed since beginning to work at this school. She added that her earlier interactions with children with learning disabilities also helped her understand and handle young children with disabilities better.

When asked why she became a teacher, Ms. Roopa stated that she liked teaching, and she loved being around kids. When she began her career as a teacher, things went well for her and she continued in this line of work.

Ms. Akila was a veteran teacher with 11 years of teaching, was the most experienced among teacher participants. She was in-charge of monitoring the primary school and its activities, and coordinated with the principal. She had worked in other schools but had not taught children with disabilities until her 2nd year at the current school. She also indicated that prior to teaching at the school, she had no experience or interactions with either adults or children with disabilities.

In addition to an undergraduate degree, Ms. Akila had trained in Montessori and Early Childhood education. She said she received a B.Ed degree, but that it was a regular program, and did not receive any training related to children with disabilities or inclusion.

When asked about why she became a teacher, she said she liked working with children. She also indicated that she did not think she would become a teacher when she started her undergraduate studies, but by the time she had completed her Montessori training, she was passionate about teaching. She added that she loved her job at the current school and felt very comfortable working there, both with the administration and with her colleagues.

Participant teachers had between 2 and 6 students with varying types and severity of disabilities in their classrooms. The classroom demographics of participant teachers including total number of students, number of students with disabilities and types of disabilities are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Classroom demographics of participant teachers

Teacher	No. of students in class	No. of students with disabilities	Types of disabilities
Ms. Anu	37	4	Learning disabilities (LD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, intellectual disabilities
Ms. Jayashree	44	3	ADHD, mental retardation, autism, speech and communication disorders
Ms. Banu	32	3	LD, Autism, developmental disabilities
Ms. Roopa	38	2	Downs Syndrome, speech and communication disorders
Ms. Akila	34	6	ADHD, LD, hearing impairment, autism, mental retardation, Speech and communication disorders, intellectual disabilities

Parent participants. A mother of two, Ms. Prema said Shyamala School wasn't her first experience in an inclusive school. This was her first year at the current school. When asked about why she selected the current school, she indicated that she had taken her child to many schools, but did not stay in any school long enough. She accompanied her child to the classroom every day, for 2- 2.5 hours, which was the entire duration of the child's presence at school.

Also a mother of two, Ms. Saritha indicated that both her children went to in Shyamala School. She indicated that this was the first year in inclusion for her second child, prior to which the child was placed in special education in order to provide some early intervention for developmental and behavior-related issues. She expressed at the outset that she had very positive experiences with the teachers of the school.

The mother of a single child, Ms. Indira appeared very reserved during our initial interaction. She talked about her experiences of her child at the current school. She added that he was sent to a regular school prior to that. She indicated that her lack of awareness had caused her child's disability to be identified late, after which they placed him in Shyamala School.

Ms. Kavitha was the only working parent among all parents. She said she had admitted her child in Shyamala School before he was diagnosed with a disability; it was during his first year of schooling that a disability was identified. She had decided to continue his education at the same school because it was inclusive; he received additional therapy and support after school hours.

Ms. Lakshmi had the most experience at the current school among parents. She indicated that her child was a single child, and that she was a homemaker. Ms. Lakshmi also stated that her child was diagnosed with a disability only a year after he started going to school. She indicated that she had very positive experiences at the current school; she observed significant improvements in her child over time.

Data collection

An important characteristic feature of qualitative studies is the use of different methods of data collection to create a holistic representation of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2003). For the purposes of this study, I used semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group and review of records to explore participants' perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion and specifically in the context of inclusive practices of Shyamala School.

Measures

Semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviews may be used for many purposes, one of which is 'elaborated case studies'. They used to understand the underlying processes of certain phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Follow-up interviews help clarify why a participant did something that was not routine, for instance. This is also essential in understanding the phenomenon under study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

For this study, I initially developed an outline of topics based on my research questions and previous studies regarding implementation of inclusion, perceptions of stakeholders, benefits and issues in implementation of inclusion. Following this, I

identified questions for each participant group based on the topics identified. I then sought feedback from two professors, which I used to modify or add questions, and ensure that the topics selected to develop questions were complete, and addressed the research questions.

The interview protocol consists of 2 sections. In the first section, questions elicit background information about the participant. This helped in making participants feel comfortable with the process of interviews and conversations, which is key to the process of interviewing. The second section addresses participants' knowledge, perceptions and experiences in inclusion.

In developing the interview guide, I included some specific close-ended questions or probes. These were used to help bring participants' focus to the topic if they deviated from it or to clarify questions to them when they were unsure of how to respond. I also identified and used probes to gather additional details or examine certain topics that participants attributed importance to, during interviews. For instance, all participants felt that parents of children with disabilities played an important role in the implementation of inclusion. I therefore asked participants to talk in depth about their perceptions and experiences regarding the role of parents in inclusion. Appendices B, C and D contain the interview guides for the principal, teachers and parents respectively, along with additional probes and topics that guided interviews and conversations during the study.

Classroom observations. According to Brady and Collier (2004), human behavior is complex, and is best understood when observed in its natural settings. Observations of teacher participants, as well as the principal were conducted.

Observation data was used to observe teachers in the classroom settings; this data was used to supplement their responses in interviews and conversations. Field notes were used to record details of instructional practices, classroom activities, behavior management techniques, or other significant events and interactions in the classroom that pertained to inclusion. I observed the principal and used field notes to help provide insights into the working of the school, as well as her interactions with teachers and parents.

Focus group. According to Babbie (1998), focus group is "a group of subjects interviewed together, prompting a discussion". A focus group of the general education teachers was conducted at the end of the study. The purpose of this was to engage teachers in discussing topics that emerged during the study or were not discussed in sufficient detail during interviews. A focus group guide (Appendix E) was developed initially as a guide to steer discussions. Additional questions that were not discussed in detail during the individual interviews were also used as points of discussion during focus groups.

Document analysis. Public records related to disability statistics obtained from the Internet and a local library was used. For example, the national census data as well as other statistical data on persons with disabilities was used to provide the context of the status of these individuals in India. School records regarding students with disabilities were limited, and predominantly contained demographic information.

Procedures

Prior to beginning data collection procedures, I sought verbal consent from all participants (verbal assent from student participants). I provided participants details regarding the study including the procedures, risks and benefits as well as regarding confidentiality of data. I also answered participants' questions and concerns regarding the study and their participation, stressing upon the voluntary nature of their participation in the study, and the right to withdraw at any stage. Once participants gave their consent, I scheduled interview times and locations according to their convenience.

I began initial interviews with informal conversations, seeking some demographic information and general information regarding participants. This helped establish rapport with participants, especially parents. Most interviews were conducted during the school day, and in the school premises. All interviews were audio-recorded, which helped me pay attention to details of conversations with participants, and therefore ask appropriate follow-up questions.

Conversations with teachers involved strategies used in the classroom (instructional or behavioral), communication between essential stakeholders, school resources and support in implementing inclusion, role of parents and teachers and issues in inclusion. This helped shed light on how the teacher handled their classroom, as well as provide information supporting their perceptions and experiences in the classroom. I also interviewed the principal of the school regarding her perceptions and experiences as an administrator in an inclusive setup. Interviews with parents focused on their roles and experiences in the inclusive school, in addition to their perceptions about inclusion. As I

began interviewing participants, I was able to identify certain topics that were important, based on the responses of participants. For example, participants related their perceptions to their experiences and inclusive practices in the school. I therefore used probes and follow up interviews to ask participants further details in these aspects.

During the first week, prior to engaging in formal classroom observations, I observed teachers in their classrooms for a few days to establish rapport (no field note-taking during this period). After an initial interview with the teacher participants, I used field notes to observe and record the practice of inclusion in the natural setting of the classroom through regular observations. For this study, each teacher was observed on different days of the week, at different times of the day over a period of 6 weeks. The purpose of the observations was to observe inclusive practices in the classroom as well as obtain supporting data for the interviews. Observations focused on what teachers did in the classroom to accommodate children with disabilities, how they interacted with children, instructional and behavioral strategies they used, as well as physical setting of the classroom. Field notes were hand-written, and were then typed within a day into a word processing document for further analysis. I observed each teacher 4-6 times. In addition to observing teachers, I also observed the principal on 3 different days during the course of the study. During these observations, I observed her interactions with teachers or parents in her office or accompanied her if she were visiting classrooms. I used these observations to gain insights into her role and responsibilities as an administrator, her interactions with teachers and parents, as well as the general functioning of the school.

During some of these observations, I was requested to step out of the office when information was confidential or sensitive.

I used follow-up interviews and conversations from time-to-time to help clarify any inconsistencies in the data or elicit more information from participants based on their responses to interview questions or observations. For instance, I observed that teachers used a certain seating arrangement in the classroom. I was able to discuss the teachers' rationale for these arrangements, which allowed me to identify them as an important accommodation reflective of the inclusive practices of the school. Sometimes teachers also commented upon classroom activities during observations. While I did not record these conversations, I made note of them as part of classroom observations.

At the end of all interviews and observations, I conducted a focus group session with teacher participants. I used the focus group guide, along with one or two additional topics identified during the course of the study to engage teachers in a discussion. For example, during the individual interviews, teachers identified that parents played an important role in the implementation of inclusion. While teachers had discussed this during individual interviews, I used it as a point of discussion during focus group session. Teachers were able to engage in a discussion regarding some of their negative experiences with the role of parents.

Confidentiality of data

Since the number of participants was few, no personally identifiable data was collected from participants; a pseudonym was assigned to all participants. No identifying information was used anywhere in the data. All electronic data is stored in a secure folder

in a hard disk. This folder is password protected and accessible only to the researcher. For audio-recorded files, I used the pseudonym assigned in the beginning of the study for the file names. Only I had access to these audio files and once the files were coded, transcribed and data analysis complete, they were destroyed. Any paper copies of field notes and transcripts of interviews were also shredded and disposed off. Electronic copies of transcripts will be stored for at least three years. These files are encrypted and stored in a password-protected folder; only the primary researcher has access to these files.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative studies, there are different techniques used by researchers to establish internal validity. Researchers provide a number of techniques to establish internal validity of a study (Creswell, 2003). These include persistent observations, triangulation of data, member checks, participant research, using thick and rich descriptions, clarification of researcher bias and negative case analysis. In order to ensure internal validity of this study, some of these methods were used.

Researcher as instrument. For the purpose of this study, I was the instrument of all data collection and analyses procedures. I conducted all the interviews, conversation, observation and focus group. I analyzed the data collected through the lens of my experiences, attitudes and philosophies. I had to constantly revisit my perspectives, philosophies and opinions regarding inclusion and the role of stakeholders during the course of my study. As a researcher, I felt very involved and close to the participants and school, especially as the study progressed. In this section, I will attempt to state my

experiences as a special educator, which would help other readers aware of the lens through which data was analyzed.

Experiences with individuals with disabilities. I had two family members with disabilities whom I knew and interacted with, from a very young age. As a child, I knew something was different about them, but probably did not think much about it. While I knew something was different about them, they both had very distinct personalities, and thinking retrospectively, had some impact on me. They were very different people, and I could see they had very different characteristics as I grew up. At this time, I probably became interested in knowing more about why they were different. Once I began thinking of pursuing college education, and realized I was very interested in understanding individual differences among people. It was then that my father told me there were courses in special education that focused on the education of individuals with disabilities. I felt at the time, that special education would be a good career choice since I was interested working with young children too. I therefore pursued a degree in special education. In the University where I pursued my undergraduate degree, we were typically assigned as scribes to high school and college students. This gave me a chance not only to interact with these individuals, but also a unique insight into the practical difficulties they faced as students in the classroom.

Experience in schools. I worked in a resource room program as a special education teacher briefly, during my teacher preparation program. The school had children with visual impairment, hearing impairment, mild mental retardation and learning disabilities. Here, I collaborated with the head resource room teacher, and was involved in preparing

learning materials including typing material in braille, writing large print exercises for children with low vision, as well as audio material. I noticed during this time that students with disabilities liked the resource room better than their regular classroom, because all their 'friends' went to the resource room too. They spent any time they got in the resource room, and played by themselves many times. I also observed that there was very limited collaboration between general and special education teachers. I felt that the general education teachers also thought that the special education teacher would always be fully responsible for children with disabilities; and that children with disabilities did better in special schools or in the resource room. Prior to the study, I felt that most teachers might feel the same way. However, my opinion regarding general education teachers changed during the course of my study.

Outsider researcher. While I went back to a community that I grew up in and was very familiar with, I realized during the initial stages of the study, that there was some influence of my college education, and particularly of a graduate program abroad. My knowledge and understanding of inclusion was based on literature in the West, and during my initial interactions with the school I was able to identify some of the biases I held as a researcher. I had some "fixed" ideas about what inclusion should look like, and was looking for certain elements in the school and teachers. Having spoken to some professors and peers after my experience, I was able to look at the data from a slightly different perspective. I kept an open mind to the data, and was able to see that inclusion was implemented in a way that was consistent with the school goals, given the social and cultural contexts, as well as adopted to suit the needs and goals of the school.

My research questions were based on literature that reflected many different perspectives on inclusion, and how it is implemented in different schools within the United States, as well as in other countries. The social, cultural and economic of a particular region may influence how inclusion is implemented there. The literature reflects that inclusion has been both positive and negative, and there are many influencing factors in the process. Studies have also shown that administrators' and teachers' perceptions and experiences play a very important role in how children with disabilities are included in general education classes. However, I believe that the school personnel in Shyamala School were able to adapt and implement inclusion practices consistent with their goals, given their limitations and resources. In addition, stakeholders' perceptions regarding inclusion were consistent with inclusive practices in their school. Through this, and based on literature in other developing countries, I believe inclusion can be adapted successfully, and that in practice, it could be very different from school-to-school, or even class-to-class. I discussed these perspectives with the participants of the study during my informal conversations with them. I also often revisited the interview and observation data to make sure that the participants' philosophies, experiences and attitudes were best represented neutrally, and my presuppositions did not hinder the process of data collection and analyses. I was able to relate to some of cultural and social context of the study, especially with regard to challenges in inclusion, and at times, I felt like an insider. Knowing the local language was also an advantage since some of the teachers and parents felt easier and more comfortable conversing in the local language, particularly when they were talking about

sensitive issues. I took many steps to ensure that the data collected and analyzed is objective, and reflected the perceptions and lived experiences of participants and not influenced by the personal philosophies I hold.

Triangulation. Triangulation refers to consistence from multiple sources of information, was used (Creswell, 2003). According to Brantlinger (in press), this enhances the credibility of qualitative studies (Bratlinger, in press). This could be done through data triangulation (use of different data sources), investigator triangulation (use of multiple investigators) or methodological triangulation (use of multiple methods to study the same problem). For this study, multiple sources of data (interviews, observations and records) were collected for data triangulation to help reduce bias.

Member checks. In reporting the data for this study, I collaborated with the participants in order to represent their experiences and perceptions as accurately as possible. I provided participants a copy of the interview transcripts to check for accuracy of responses. I also discussed preliminary results to identify discrepancies or clarify responses with the participants.

Data Analysis

I used guidelines developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to develop codes and categories to explain data. Based on the specific data obtained through observations and interviews, I looked for emergent themes and patterns.

First, I prepared interview data to begin initial coding. For this, data was divided into individual segments; each sentence constituted a segment. Each segment was then assigned a code. Sometimes, segments were assigned multiple codes. According to

Charmaz (2006), these initial codes help categorize and summarize large chunks of data, which in turn helps analytic interpretation. During initial coding, I developed a codebook listing codes assigned to the data, along with a short description of what that code indicated. There were over 80 codes generated in the first interview. I then reviewed these codes with a professor to revise and refine them. I then coded the remainder of the interviews using these codes. New codes were added if they were generated in subsequent interviews. I revised and recoded interviews based on these revised codes. This process was continued till all interview data was coded.

Once all interview data was coded using the open coding method, focused coding was used. According to Charmaz (2006), the purpose of focused coding is to view large chunks of data based on these initial codes. In the second step, initial labels and segments of data were used to develop categories; clusters of labels were grouped into one larger category. For example, accommodations in instruction, tests and examinations and seating were combined to develop a category "classroom accommodations" in order to explain inclusive practices. Examples of initial and focused coding of sections of two teacher interviews and one parent interview are provided in Appendix F (Tables F1, F2 & F3); sample codebook definitions are provided in Appendix G. Following this, observation data was segmented into incidents. Segments were assigned codes and categories that were developed based on interview data. This helped identify data relevant to categories that helped answer research questions, and provide supporting evidence to categories identified in the interviews.

Memo writing was also used during the coding process. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), memos written by the observer, which include comments by the researcher relevant to the interview and/or observation data, may aid in adding details to the categories, comparing different aspects within and between data categories as well as in identifying gaps in data. For example, during the coding process, I felt that the roles of parents and teachers, as well as lack of special educators on staff at the school were consistent with the goals of inclusion for the school. I therefore recorded this as a memo. I then used these in the analysis and development of codes and categories, as well as to establish the relationship between the different codes and categories. In another instance, I noted that teachers' perceptions of inclusion reflected their perceptions about children with disabilities, which I recorded as another memo.

In the final step of coding, relationships were identified between categories developed in the focused coding phase. In this study, I identified that the school practiced a model of social inclusion; goals, practices and perceptions of participants were reflective of, and related to the implementation of social inclusion in the school.

During data analysis, the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to compare data, codes and categories. Data was constantly reread and codes and categories defined as they emerged. Comparisons and contrasts were with the data from different participants. Comparisons were also made between interview and observation data.

This case study helps provide rich and detailed descriptions of inclusive practices, and stakeholders' perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion in Shyamala School.

This data could provide valuable input to school administrators and educators in understanding how one school adapted inclusive practices to suit the needs and goals of their school, and how this impacted the perceptions of stakeholders regarding inclusion. Stakeholders' experiences in implementing inclusion could help identify elements of inclusion that could be successful, in addition to identifying barriers to inclusion in the context of schools in India.

Chapter 4: Findings

Interviews and observations were used to understand the implementation of inclusion in a primary school setting. In addition, the knowledge perceptions and experiences of essential stakeholders regarding inclusive education were also explored in the context of school practices. A primary school that was in its 11th year of implementing inclusive education in southern India was selected for this study. The research questions guiding the study were:

- What is the nature of inclusive practices of a private, primary school implementing inclusion?
- What does the principal know about, and what are her perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion?
- What do general education teachers know about, and what are their perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion?
- What do parents know about, and what are their perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion?

The findings of the study are presented in two sections. In the first section, I provide an introduction to the school and setting and describe practices implemented in the school. I then discuss the role of participants in implementing inclusion, and finally, I present participants' knowledge and perceptions regarding inclusion in India and in the context of inclusive practices of the school.

An introduction to the school

In India, no child under 14 years of age may be refused admission to a school for reasons of religion, caste, sex or disability, according to the Right to Education Act of 2009. However, the implementation of this law has not been very rigorous and there may be schools where children with disabilities are not admitted for various reasons. It is the general opinion that private or management schools are not obliged to admit a child, should they choose not to. Therefore, in order to understand why this particular school admits children with disabilities, I asked the principal about when and how she decided to introduce inclusion in her school.

Established in 2001 with 157 students, and with Mrs. Sita as principal, Shyamala School is run by a management. The management established Shyamala School with Matriculation curriculum, which is considered easier for many children in comparison to other curriculum (Central Board of Secondary Education, CBSE). During her initial days as principal of Shyamala School, Mrs. Sita said she interacted with many parents. According to her, some of these parents were interested in Shyamala School because their children had difficulties with the CBSE curriculum and because she was willing to admit these children as well as children with disabilities into Shyamala School. Mrs. Sita felt confident that she could help these parents because she felt Shyamala School had the resources necessary for inclusion. She added that the vice-principal and coordinator of the school provided her with a lot of support not only when she introduced inclusion, but also in sustaining the program over the years. She concluded with, “My door is open to all children”.

The physical setting of the school and classrooms

The school was a large compound divided into three sections, each with its own enclosure. One of the enclosures contained the primary school, the second a Boys' middle and high school and the third was the co-ed middle and high school. The primary school also shared space with a college run by the same management. When one entered the primary school enclosure, one immediately saw a small playground with a swing, a slide and a few others pieces of play equipment. Directly in front of you were the pre-primary classrooms. There were two large rooms; each of these was divided into two sections with wooden dividers. Each section contained was one pre-primary classroom. Along the right side, up a small flight of stairs, was a corridor with another two classrooms. There were a total of five classrooms on the ground floor; the remaining classrooms were on the first floor. Grades 1 and 2 were on the first floor; grades 3 and 4 on the second floor.

All classrooms were open; the doors and windows were always kept open. One could hear children from other classrooms or sometimes from outside. Each classroom had rows of long benches; each bench seated 3-4 children. The benches typically faced the blackboard, which was placed on the front wall of the class. The teacher's desk was near the blackboard, on one side of the classroom. Sometimes, teachers adjusted the placement of the benches to suit their needs. Ms. Banu placed benches to resemble a horseshoe so that children could see each other as they interacted in the classroom. In some classrooms, teachers placed benches along the wall (in addition to the ones facing the blackboard), in order to accommodate a larger class size. Ms. Jayashree placed one

bench close to her desk to seat children she wanted to closely monitor. Each classroom also had a cupboard which the teacher uses to store student notebooks or other teaching-learning material. This particular school was in a locality that had scheduled power outages everyday, between 12:00 and 2:00 PM.

All classes were held in assigned classrooms in the primary school building and the class teachers spent most of the day with the same group of children. They were however, taken to the high school once or twice a week, when they had "audio-visual" classes. Two classes were typically combined for this activity. The students were taken in a group to the audio-visual room in the high school building, which was equipped with a projector, was air conditioned and kept dark. Teachers screened movies during audio-visual classes, which continued each week, until the entire movie was watched. The children and teachers enjoyed this, and looked forward to it. It also provided much needed respite from the heat.

School sessions

The school year was divided into three terms. Teachers collaborated with their colleagues to plan lessons term-wise. For example, they would teach the first 5 lessons in the textbook in the first term, the next 3 lessons during the second term and the final 4 lessons during the final term. At the end of each term, there was an examination: a quarterly exam at the end of the first term; the half-yearly at the end of the second; and the year-end final exam for the third. In addition, mid-term tests were administered for each term.

In the lower primary grades, each class was assigned one class teacher. This teacher was in charge of teaching multiple subjects (English, Mathematics, Moral Instruction, Science and Social Science). However, in grades 3 and 4, class teachers taught all subjects except mathematics; a different teacher taught mathematics. There were also additional teachers for music and arts, physical education, as well as second language for all classes.

School-wide practices and goals

In this section, I will describe practices that were commonly used across grades in the primary school. These help provide a context for understanding the principal's goals for children in primary classes as well as the expected roles of the general education teacher in the school setting.

Notebook checking. 'Notebook checking' was a practice where students from all classes submitted their notebooks once in a while, and either a head teacher or assigned teachers would check these notebooks. This was done to ensure that every child was regularly completing his/her work. It also ensured that the teachers were checking the notebooks of all children routinely, during classroom instruction.

Ms. Akila described the practice as "checking students' notebooks and making corrections; [to see] whether students have completed the notes on time, and the handwriting aspect". This practice was different from the class teacher checking the notebooks of students soon after a task had been assigned during classroom instruction.

Board copying. 'Board copying', as the teachers described it in their conversations, seemed to be an important skill that students had to develop during their

years in the primary school. It meant that the child should be able to copy everything that the teacher writes on the board. At the end of each lesson in the textbook, teachers wrote responses to most or all exercise questions on the blackboard; children copied these to their notebooks. Teachers gave specific instructions to children about which notebook they must copy the material into, how exactly it must be copied and so on. When asked about this practice, teachers felt that copying from the board helped reinforce learning in young children during their formative years of learning. This, in fact, was a goal that teachers emphasized they wanted children with disabilities to be able to achieve.

Practicing conversational English. The school insisted that children speak in English while they were at school, especially since the medium of instruction was mainly English. Many children were first generation learners; their parents or other significant elders at home did not speak English. This is an important goal in the context of many schools in India where English is the first language. Ms. Anu commented, "So nowadays I am not at all allowing them to talk in Tamil in class because this is an English medium school right"? Ms. Banu also noted that she never spoke to her students in Tamil, and encouraged them to speak in English as much as they could, even if they made errors once in a while.

Every morning, teachers practiced conversational English with students. They selected two or three questions each day, and wrote them on the board. They then provided students with the correct response. Through drill and practice, children repeatedly practiced the responses for these questions. Examples of questions were "What did you eat for breakfast, what does your father do or what is the name of your

school?" The children wrote the questions and the appropriate responses in their notebooks; the teachers immediately corrected and gave them feedback if required. The following day, the teachers and students practiced questions from the previous day, before new questions were introduced. This was practiced in every class, everyday.

Personnel meetings. In many schools, meetings between the parents and teachers, the principal and parents, or among staff are formal, and are typically scheduled at specific times during the school year. The school personnel contact parents if they request a meeting for any reason. Similarly, the parents contact the school ahead of time if they wish to meet with the principal or teachers. In Shyamala School, some formal parent-teacher meetings were scheduled at the end of each term when the teachers gave the results of the term-examinations. During this time, parents (of all children) met with the teacher, and discussed the performance of the child in the classroom in general, and specifically in the examination. However, parents also met teachers at any time during the school year, during or after school hours. Teachers said parents of children with disabilities met with them during these unscheduled meetings to discuss the progress of the child. Teachers also used these meetings "to guide them [parents] in what way they [children with disabilities] can improve, about especially their behavior, based on their [parents'] own assessment [*sic*]". Teachers said they spoke to parents about conversing in English at home when possible, since it was an English medium school.

Prior to enrolling a child in the school, the principal met with the child and his or her parent. In addition, she also met with them during the academic year. There was a difference between meetings with the parents of children with and without disabilities.

The academic coordinator talked to parents of individually, and gave them information regarding the progress of the child. These meetings are also used to get feedback from the parents about how they felt the child was progressing.

Before the start of each term, staff meetings were held with the principal to discuss plans for the following years and school events such as annual day, sports day or Independence Day celebrations. Additionally, teachers met with each other at the beginning and end of the academic year; they did not schedule formal meetings on a regular basis. They met with each other if, and when they needed to; their interactions with their colleagues were mostly informal. Ms. Akila said, "Staff meetings are about our classroom interactions with the children". Teachers also indicated that they shared ideas and information regarding common tasks like notebook checking and lunch duty.

A typical day in the primary school

The school day began at 8:50 A.M. but teachers and students began arriving at about 8:00 A.M. Students arrived either by bicycle (common among older students), by private transportation (vans, auto rickshaws) or with their parents. When they arrived, students placed their bags in the classroom. When the bell rang for morning assembly, the teachers asked the children to stand in a line; the children were then escorted towards the open ground in the high school. Students and teachers of all classes from Pre-KG through 12th standard participated in the school assembly. The students stood in rows, class-wise. The teachers of pre-primary and primary classes stayed close to the students until the end of the assembly in order to monitor them and ensure that decorum was maintained. Once

the assembly began, the gates of the school closed. Any student who was late was not allowed to participate in the assembly.

Morning assembly began with prayer, followed by the reading of brief current news events and a quote or 'thought for the day' by students. Older students were responsible for these tasks. Then, the teachers or principal announced upcoming school events, or student achievements in either academics or extra-curricular activities. Following this, the students recited the National Pledge, which is an oath of allegiance to the country (Wikipedia, n.d.). Many schools recite this national pledge in different Indian languages during school assembly or occasions like Republic Day or Independence Day. Typically, a senior student recited the pledge, and the other students repeated after him or her. Finally, the students sang the Indian National Anthem.

After the assembly, teachers of pre-primary and primary classes escorted the students back to their respective classroom. Teachers typically did not escort middle and high school students to their classrooms; however, there were one or two teachers who stayed close to the students and instructed them to walk in line and not run in the corridors. All students were expected to attend the school assembly and return to their classes in line with their classmates.

One or more teachers were responsible for addressing students who missed school assembly because they were late. If students regularly arrived late, the parents were contacted and steps taken to ensure that all students arrived on time. Classes began once students returned to their classrooms. In the primary school, children with disabilities joined the class after morning assembly or as late as 10:00 AM.

In primary classes, the class teacher typically taught most or all of the subjects. Before beginning instruction, the teacher took class attendance. It involved the teacher calling out the name of each student to which, they responded with “Present miss”. Following this, the teacher practiced conversational English by introducing two simple conversational exchanges, which pertained to regular day-to-day activities. The teacher asked the students the questions they learned the previous day and students responded. After this, the teacher wrote two new questions and answers on the board, which the students were asked to write in their notebooks. Questions were of the type “What does your mother do?” or “What is your sibling’s name?” Students were taught to answer these in complete sentences. The teacher then asked individual students to answer the question, and used drill and practice for about 5-10 minutes. It was after this exercise that regular instruction began.

The students went through their classes according to the timetable provided at the beginning of the year. The timetable at the school indicated that instruction in the academic subjects was scheduled during the morning session, especially for lower primary classes. The afternoon session mostly consisted of non-academic classes including dance or music, physical training classes, art classes, yoga or other activities (Cubs and Bulbuls), with a smaller number of academic classes.

Students were given two breaks during the day. At 11:15 AM, the students had a 15-minute recess. During this time, the students took their snack boxes and water bottles to the corridors outside the classroom and sat along the walls to eat. Students were not allowed to eat inside the classroom since it may cause it to become messy or dirty. Like

many other schools in India, Shyamala School did not have a lunchroom or cafeteria in the school. The students therefore sat in the corridors or in the school playgrounds under the shade of the trees to eat their meal or snack. Children in pre-primary and primary grades were typically seated in the building corridors during lunch or snack breaks. Sometimes teachers walked around the corridor to ensure that students ate, and did not waste any food they brought with them. The principal and teachers of this school insisted that students bring healthy snacks like fruits rather than fast food or fried food. This was part of an initiative to make children start eating healthy food at an early age. The teachers communicated this to the parents as often as possible. After their break, the students returned to their respective classes to continue with their classes.

At 12:30 PM, the students had their lunch break. Again, students sat outside their classrooms (except one class, where the teacher and students lunched together in the classroom) to eat their lunches. Teachers had their lunch inside the classroom. They supervised children during lunch break to make sure that the children ate all their food, and did not waste or take any food back home. When students returned to their respective classrooms, a caretaker (called an *ayah* in India) swept the corridor clean of spills from the lunch. Additionally, since teachers were with the class almost all day, they were served tea in the classrooms, once in the morning and once in the afternoon.

At the end of the school day, one saw a steady stream of children running out of school to meet their parents, or to their respective rides home.

A typical class period in the primary school

Classroom instruction typically involved the teacher delivering instruction to the whole group, with teacher-lecture taking up the predominant part of the instructional time. Reading and writing were also important aspects of instructional time.

When a teacher introduced a new topic, she began instruction by telling students what she would teach in that class period. She then introduced the topic by asking the students questions about concepts that they had already learned and that related to the new topic. If however, the teacher continued teaching a concept she had introduced earlier, she asked the students review questions based on the previous class period. When the teacher put forward questions to the entire classroom, she told the students that they should not shout out the answer. She told the students to raise their hands if they knew the answer, and then she called upon one or more students to respond to the question. If the student gave a correct response, she repeated the response so that all the students could listen to it. If the student gave an incorrect response, she asked another student to respond. At other times, when the teacher put forth a question to the entire class, students responded chorally.

There were textbooks for every subject (content area and languages). Additionally, there were supplementary books for certain subjects. For instance, students in Standard 3 had a supplementary book for Science, with certain activities related to the content in their textbook. For example, if the students were learning about leaves, there was an exercise that involved collecting and pasting different types of leaves in the supplemental book. Social studies and English were the other subjects that sometimes

had supplementary books. Parents could buy textbooks for their children through the school once the school ordered them. All students were required to buy textbooks, supplemental textbooks and notebooks. Teachers provided specifications about how many notebooks students needed for each subject; it was mandatory that students buy these based on the teachers' instructions. The textbook was typically used during most, if not all classes. Sometimes, the teacher read from the book and then provided additional explanations to concepts she taught. At other times, the teacher explained the concept, and then asked the students to read aloud from the textbook. Once this was done and the teacher completed introducing/teaching the topic, the students were asked to work on the exercises at the end of the lesson. There was an emphasis on rote memory learning of textbook material. For exercise questions that involved longer responses (like understanding a phenomenon, or explaining a process or concept), the teacher read the question, asked the children to open their books to a specific page and told them to mark the expected in their respective textbooks. Students then copied these verbatim into their notebooks. The children were then asked to learn this response for the exams.

In primary grades, and especially in lower primary classes, teachers typically gave students a lot of time for 'board copying'. The teachers went around the classroom ensuring that children were copying material correctly per their instructions. The students then took their notebooks to the teacher's desk where she checked them and made corrections. If the teacher decided to assign any homework, it was written on the blackboard on one side, along with verbal instructions. This was left on the blackboard for the entire day.

Implementation of Inclusion in India

In this section, I address participants' knowledge and perceptions regarding inclusion in India, and in the context of the school. I begin with their goals for children with disabilities in inclusion classrooms, school administrative practices related to assessment, placement, provision of services and planning in the school. Following this, I discuss classroom practices related to accommodations provided to children and the role of teachers and parents in inclusion. I then present participants' knowledge regarding inclusion in India, perceptions regarding who can be included and whether inclusion or special education is better, benefits and issues in inclusion as well as suggestions for improving inclusion. Participants' perceptions regarding best practices in instruction and behavior as well as the role of parents and teachers will also be discussed. In addition to participants' perceptions regarding inclusion, their general perceptions regarding children with disabilities are also included in this section.

Based on the data, the school implemented a social model of inclusion. The services provided by the school and the overall perceptions of the principal, teachers and parents regarding inclusion are consistent with a social model of inclusion. Data also indicated that experience in inclusive schools shaped how teachers and parents knew about and perceived inclusion.

Setting social goals for students in inclusion

The goals of inclusion for children with disabilities were predominantly consistent across participants with some discrepancies between the goals of parents and those of school personnel (principal and teachers).

The principal stated that the key goal for students with disabilities was holistic development, with less emphasis on scoring marks in examinations, more emphasis on learning appropriate social behavior and on developing children's talents. Academics were not given much importance until after 4th standard; it was important that the child adjust to school during his or her initial years. The principal said, "I generally believe that evolving into good human beings is more important than setting goals".

When I initially asked the teachers what goals they set for their students with disabilities, they did not talk about academic goals but about affective goals. Ms. Jayashree said, "The children should love their school first. They should love their teacher and only then they can love their subjects" indicating that children should enjoy going to school, as well as feel safe in that environment.

Teachers also discussed the importance of socialization. They felt that children with disabilities needed to learn to socialize with their peers. Ms. Jayashree commented, "My thing is I don't want these special children to [only] become very good in their academics. I want those children to behave normally and socially with others". Ms. Anu concurred, "Academics I am not worried; I am not going to force him. First they have to settle down in the class. That is very important because they are mingling with the normal children". Teachers also wanted children with disabilities to learn to play and share things with their peers and friends, communicate at a basic level (for example, ask the teacher if they needed to drink water, or use the bathroom) and know how to behave if they went to another classroom or if another teacher came into their class. They stressed the importance of these goals, given that children with disabilities had difficulties in these

aspects. They felt these goals were most important aspects for children to acquire at a young age and that children with these skills would be better prepared for the future.

In addition to behavioral and social goals, teachers also felt that young children must learn good values like respecting elders or peers in the classroom, in their early years. Many primary teachers in India feel responsible for imparting values to children in their classrooms since children spend most of the day in the school with their teachers and peers. Typically, goals focused on children's character development, especially in aspects of communication and decision-making. Teachers also talked about developing qualities like good manners, good behavior and respect towards elders. They felt that during early school years, it was important that children learn how to sit in the classroom, appropriate classroom behavior like "asking for sorry if they commit a mistake [*sic*]" or "how to get excuse when they enter into the classroom [*sic*]" and follow basic instructions the teacher may give in the class. Ms. Anu commented, "I think I should bring these children [up] in a good way; [teach] good manners, teach good discipline". These were some of the common affective aspects teachers focused on, as children progressed through primary school.

I then asked teachers two follow-up questions: first, what, if any, were the academic goals they had for the children in their classrooms; and second, how did they teach students the social and behavioral tasks they needed to reach their goals.

While academic goals were secondary to social and behavioral goals, especially for children with disabilities, Ms. Jayashree indicated that children with disabilities must learn basic reading and writing skills and that it was her responsibility to ensure that they

did. She commented, “If they are not reading at all, you should make them read. The thing is that they should understand the concept of the lessons, whatever is there in the lessons”. She added that while it was not her primary goal, she wanted children with disabilities to learn some basic academics.

When children with disabilities were comfortable in the classroom and had some communication skills, teachers were able to, with some accommodations, focus on academics. Ms. Banu indicated that she focused on one of the school goals in her class, namely, developing students’ conversational skills in English. She said she focused on this, “[because] they should know how to converse in English because all [of the students] are from the lower middle class”. As far as children with disabilities were concerned, she focused on this aspect so that they may at least be able to communicate at a basic level, both at school and outside school. Other teachers discussed this aspect of focusing on communication in English as well, but not when they were asked about academic goals. They indicated that they practiced conversation in English as a part of an effort by the principal to make students comfortable conversing in English.

Parents’ goals for their children with disabilities. In India, parents have the responsibility of providing additional supports in the education of their children. In Shyamala School, parents have additional responsibilities in supporting their children in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, parents’ goals reflect the importance of their children developing independence. Parents had both behavioral and academic goals, but behavioral goals took precedence over academic ones. All parents indicated that their children had certain behavioral and social issues, which they would like addressed.

One of the parents' main goals for their children with disabilities was to learn to socialize with other children. A long-term goal of ensuring that children learn to socialize with peers was that it not only led to self-improvement, but also eventually led to children being able to learn what other children their age know. By socializing with other children, parents felt their own child could acquire behavior that is appropriate for children their age and also make the child less dependent on the parent. Ms. Kavitha said, "He has to be more independent on his own without any support". Ms. Prema felt that while her child was almost able to write independently, he still depended on her to hold his hand as he wrote. Her goal therefore, was to make him write independently, as well as stay in class without her support. Ms. Saritha wanted her child to listen to other children so that he would acquire some speech. She said, "If he has a headache or stomach ache, that he should be able to tell; that is enough, he doesn't even have to talk as much as we do".

Reducing inappropriate behaviors was another goal parents discussed. For example, Ms. Kavitha talked about her son's impulsive behaviors. She said, "That characteristic of his, he gets angry very quickly; he gets emotional very quickly. Those are the things that I want to change in him".

Two out of five parents talked about their children's interest in extracurricular activities, and how they felt it was important to nurture their interests in these aspects. Ms. Kavitha said her child was very interested in music. She said, "We wanted him to also have some activity besides education; so far we have had to focus on academics because he couldn't write or read. We just had to focus on teaching him letters and things

like that", indicating that since his basic skills in reading and writing were improving, she was comfortable focusing on non-academic interests.

Administrative practices in the primary school

In this section, I describe the administrative practices in the primary school. The school adopts these practices with regard to providing inclusive education; they are consistent with participants' goals of social inclusion.

Assessment, placement and provision of services. Schools enrolling children with disabilities either in inclusive classrooms or resource room programs typically have at least one and at times, multiple special educators on staff. However, while Mrs. Sita decided to offer inclusive education in her school, her staff included no special educators, psychologists or other support personnel for children with disabilities. According to her, she consulted with one or two special educators when she needed support or information. These special educators specialized in assessment and intervention for children with different types and severity of disabilities including autism and developmental disabilities or learning disabilities. In particular, there was one special educator in the neighborhood that recommended placing some children with disabilities in Shyamala School; he sometimes also worked with these children in the school setting. This lack of special educators on the staff reflected the primary goal of social inclusion at the school.

The parents of children with disabilities were primarily responsible for ensuring that their children received special education and other support services like occupational therapy or physical therapy outside the school itself since the school did not offer any of these services. They had assessments conducted at centers that provided such services,

and then submitted them to the school during the admission process. Any additional assessments required while the child was enrolled in the school were also the responsibility of the parents. While most children received special education services outside school, parents could either accompany their child or arrange for a special educator to come to the child's classroom everyday for a certain period of time. In two of the four classrooms observed during this study, two children (one from each class) received support from independent special educators for 1-2 hours each day. In one of the classrooms, a parent accompanied a child to the classroom every day.

Children with disabilities were allowed to remain in the classroom for part of the day; they could use the rest of the day for receiving special education and other support services that they required, since the school did not provide these. The number of hours each child stayed in the school depended on the needs of the child. This was discussed with the principal and class teacher at the beginning of the school year. However, teachers indicated that as the children grew older, they tried to increase the time they spent in the classroom. Based on my observations, some students spent less than half of the school day at school while others stayed at school for the entire school day. Ms. Lakshmi said that flexible school timing during early school years helped her son since "it is convenient to take them to classes, and rest after that and settle down. Otherwise if it is normal school, after 3 or 4 o'clock, taking them to classes is difficult".

General educators in an inclusive classroom: Collaboration. The teachers were not trained in special education or inclusive practices. When asked how they handled children with disabilities, they stated that they learned techniques 'on-the-job'

that involved observing the behavior of children with disabilities in their classrooms. The principal said, “And also experience you know, since they [teachers] have handled the child for a year, they know the symptoms better than others; that way they are equipped, not that they are trained elsewhere [they do not have a degree in special education]”. Some teachers discussed collaborating with other teachers in the primary school, parents and special educators of children with disabilities.

All teachers stated that they found it helpful to talk to parents about their children. Some of the teachers sought the help and support of parents when they are unable to manage a child in the class. For example, Ms. Jayashree said she called the mother of one of the children into her class for a few days since she was having some difficulty controlling the behavior of the child. Ms. Akila also discussed using this strategy with one of the children in her classroom.

Teachers typically involved parents in the classroom as follows:

- The parent could come every day and copy whatever the teacher wrote during classroom instruction on the blackboard of a child with disability was unable to do ‘board copying’, which was an important aspect of classroom instruction. I observed this across multiple classes.
- Teachers said they sought the help of parents during examinations according to the needs of the child, in preparation and implementation of examinations. In preparing test and exams, teachers either collaborated with or requested that parents themselves prepare a question paper. This practice was used more frequently in the lower primary classes; teachers tried to make children with

disabilities write the same examination that their peers wrote as they progressed from lower to upper primary classes. Sometimes, parents also acted as scribes for their own children. As scribes, they would read questions out to the child. They sometimes provided simple prompts while the child wrote the answers and/or assisted them by holding the child's hands and guiding them. However, at least two teachers expressed some dissatisfaction with this practice based on their experiences. "What she'll do is she will prepare the question paper, give it to the child and expect us to give full marks on the paper for her to take home", said Ms. Jayashree, speaking of her experience with one of the parents. The teachers felt that it was unfair to other children in the classroom who worked hard to prepare for the examinations.

- If the teachers felt they couldn't handle a child on any given day, they sought the help of the parent. It was also observed that when the teacher was unable to manage the behavior of a certain child, and it disrupted the rest of the classroom significantly, the parent was asked to either accompany the child in the classroom till he/she settled down, or the child was removed from the classroom for a day or two. Teachers expressed feeling overwhelmed and frustrated when children disrupted the classroom.

The principal said teachers worked in tandem with special educators. However, teacher responses indicated that they interacted with parents to a greater extent than with special educators. Teacher interactions with special educators were predominantly indirect and through parents. Parents acted as a mediator between teachers and the special

educator, and informed the class teacher regarding what was taught in special education. While data indicated that teachers didn't always collaborate directly with the special educator, three out of five teachers felt that collaborating with the special educator could be beneficial to the child. Ms. Akila said, "Special educator maybe they'll be able to guide us regarding the academics part and the social behavior [*sic*]". Conversations with teachers did not however indicate that they were fully aware of details regarding what the special educator was teaching the children with disabilities.

Ms. Roopa felt that general education teachers in the primary grades did not collaborate much since one teacher was assigned to each class and this teacher taught the main academic subjects. When teachers were assigned children with disabilities in their classroom at the beginning of an academic year, they typically sought the help of the previous class teacher of those children; they sought information and tips regarding how to handle children with disabilities. Conversations with teachers indicated that they felt very comfortable with each other, were always open to suggestions from other teachers, and sought help when needed. Ms. Jayashree said, "Sometimes we might have a doubt regarding the students or we have some doubt in English. Then I'll go and ask the other teacher who is nearby and I used to ask [clarifications in] spellings also". I also observed this easy communication and collaboration among teachers during one observation session when one of the teachers sought the help of another teacher regarding a question she had while she was teaching class. Teachers also collaborated in implementing school practices like 'notebook-checking' or lunch duty.

Classroom practices in the primary school: Accommodations

The school had a social model of inclusion; social goals typically took precedence over academic ones, especially in the lower primary classes. There was a gradual increase in academic expectations and goals as the children progressed from lower to the upper primary classes, and eventually to secondary schooling. Despite limited academic goals, classrooms portrayed inclusive practices through certain classroom accommodations with regard to the teaching-learning process. Some teachers stated that accommodations helped in social and academic inclusion. Initially, when asked about what changes they had made in their classes to accommodate children with disabilities, teachers were unable to think of examples except for accommodations in examinations. So I began by asking questions based on my observations of the physical setting of the classroom, seating and instruction.

Data indicated that broadly, teachers provided accommodations in seating, classroom instruction, and in examinations. These accommodations were individual to the classroom and students, and did not necessarily always reflect school-wide practices. All teachers spoke about the accommodations provided during examinations; there was minimal to no instructional modification or accommodations during instruction.

Seating. During classroom observations I noted that students were seated in a specific manner in each class. In many schools, especially ones with large class sizes, teachers use seating arrangements as tools for better classroom management. With this in mind, I asked each teacher about seating arrangements in their classrooms.

One common element I observed was that in no class were children with disabilities made to sit next to each other. Teachers unanimously opined that they wanted children with disabilities to mingle with their peers so that they could learn age-appropriate social skills and classroom behavior through imitation. Teachers felt that children with disabilities tended to imitate negative behavior characteristics if they sat next to each other. Ms. Anu observed, "If they all sit together, the problem is they'll start doing something. They themselves will start shouting, fighting or screaming. That's why I make them sit like that".

Sometimes children were made to sit next to the teacher's desk. This technique was used when the teacher felt the need to give personal attention to a child, especially if he or she had any behavior issues. Ms. Banu said, " The ones who sit in the corner are relaxing over there. So I make them sit in the front". One teacher had made a child with hearing impairment sit in the front row so that the child could use lip-reading to follow the teacher's instructions.

Ms. Akila had some unique experiences with one or two children with disabilities in her classroom. She said they did better in the classroom if they did not sit too close to her desk. She felt that her constant presence or direct instructions could be a distraction to these children; they were perhaps unaware of how to behave appropriately or follow directions. By not having too much eye direct eye contact with them, she said was able to handle them better over the course of the day.

Some teachers paired children with disabilities with a peer without disability they identified by observing interactions between children in their classrooms. Teachers who

used this strategy felt it was successful in social and academic aspects. In social aspects, it helped the teachers handle children with disabilities and especially in keeping any negative behaviors from disturbing the entire classroom.

Such seating arrangements were also helpful when the teacher gave specific instructions to students during classroom instruction. For example, when the teacher instructed the class to take out a specific book or notebook, peers helped children with disabilities. Peers also helped keep a child with disability focused on the task; they deliberately brought the child's attention back to the task on hand if he or she got distracted. In one instance, the peer who was paired with one of the children also prevented him from getting into a fight with another child. Peers assisting children with disabilities also provided some help during examinations; this will be discussed in detail in the section regarding accommodations in examinations.

Instructional planning, classroom instruction and homework. Teachers were asked to discuss how they planned and provided instruction in the classroom. Typically, they did not develop individual lesson plans for students each year. The school practice involved all teachers teaching a particular grade level to decide how many lessons would be taught each term. Each teacher then paced the lessons according to their individual classes. Teachers used material prepared during previous years to teach students in subsequent years, and only changed things when they needed to.

Classroom learning often involved alternating between listening to the teacher teaching the lesson, and board copying. Teachers focused on developing reading, writing and conversation skills during classroom instruction. Data indicated that teachers did not

use any new instructional strategies in their classrooms; special educators typically taught academic material by modifying instruction to suit the needs of children with disabilities.

Teachers' practices included changes in the pace of instruction and the provision of additional time during classroom instruction. They used these practices based on their observations of how the children seemed to learn a concept. Ms. Akila said, "Maybe one day they may be able to learn objectives [multiple-choice questions] as well as question and answers, another day you know they'll be in a very lazy mood. So, then we'll postpone [teaching the lesson to another time]".

First, teachers took breaks or taught for shorter durations of time when they felt the students were not responding adequately. I recorded an instance of this accommodation during one classroom observation session. Typically, there were scheduled power outages for 2 hours everyday. However, once in a while, there was an 8-hour power outage. On one such daylong power outage, the classrooms were very hot; the students were restless and seemed less attentive. On this day, Ms. Jayashree used part of the morning session to teach a short lesson, and then spent some time playing games and providing other light activities like making the children draw, or sing. When asked about this, she indicated that it was important to teach children when they were more attentive and be relaxed when they were not. In many classes, teachers either did not teach during prolonged power outages or asked students to write or do other activities that were not very rigorous. Ms. Anu also indicated she used this accommodation in her classroom. According to Ms. Anu, "Those who know [how to write] are writing, those who don't are sitting quietly. But I am making them write slowly, am giving test slowly".

With one child with a disability in her classroom, the teacher allowed the child to write when she felt like it; at other times the teacher herself wrote in the child's notebooks. The teacher did not wish to comment upon one child whose parent was constantly in the classroom, helping him. I also observed that she did not communicate much with the parent or child in the classroom.

Second, teachers provided additional time for children with disabilities to complete tasks such as writing assigned during classroom instruction. Ms. Jayashree indicated that she gave all her students some extra time for tasks related to board copying so that they could learn the concept well. Ms. Roopa said she used trial and error to determine whether the teaching methods she used in class worked successfully with the group of students she had. Regarding reading modifications she made, Ms. Jayashree said, "So, for the other children I am asking them to read a whole sentence, I'll just ask these children [with disabilities] to read the spelling of 'is', 'and', 'was', 'at'—two or three-letter words I'll ask. So this is the way I am doing academics for these kind of children".

Lastly, a less used practice was the use of a special educator, parent or caretaker in the classroom to provide additional supports to a child with disability. The school did not provide a special educator or caretaker; parents had to make these arrangements for their child after seeking the approval of the principal and teachers. Parents of some children regularly visited the classroom at the end of the day. This practice was used when a child was unable to copy anything the teacher might have written on the blackboard or when the child was absent for a few days. In Standard 1, there was a child

whose parent accompanied him. He only spent 2-2.5 hours during the morning at school and the parent was present with him at all times. She helped him copy notes from class, she taught him what was taught in class; the teacher did not seem to interact with the child, except when his notebook was checked. In the same class, another child had a special educator who came for an hour or two every day, followed by a caretaker. The teacher indicated that the special educator slowly introduced board copying and lessons taught in the classroom alongside other concepts, if required. There was a similar situation with a different special educator for a child in Standard 3. Ms. Banu indicated that the special educator did not teach what she taught in class; they interacted once in a while to discuss the progress of the child. Observations indicated that the class teacher interacted with this child casually on many occasions as she did with her other students, but the child was not involved in classroom instruction.

Assigning students homework is a practice in many schools in India. While there are individual teachers who may not assign students homework on a regular basis, many teachers consider it an essential aspect of the learning process. Three of the teacher participants assigned the same homework to the entire class, but did not expect children with disabilities to complete all of it. One of the reasons for this was that these children went to special education or therapy classes during evenings and weekends, and therefore would not be able to complete as much work as the other children. Ms. Akila said she gave students reading practice and grammar exercises as homework since the school was trying to push development of English skills among young children. Ms. Jayashree

however felt differently, in that very young children should not be given homework since they were already in school for 6-8 hours a day.

Examinations. In Shyamala School, children with disabilities took tests and examinations along with their peers, with all teachers providing some accommodation to suit the individual needs of each of these children. Broadly, accommodations were provided for students writing examinations independently, with the help of their peers without disabilities, teachers or parents. Accommodations were either provided in three different aspects: preparation, administration and grading of tests/examinations.

Preparation of tests and examinations. In preparing tests and examinations, either the teacher, the parent or both played a role. Preparing a separate question paper or changing question patterns for the examination were the most common accommodations.

Ms. Roopa indicated that she collaborated with the special education teacher to prepare separate question papers for children with disabilities. She said, "We'll give them separate papers. So the special educator will inform us, what all concepts they have covered, what all we have to ask. Based on that we'll make a question paper". However, no other teacher discussed collaborating with special educators for this purpose. Ms. Anu felt that while she did not have experience in preparing special papers for examinations, she tried to make the children with disabilities write slowly, both in class as well as in tests and exams.

Teachers also sometimes changed the pattern of the question paper to suit the needs of the children with disabilities. Ms. Jayashree eliminated fill-in-the-blanks and gave multiple-choice questions if she found that children were able to better respond to

these formats. At times, she asked them to underline the correct answer rather than write it out. She also used awarding additional points in elements like drawing and neatness. She felt this would help all students, "The final question paper will have to be the same, but change the question pattern so that even the weak students can write the exam well".

As discussed earlier, teachers involved the parents of children with disabilities by either seeking their help in preparing a separate paper, or requesting the parent to prepare it themselves to suit the needs of individual children. Parents developed a special question paper for their own child, if required, which the class teacher approved prior to the exam. Three of the teachers sought the help of the parent to develop special questions for children for their exams. Ms. Akila however felt that this practice should be reduced over time so that children with disabilities may gradually be introduced to higher academic goals, and regular classroom practices. "Last year, when Raja was in 3rd standard, his mother used to prepare the question paper for him. So [now] he is able to do the normal paper that everyone is writing. Raja is able to do the whole thing, but he will take a long time to do it; extra half an hour or something", she added. However, when a parent prepared separate question papers for their children, they had to take the exam in the school library, and were supervised by the vice-principal of the school.

Administration of tests and examinations. Teachers provided two accommodations when children with disabilities wrote tests and exams independently or with a help of a scribe.. First, they were allowed to attempt parts of the examination while omitting others. Second, they were given additional time to complete the examination. When children were allowed to attempt part of the exam, it meant that they could write as

much as they could, focusing on objective-type questions including fill in the blanks, multiple-choice questions, match answers; they could leave out essay-type questions (which was more difficult for them to learn). This meant that they could attempt the entire exam but it was not required that they did. Teachers also talked about trying to slowly make these children write more as they progressed from lower primary to upper primary classes. According to Ms. Akila, "It's [question paper] not different. [It is] the same questions that the other kids [write], only the ability differs. Some may be able to do it on the normal questions [*sic*]. For example, Vijay; he is able to do on par with the other children". Ms. Banu said, "I'll give them the [exam] paper. Answer sheets I give them. Let them do what they want". She also talked about allowing children with disabilities in her classroom to take the same exam that their peers without disabilities wrote so that they felt like a part of the classroom.

One teacher used peers of children with disabilities to assist them during exams. Peers sometimes took the role of a scribe; after completing their own exams, peers helped children with disabilities by reading questions to them or writing answers to questions without teaching them. Ms. Akila said she paired children with and without disabilities based on her observation of whom the child with disability is comfortable with. This peer, as discussed earlier, helps during regular class time as well as during examination times.

Teachers themselves also helped children with disabilities during examinations. Each teacher talked about their experiences in how they assisted children in their classrooms. Ms. Jayashree and Ms. Akila said they made some children sit beside them

during the exam. According to Ms. Akila, "Anand I have to give personal attention, otherwise he'll not even write a word". Teachers sometimes also provided assistance by giving cues or explaining the question in a different way so that the child may attempt to respond. Ms. Akila said, "When I read out questions to them, sometimes, they know answers but are not able to express that. So again I have to explain that concept to them, then ask specifically. They are able to answer that time [*sic*]".

Parents were sometimes assigned as a scribe for the student, allowing them to write the answers for the child during the exam. In Ms. Anu's classroom, the parent had to hold the hand of the child to make them write. This teacher felt that this might be a potential issue since it was not fair to the other students.

Two relatively less used accommodations in administration of exams were allowing students to take oral exams rather than in written format and having a scribe other than the parent of the child. Ms. Akila allowed one of her students to write part of the exam, and attempt some of the questions orally, when he was not inclined to write.

Grading of tests and examinations. Teachers did not focus on spelling and handwriting if the children were able to demonstrate that they understood the concept, at least to a certain degree. Sometimes, if children with disabilities attempted only part of a question without completing it, teachers gave them partial grades based on what they had written.

Roles of stakeholders: Collaboration and communication

Both teachers and parents of children with disabilities play a vital role in the implementation of inclusion in Shyamala School. The perceptions of these individuals

regarding their roles, as well as collaboration and communication between them, are important factors in successful implementation of inclusive practices and will be discussed in this section.

In some schools in India, and, in this school in particular, inclusion is only possible with the collaboration of parents. Communication is key to successful collaboration. My conversations with teachers and parents and classroom observations showed that parents played a significant role in the implementation of inclusion in the school. The degree of involvement of parents varied according to the individual needs of children and at the request of the teacher in some cases. It is therefore important to understand perceptions of participants regarding the role that parents play. I will discuss teachers' general perception regarding parents of children with disabilities as well as the perceptions and experiences of both teachers and parents regarding the role of parents in implementing inclusive practices in the school. In addition, I will discuss how participants interacted with each other and their perceptions and experiences in this regard.

Teacher perceptions regarding parents of children with disabilities

Conversations with teachers reflected that they had both positive and negative perceptions and experiences with parents of children with disabilities. Overall, teachers were aware of and acknowledged the difficulties parents of children with disabilities could face regarding the acceptance of their child in the society. They were also aware of adversities that parents sometimes faced in raising a child with a disability.

Data indicated that when parents were more involved in the education of their child and collaborated and interacted more frequently with the teachers, they expressed positive perceptions and feelings of empathy. Some teachers also expressed feelings of admiration for parents of children with disabilities. Teachers predominantly expressed feelings of empathy or pity for parents; at times they expressed negative feelings too. Teachers related these feelings to the negative experiences they had with parents of some children, and the level of parental involvement in the education of their child and collaboration with the teacher.

Being parents of young children themselves, teachers empathized with parents, acknowledging the challenges that parents faced and the time they invest in the care of a child. Some teachers talked about how parents find it difficult to accept that their child may have a difficulty or disability, especially due to family and societal pressures associated with disabilities. At times, teachers felt that they didn't want to say negative things about children to their parents for two important reasons. One, parents may face issues of neglect from family and the society, and the second, saying negative things may hurt parents since parents feel that they do everything in the best interests of the child. According to Ms. Banu, "They are all young parents, and who are all in very good jobs, very highly educated parents. They leave all that, just for these children. They come running here [to the school/teacher]. They are going through such a tough time".

Teachers' comments reflected that they wanted some parents to be more involved and invest more time in the education of the child, while at the same time acknowledging that parents could not spend all the time in the school with the child. This was

contradictory to the feelings of empathy that teachers expressed initially for parents and teachers' goals (of sitting independently in the classroom, without the support of the parent) for children with disabilities.

Teachers also reflected upon the significance of parents' role in the education of their child and in some instances, expressed negative perceptions regarding parents. These negative perceptions were based on teachers' experiences over the years and reflected the involvement of parents, how much they supported the teacher, parents' expectations of teachers and/or the school, as well as their goals for their children.

In many schools in Southern India, schools expect parents to play a big role in the education of children. For example, Shyamala School did not have a psychologist or special educator or other resources specifically for children with disabilities. The burden of conducting assessments fell on the parents; they had to make arrangements to have their child assessed in any institution or assessment center outside the school and provide relevant reports to the school. Teachers sometimes requested an assessment through the parents if they felt a child was not making adequate progress or observed that the child had certain difficulties in class. However, this was not acceptable for some of the parents, and they did not respond to the requests of the teachers, which lead teachers to have negative feelings. Ms. Jayashree said, "If you ask them to send their child for assessment, they'll say, 'my child is normal. He doesn't study because he is watching a lot of TV or playing too much'".

Some teachers stated that parents were less involved and put a greater responsibility of taking care of the child on the teacher. Teachers even felt that parents

treated them like caretakers. This was especially evident during the teachers' conversations during the focus group. Teachers said parents wanted some time to themselves; so they left the child in the school and didn't involve themselves after that. In these instances, teachers felt they were not able to help the child as much as when they had better support of parents.

Another area of concern expressed by the teachers was how parents had increasing expectations over time. The teachers mainly focused on social goals for children with disabilities, especially in primary classes. They wanted children with disabilities to be able to come to the classroom, sit with other students, listen to the class without disrupting it, and socialize and learn behaviors by observing other children. Teachers said that while the parents initially don't focus on the academics, they set higher goals as soon as they saw any small improvements in social behavior.

A third aspect teachers talked about was what they felt when they interacted with parents of children with disabilities over the years. Teachers used the following adjectives to describe emotions of parents of children with disabilities, during their interactions: emotional, sensitive, impulsive, depressed, tense, worried, anxious, isolated by their family and society and afraid. Despite attempts by the school and teachers to keep the school atmosphere as informal as possible, teachers felt that parents displayed these emotions more often than not, when they interacted with them. Ms. Akila acknowledged that parents are neglected, sometimes by their family members, and sometimes by the society, indicating that this could cause anxieties amongst parents. According to Ms. Jayashree, "I don't want to argue with the parent because they have

some type of thinking [think a certain way] about their children. We should not damage or we should not provoke them. So I'll just keep quiet".

Teacher-parent interactions

Teachers discussed their expectations for parents and how they communicated these expectations to parents. They also talked about the general school atmosphere and school practices when it came to interacting with parents. In addition to this, teachers' conversations focused upon their experiences with various parents of children with and without disabilities, during that school year as well as in previous years. Parents' perceptions and experiences regarding teacher-parent interactions are also discussed.

Teacher perceptions regarding teacher-parent interactions. Constant and open communication was an essential component in the implementation of inclusion in Shyamala School. All teachers expressed that they communicated with parents as and when needed, and that parents did the same. Teachers said that parents came to them whenever they needed to, and not necessarily only during scheduled parent-teacher meetings. Communication was informal between teachers and parents, and generally involved information regarding details of support services the child received outside school (like special education, occupational therapy and so on), what goals parents had for their children, their expectations of teachers as well as when there were any issues regarding the child in class or at home. Teachers indicated that it was usually easier to manage a child in the class if parents communicated with the teacher and kept them informed of what children did outside school and what their (the parents') expectations for the child and teachers were. Teachers also said they communicated with parents for

the same reasons. According to Ms. Anu, "I am asking them to do [things] at home. So that's what I want from them". Ms. Akila said, "Also, [what we do in class] is definitely with the guidance of parents and special educators.

Teachers also discussed at length the different ways in which parents communicated with them. With the support of the principal, teachers tried to keep the school environment as informal as possible so as to make parents feel comfortable communicating with them. They reported that it was easier to communicate with some parents than with others because some parents were more open to suggestions and comments from the teachers than others. While most teachers did not experience any problems communicating with parents, two teachers mentioned that they had occasionally had issues communicating with parents. Some instances when they found it difficult to communicate with parents were when they had problem handling a certain child and needed additional support, had to report behavior problems that involved other children in the classroom or had negative feedback on the performance of the child.

Parent perceptions regarding teacher-parent interaction. All parents talked about their interactions with the teachers and while most parents had positive experiences, some parents talked about certain negative experiences. As teachers did, parents also perceived communication as an important factor in teachers being better able to include their children in the classrooms.

Parents said they generally spoke to the teacher whenever they felt they needed to, rather than having formal meetings. Communication between parents and teachers usually involved conversations about progress of the child, if the teacher needed any

additional support from the parent, or regarding problems in the classroom specifically relating to their child. Some parents expressed that they felt the teachers were concerned about them and their child, and that they were able to establish a good relationship with the teacher through open communication. One parent said that she spoke to the class teacher at the beginning of the academic year regarding her child and his characteristics, so that the teacher was aware of what to expect. She added, "They [the teachers] say they will take care of him, you go home without worries", indicating that she always established rapport early in the year with the teacher. She also said she was always available to come to the school if the teacher was not able to manage her child for any reason.

Some parents also mentioned that teachers and even the principal encouraged them a lot. Ms. Kavitha said, "When I told the teachers that he could do only so much on some days, or made suggestions about what questions to ask him during the exams, they accepted all my suggestions". She also added that teachers encouraged her child to try to write and he showed gradual improvements in tasks such as board-copying, and writing exams by himself, without additional support, over the school year.

While most parents' responses indicated that teachers contacted them once in a while if they needed to, one parent indicated that the teacher had requested her to stay with the child in the classroom. She narrated her experiences of how it had a negative impact on her. She felt that there was a lack of proper communication between the teacher and her, as well as the teacher and her child. She felt excluded since the teacher

did not communicate with her child as much as she did with some of the other children in the classroom or their parents, even regarding classroom assignments or projects.

Role of parents in including children with disabilities

Both teachers and parents expressed that parents played a key role in successfully including children with disabilities in the classroom. Given their school practices, participants indicated that parents played a very important role in supporting the teacher in as well as outside the classroom. Parents and teachers felt that they should understand the different situations in the school, the classroom and at home, and be flexible and open to suggestions.

Teacher perceptions and experiences regarding role of parents. In response to the question of whose role they perceived as more important between that of the teacher and the parent, three of the five teachers felt that parents and teachers played an equally important role in doing what is best for the child. Ms. Anu felt that the role of parents was more important than the role of the teacher because, "Teachers can help him [the child] during the class time, however long he is here [at school], but most of the time the child is spending with parents only. So they should put more efforts with their children, and they should tell me how to be with him [*sic*]". Ms. Jayashree felt that teachers played a more substantial role in including children with disabilities, "Teachers can only include children with disabilities with the help of parents".

Teachers also felt that parents must support learning at home, working in tandem with what the teacher does in the classroom. Ms. Jayashree mentioned that it was important for parents to make the children read at home, even if only a little. She stated,

"At least make the children read something out of the book… or else they should prepare their own one letter word, 2-letter word and make the children read [*sic*]". According to Ms. Roopa, "And the parents should also accompany the teacher to make the child to come up [develop]". "As years go by, I feel the parents really have to sit and work [with their child, at home]", says Ms. Banu.

Ms. Jayashree talked about both positive and negative experiences with parents' role. One of the children in her class was very disruptive and difficult to manage when he fell sick. She said the parent was very supportive, and would come immediately if she needed to call the parent to remove the child from the class. On the other hand, there was another very unsupportive parent who refused to meet her despite her request for a meeting many times. The teachers talked about how much easier it was to manage the class when they knew the parents would back them up when the teachers needed their support.

Parent perceptions and experiences regarding role of parents. All parents acknowledged that they played an important role in the inclusion of their child, given the school set-up and practices. Ms. Prema said, "Even the parents should show interest. They should think they would do everything to bring their child up; only then the child can change. She also added that that was not necessarily always the case; that many parents only took their child to OT or special education classes, and did not do more than that. Ms. Indira commented, "Parent's role is very important I think, even more than the teacher's role".

Parents also discussed their roles in the education of their child at Shyamala School. Data indicated that parents played an active role in supporting the class teacher, both in and outside the classroom. Parents sometimes accompanied their child in the classroom, if the teacher was unable to manage. They also had the option of using a caretaker to take care of the child in class, whom they could privately hire..

While most parents perceived a positive impact due to their involvement, one parent's experiences were different. She explained her son's dependence on her despite being able to follow many of the instructions or respond to questions asked by the teacher in the class. She said, "Even if he understands also, he'll look at me whether I'll have to answer or not. If you ask him 'what color is this', he'll look at me like he wants to confirm whether that answer is right. That confirmation of things, he is very dependent on me [*sic*]". The parent felt that the reason for this dependence might be that the teacher had requested the parent to sit with her child the entire school year due to certain behavior issues the child had.

Ms. Kavitha talked about her role and experiences over the current and past academic years with her child. She indicated that her role gradually reduced over time. For example, she used to develop special questions papers for her son during his early years in the primary school. However, the current class teacher had insisted that her son try to write exams on his own, and that he had over the academic year, improved significantly in his ability to read and write examinations independently.

Special cases. Teachers said they had positive experiences with many parents of children with disabilities, especially when parents were involved in classroom activities,

or provided some additional support to the teacher. Similarly, parents also indicated that the teacher was supportive and sought the involvement of parents in the classroom. However, two teachers mentioned specific situations in which they had experienced issues with parents. Both teachers discussed issues in communication with the parent, as well as feeling overwhelmed in the classroom since they felt they had equal responsibilities towards other children in their classrooms. One parent narrated her experience regarding issues with the teacher. Specifically, she felt excluded due to a lack of communication between herself and the teacher, even though she was fully involved in the education of her child. These experiences are presented below.

Teacher experiences. One teacher felt she needed additional help from the parent sometimes, but the parent never responded. She mentioned several times during our conversations, that she had tried to communicate with the parent of the child since she said she was unable to pay individual attention, which was required at times because the child had behavior problems.

Ms. Anu narrated her experiences with one of the students in her classroom. While she felt she needed the help of the parent to take care of the child, the child would only listen to the parent, and so she was never able to manage the child in the absence of the parent for a prolonged period of time. She had requested that the parent stay in the classroom the entire time the child was there, upon the suggestion of another teacher. She felt that the parent did everything for the child in the class, including guiding the child's hand while he wrote. She thought it was unfair to the other children with disabilities in the class, who did more without the help of their parents. Based on classroom

observations, this child was in class only 2 hours in the morning, accompanied by the parent. The parent made the child copy everything the teacher had written on the blackboard, onto his notebook. After completing this, the child took his notebook to the teacher's desk to get it corrected. The interactions between the teacher and student were minimal to none. I did not observe the teacher interact regularly with the parent either; the parent said she sought the help of other students in the class to determine what the teacher taught the previous afternoon when her child was not in class. The teacher sometimes practiced simple conversations in English with the students. For example, "What did you eat for breakfast?", or made them say "Good morning" when they saw the teacher or to excuse themselves before they entered the classroom. There were few instances during the entire observation period when the teacher and student interacted; these were mostly informal.

Parent experiences. Ms. Prema felt that there was a lack of communication between the teacher and her, as well as the teacher and her child. She said the teacher had requested her to stay in the classroom for the entire duration that the child was there, but still did not interact with her child as much as she did with the other children in the classroom. She also said the teacher did not give her child credit due for completing his work in class or during the examinations since she would hold his hand as he wrote. According to her, she thought that the teacher assumed she was doing all the work and teaching him the answers rather than him being able to write by himself. She said being with her son all morning took away time from her other child, that it lead to considerable

stress, and that she especially felt sad that despite staying with her son in the classroom, she did not feel completely included.

Role that teachers play in including children with disabilities inclusion

In addition to discussing the role of parents, teachers reflected upon their own role in including children with disabilities. Overall, teachers said many positive things about how they could impact the implementation of inclusion. However, sometimes, teachers talked about difficulties and limitations they experienced. In particular, teachers discussed the conflict in expectations that parents had and what the school and hence the teachers, could provide in an inclusive classroom.

Interview and observation data indicated that teachers played an important role in providing an appropriate classroom atmosphere, interacting with parents of children with disabilities, and determining how to handle children by knowing and understanding students' background, especially with regard to children with disabilities. During these conversations, teachers also talked about their perceptions regarding themselves and their personalities, and how it affected their classrooms.

Teacher perceptions regarding self. Teachers expressed that they experienced a sense of satisfaction teaching an inclusive classroom, doing whatever little they could, not only for children with disabilities, but also for their parents. Ms. Jayashree and Ms. Akila said they were very passionate about teaching. Ms. Jayashree commented, "As far as I am concerned, whatever kind of child comes to me, I will try to make them do something". Ms. Roopa also expressed that her concern was in teaching, rather than what

kind of children came to her class. She added that she learned a lot through her experiences in inclusive classrooms.

Teachers used many adjectives to describe qualities and characteristics they had, as teachers of inclusive classroom. Two out of the five teachers (Ms. Anu and Ms. Jayashree) said they were very "soft" when it came to children with disabilities, indicating that they were lenient with the children because they could not reprimand children with disabilities the same way they did their peers without disabilities. Ms. Anu added that since their behavior was not always predictable, she was learning how to handle children with disabilities each day on the job. She also indicated that understanding the characteristics of children with disabilities and some training in special education would help her improve how she handled these children in her classroom.

Providing appropriate classroom atmosphere. During their conversations with me, teachers talked about some of the practices in their classrooms, which they felt promoted inclusion of children with disabilities, or accommodated them, at the very least. All but one teacher said they believed that the role of the teacher was very important since the children spent most of the day in the school with them and learned many academic and non-academic things in their classrooms. They also added that communicating with the child was a key aspect in providing an atmosphere of inclusiveness.

Teachers felt that if they understood and accepted children with diverse characteristics, it would help improve personal communication with children with disabilities. Ms. Jayashree felt that it was the "duty of the teacher to guide and motivate

children" as well as to appreciate the child for whatever they do. Ms. Akila endorsed this aspect, adding that personal interaction was the key to achieving this.

Ms. Akila also indicated that for children, the classroom was like a second home, and the teacher was like a mother. She felt it was important that such an atmosphere be provided so that students felt safe and comfortable in the classroom and with the teacher. During the focus group discussions, other teachers also indicated they felt responsible for the children in their classes just as they did their own children.

Three out of five teachers said that terms such as "special" were not used to describe children with disabilities in their school. Ms. Banu said that she did not distinguish children with and without disabilities in routine classroom activities; children with disabilities had to do everything like their peers. She said, "They have to stand in line; they have to do everything. When I say, "All children stand up", even Guna has to stand up". I also observed this aspect in some of her classes. In one instance, one of the children with disabilities did not ask for her permission before entering the class. In order to make the child understand the routine, she asked him to step out of the classroom, ask for her permission to enter and then enter the classroom. She also followed this up with some positive reinforcement. She acknowledged that the child had sought her permission like all the other children in the class, before entering the classroom and made the rest of the class clap for him. In Ms. Anu's classroom, the parent accompanying the child gave him instructions to seek the permission of the teacher before entering the class, to greet the teacher, and to seek her permission before leaving the class. I did not observe the teacher herself give the child these instructions.

Ms. Banu and Ms. Roopa felt that as teachers, they should be approachable, and children should feel uninhibited in communicating with the teacher. When asked how they promoted such an atmosphere, Ms. Roopa said she shared her experiences with the children in her class. She told them about herself so that the children might feel they could approach her anytime they wanted to. Ms. Banu said that she had lunch with the children in her class every day. This was to ensure that they did not waste food, as well as to make children more comfortable interacting with her, by making light conversation outside the academic setting.

Ms. Anu, Ms. Jayashree and Ms. Banu had a different perspective as to how the classroom atmosphere should be in general, and especially in inclusive classrooms. According to Ms. Jayashree, "Let them also enjoy; they have to enjoy. So if we allow them to mingle freely with other children, then only they'll love school and come to school". She added that children ought to be allowed to play freely, and that the classroom atmosphere should be joyful and one that keeps children active. Ms. Banu supported this perception, "It's all play, game and laughter; I strongly believe that in my class".

Responsibilities towards parents. As already discussed, teachers stressed the importance of communicating with the parents of children with disabilities. All but one teacher said they felt it was very important for the teacher to maintain a good relationship with parents. "They are already neglected in the society and all that", said Ms. Akila.

They also felt that teachers should establish rapport with children and their parents, and treat them as family members. Ms. Roopa suggested that collaborating with

parents, and keeping them involved in the education of their child was key to establishing and maintaining good relationships with them. Since hierarchy is common within schools with teachers having an upper hand over parents typically, Ms. Jayashree said, "We should not imagine ourselves to be teachers or with higher ranks or so". Ms. Banu felt that parents should not be provoked or told many negative things; that teachers should empathize and collaborate with parents rather than complain about their children.

Responsibilities towards students. Teachers had a very important responsibility towards the children in their classes, especially since they were in their formative years. They felt they played a role in the development of each child. Being aware of and knowing about each child and their family was important in how they handled them in the classroom.

Ms. Anu, Ms. Jayashree and Ms. Roopa indicated that they must inculcate good values, respect for elders and discipline in children and that they treated the children in their classrooms the same way they treated their own children at home. So rather than punish them, teachers felt they should take good care of them.

Ms. Roopa indicated that "they are the priority", implying that teachers must find ways to teach children keeping in mind the individual differences in their characteristics. "It is the personal interaction with the students", which, according to Ms. Akila, goes a long way in how well a child is included in the classroom. She added that it was up to the teacher to adapt to different characteristics of children in their classrooms and provide appropriate support. For example, if the student needed individual attention or if he/she needed to be punished for some reason, it was the teacher's duty to do so. Ms. Banu and

Ms. Roopa felt that the teacher was responsible for how the child behaved at school; how he or she sat, ate or played with other children.

Parent perceptions regarding role of teachers. Parents talked about what role the teacher played in how inclusion was implemented in the school, their experiences with the class teacher during the academic year, as well as in the past years with other teachers in the school. They also reflected upon how they felt about these experiences. Data indicated that parents had mostly positive perceptions and experiences with teachers in Shyamala School. All but one parent said the teachers in the school had been very helpful to their child, as well as to them.

One common thing parents said about teachers was that they cared for their child. Ms. Kavitha said, "The teachers are more understanding and encouraging. So there have been no problems". Ms. Saritha, Ms. Indira and Ms. Kavitha also talked about how teachers not only encouraged their child in the classroom, but also cooperated and communicated with the parent. They discussed with parents any accommodations they made in the classroom keeping in mind certain limitations their children had. Ms. Prema felt however, that the teacher did not pay as much attention to her because she accompanied her son during the entire time he was in the classroom. When asked about what she felt the teacher could have done, she said the teacher could assign her child the same tasks she otherwise assigned to the rest of the class, and give her son an opportunity to attempt the task. She added, "They are complaining about something; they say he is sitting simply. If there are no behavior issues, they say he is not doing board copying and that he is sitting simply. Otherwise he is not studying; one after the other they say". The

parent acknowledged that the teacher might be unaware of how to handle children with disabilities since it was her first year, but she still felt her child was singled out.

Another positive aspect parents mentioned regarding the teachers was that they were willing to listen to them. Ms. Saritha said, "I've seen that she teaches very well. She pays a lot of attention. If we tell something, they listen to us". In addition, Ms. Saritha and Ms. Kavitha indicated that teachers took special care of their children, and encouraged both the children and the parents. Ms. Prema however felt that the teacher was not willing to listen, and did not cooperate or encourage her child much.

Knowledge and perceptions

In this section, I will discuss the knowledge and general perceptions of participants regarding inclusion in India, and specifically regarding inclusive practices in the school. Specifically, I will address participants' perceptions regarding who can be included, whether they perceive special education or inclusion as the better practice and their perceptions regarding in-class support. Participants' knowledge and perceptions regarding individuals with disabilities will also be discussed in this section.

Knowledge of inclusion in India

In order to gain insights into what participants knew about inclusion in India, I asked them to define inclusion, as well as to talk about laws pertaining to the education of children with disabilities, and inclusion in India. In general, participants were not aware of specific laws pertaining to individuals with disabilities or in the field of education, with a few exceptions. However, participants' responses indicated an awareness regarding the general perceptions of persons with disabilities in India.

Teachers' knowledge regarding inclusion in India. Most teachers had not interacted with individuals with disabilities (children or adults) before they started teaching inclusive classrooms. What teachers knew about children with disabilities or inclusion, and how they felt about it, was based on their experiences as teachers of an inclusive classroom. Ms. Anu said, "I have only seen such people but I don't know their behavior, how they'll be or how they'll react. After coming here only I am getting that experience". According to Ms. Jayashree, "When I was young and in my childhood, I did not know anything about inclusion and all that. We didn't know back then. If a child did not study, parents will set up a shop for the child to take care of, or something like that".

Teachers described inclusion as a setting where children with disabilities were placed in a regular school along with children without disabilities; children received additional support from a special educator, either outside the school or within the school. Ms. Akila described inclusion as "teamwork to help them [children with disabilities] out". Ms. Banu felt it was not only about teaching, but doing something good.

Some teachers were aware of The Right to Education Act; they were however not aware of other laws specifically related to individuals with disabilities, and especially regarding their education. Ms. Roopa said, "I know we are supposed to include children and not shun them away [*sic*], but I don't know of any specific laws related to that or anything". She added that there were provisions made by the Government for children with disabilities, "They can go directly to 10th standard after 8th standard, they don't have to do 9th standard".

Teachers were aware of perceptions regarding persons with disabilities, as well as the status of persons with disabilities in Indian society. Teachers indicated that while there were negative perceptions regarding individuals with disabilities in general, they felt that these perceptions were gradually changing due to increased awareness among the general public. Ms. Banu, in particular, talked at length about negative perceptions regarding persons with disabilities, as she identified issues in inclusion. She reflected, "India is a traditional country with a lot of religious bias. In India, if I have child with disability who goes to a special school, it is considered as a symbol of disrespect and a big sin on my part. They are ashamed and pained to say that they have a child with disability. They don't mind if the child doesn't study or anything, they just want the child to be a normal child. They don't want their child to be exposed as a special child".

Some teachers also acknowledged that special education services had improved over the years, due to an increased awareness. Ms. Akila commented, "Ten or fifteen years back, if a child had some behavioral problems, they would immediately label him as mentally retarded. That would have been the common term; the child is insane or something. Nowadays I feel that social awareness, or focus through media and communication, people are much more aware that such children should not be isolated".

Parents' knowledge regarding inclusion in India. Parents initially learned of inclusion through interactions with other parents, special educators, or teachers of previous schools where they had enrolled their child. Parents indicated that they were not aware of what a disability was, prior to their personal experience with their child.

According to parents, inclusion meant placing children with disabilities in regular schools while receiving additional support from a special educator, either within or outside the school. Ms. Indira said, "Schools are taking children with dyslexia and ADHD. For every 25 children, they take about 5 such children. They are flexible; the teachers, the principal. All of them work together; they sometimes have an assistant".

While parents were generally unaware of laws regarding children with disabilities in India, Ms. Prema talked about most schools adhering to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, according to which "no child may be refused admission to a school till 14 years of age [*sic*]". Some parents discussed concessions that the Government gave children with disabilities in schools. For example, Ms. Indira said, "The Central Government is now considering exempting students from language exams until the 10th grade".

As with teachers, parents were also aware of the general perceptions regarding persons with disabilities in India; they themselves had direct experiences of these perceptions of people. The stigma associated with having a child with a disability in the family, the placement of the child in a special school, and a general lack of awareness among people were some of the aspects parents discussed. Ms. Prema's comment reflected this: "People think that if the child doesn't talk, he is mentally retarded. People don't accept that it is something else; it [disability] has been generalized". She also indicated that it was important to create awareness, especially among schoolteachers.

Knowledge and perceptions regarding children with disabilities

In this section, I discuss participants' perceptions regarding children with disabilities. While this was not an intended part of the research agenda, many of

participants' comments revealed what they felt about children with disabilities, especially with regard to their characteristics and their abilities and disabilities. This helps provide a deeper context to understanding participants' goals for children with disabilities and for ideal inclusive practices.

Principal's knowledge and perceptions. The principal was aware of the terms and labels used in special education, as well as of the characteristics associated with different disability types. Her perception regarding children with disabilities was unique. She felt that every human being had a disability in some aspect in his or her life; while some of these were more prominent and visible, others were not. She said she never thought of, or referred to children with disabilities as 'special' and she encouraged her teachers to think the same way. She also added that while she referred to children with disabilities using typical 'labels' or characteristics of children while discussing their progress, she never used it in the presence of the child or the parent.

Teachers' knowledge and perceptions. Teachers' knowledge and perceptions regarding children with disabilities were typically consistent with the goals they set for children in their classrooms. Teachers' knowledge regarding children with disabilities was limited, and their perceptions reflected their experiences with the children they had worked with over the years.

Two teachers discussed late marriages as the reason for the recent rise in the number of children identified with disabilities. They felt that since women were marrying at a much later age as compared to a decade or so before, more children were born with disabilities or complications.

Teachers frequently talked about individual differences in children with disabilities; they accepted and acknowledged that no two children are the same. School practices also reflected this perception. Teachers stated that different children learned at different paces, children showed improvements in different aspects of learning and no two students were alike. However, consistent with the school principal, teachers never referred to children with disabilities as 'special'.

While some teachers were familiar with the 'labels' often assigned to children with disabilities, only some teachers knew about specific disability conditions or characteristics associated with them. Most teachers were aware of the characteristics of children in their classrooms. However, they felt that this awareness alone did not always help these children, especially when children had severe behavioral or social disorders. Many teachers noted and acknowledged that children with disabilities were different from their peers due to differences in physical, behavioral and/or social attributes. When asked about her first encounter with children with disabilities, Ms. Banu said, "The first thing I noticed about them was the difference in physical attributes". Some teachers also thought that if a child had certain disabilities, there were chances of him or her becoming 'normal' or 'near-normal', while others acknowledged that the disability would remain for life.

Teachers felt that the more severe the disability, the more difficulty they had in handling the child. During the focus group, teachers talked about how characteristics of children with disabilities changed as they grew up. Specifically, they expressed a great deal of concern about handling children during their adolescence. Some teachers felt that

additional special education support was necessary for children with more severe disabilities but exposure to inclusion was beneficial for all children with disabilities.

Perceptions regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools

Conversations with participants focused on their perceptions and experiences regarding the benefits in inclusion, and on issues they faced in or outside the school. In addition, I will discuss how children with and without disabilities respond to being in inclusive classrooms, and the effect of inclusion on individuals who are involved in implementing inclusion, including the teachers themselves, parents of children with disabilities and children without disabilities.

Data reflected that the participants had mixed perceptions and experiences regarding including children with disabilities. In general, they said positive things about such a policy. However, the principal and teachers expressed some concerns about it, as will be discussed in detail in this section.

Who can be included? All participants expressed some views regarding who can be included. While parents did not comment much upon this topic, teachers seemed to be more vocal about their perceptions.

Principal's perceptions regarding who can be included. The principal felt that any child could be included. However, she also indicated that teachers sometimes requested that a child be removed from the class for a certain period of time when there were consistent behavior-related issues disrupting the classroom atmosphere, and when the child did not seem to make any progress in social and behavioral aspects. The principal said that she requested the parents to provide some additional intensive therapy

or training, and to return the child to the school after a certain period (a few weeks to a few months).

Teachers' perceptions regarding who can be included. Two key aspects emerged during my conversations with teachers regarding who could be included and how they could be included. Teachers discussed three aspects regarding who can be included. Individual differences played an important role in including children with disabilities; inclusion may not work for all children with disabilities; and it would be easier to include children with mild disabilities. Teachers attributed these beliefs to the level of special assistance or care required by some children with disabilities, based on their observations. Ms. Akila said, "Only to a certain extent, when the child can cope up with other schoolmates and all that, the question of inclusion comes". Ms. Jayashree also reflected, "There is one of type of disability that is very difficult—if the child is dumb, that is, the child is unable to speak, it will be a problem. Otherwise I don't think there is any problem about including any child"

When discussing how children with disabilities could be included, teachers talked about providing adequate support for these children. There were differences in teachers' views about how to include children with disabilities and what support teachers expected. Some felt the onus was on the teacher to find ways to include children with disabilities in the classroom, while others felt that the support of the school was necessary. Ms. Roopa said, "We can keep the school open to all children. Once the school makes this decision, the school should have some facilities for this, as well as faculties to provide for the

children [*sic*]", indicating that the teacher can fully include children with disabilities only with the necessary support and resources from the school.

Some teachers indicated that parent support was crucial in including children with disabilities. When parents were more actively involved in the education of their child, teachers expressed more positive feelings towards including the child. For example, Ms. Jayashree said during the focus group discussion, "But actually I agree with him and accept him because his parents are so good. They are cooperative. If they cooperate, we can also do something for the child. If they do not cooperate at all, then what can we do? We cannot do anything at all".

Parents' perceptions regarding who can be included. Parents' perceptions regarding who could be included were consistent with those of the teachers. They felt that while schools accommodated children with disabilities, the school expected that children should have a certain level of communication. Some parents felt positive about inclusive practices in the school; one parent had negative perceptions since she had had many negative experiences over the school year. Ms. Prema said, "The schools expect that the child has to do board copying and writing. If the child has the ability to do this, they are comfortable taking children and it is easy for them to handle. If not, they are finding it difficult".

Special education versus inclusion. Both teachers and parents talked about their perceptions and experiences regarding inclusion and special education. Both groups of participants favored a mix of inclusion and special education, indicating that a spectrum of services was ideal rather than only special education or inclusion. This was especially

relevant to their experiences in the current inclusive setup. Two teachers discussed the possibility of full inclusion with necessary supports in place.

Teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding special education versus inclusion. Teachers talked about partial and full inclusion, while referring to some of the positive and negative experiences they had in their classrooms. In general, they leaned towards partial inclusion, with additional support of special educators. Teachers identified the type and severity of disability (individual differences) and the ability (or inability) of the teacher to handle children in certain situations based on their experiences as factors that impacted the degree of inclusion.

During the focus group, teachers indicated that more special education was helpful for students with behavior disorders and severe disabilities, but that inclusion was the best option as far as social aspects were concerned. They indicated that they did not prefer one or the other, but that a continuum of services would work best, since the individual needs of the child differed. According to Ms. Banu, "You give children with disabilities full training and then send them to school; maybe one or two years of rigorous training you have to give them; very rigorous". She also felt that all children, not just children with disabilities, would benefit from methods currently used exclusively in special education.

Based on their observation of the children in their classrooms, teachers indicated that at times, special education was more beneficial than inclusion. Ms. Banu, for instance, felt inclusion did not always help a child even if additional special education was given to a child. She said that certain conditions in a regular classroom like the

number of students, noise or power-cuts, sometimes worsened the already existing behavior disorders of children with disabilities. Considering these aspects, special education classrooms could be a better environment for these children.

Two teachers felt full inclusion was feasible, although they had different perspectives on how it could be achieved. On one hand, Ms. Jayashree felt that any child may be included in the classroom, and that it was up to the teacher to ensure how to handle the child. Ms. Roopa on the other hand felt that a child could be successfully included only with the necessary support and resources from the school.

Parents' perceptions and experiences regarding special education versus inclusion. All parents felt that while inclusion helped develop social skills in their child, special education was necessary for their child since special educators were better trained to handle their children. In addition, one-to-one attention was provided in special schools, which they felt was key to academic learning. In some cases parents talked about the negative aspects of special education. Parents identified training and awareness among teachers as factors that delineated special education schools from inclusive schools.

According to parents, even though social behavior improved in inclusion, training and one-to-one attention were important aspects that could "lead to faster improvements" in a child. Ms. Prema felt however, that both special education schools and inclusive schools needed some changes in order to be more effective. She said, "If you look at a special school, there are children with different abilities. They don't segregate them according to their abilities; they all sit in the same room, they all do the same thing". She also added that school personnel needed more awareness and that they did not focus on

academic teaching; rather they tended to focus only on the behavioral aspects of children with disabilities.

Some parents reflected upon how special education could be detrimental and how inclusion could be helpful for the child. Ms. Kavitha felt that while special education was beneficial for the child at an early age, it could lead to difficulties in the long run, especially in social and behavioral aspects. Ms. Saritha, reflecting on her previous experience in a special school said, "When he was in a special school, he learned some of those habits when he saw other children do those things. If he is here, at least he will develop some speech or language, seeing the other children speak".

Special educators and in-class support

In general, while teachers felt that special educators played an important role in the education of children with disabilities, they also talked about their experiences regarding the special educators in their classrooms.

All teachers felt that special educators could guide general educators in handling children with disabilities in academic and social aspects, since "special school teachers have better training and they know how to take care of these children".

The general feeling among teachers was that presence of a special education teacher in the school would be helpful, and children could be sent to them whenever necessary. Some teachers were not comfortable with the presence of a special educator in their classroom; it was not ideal. These teachers were emphatic about their displeasure with special educators who sometimes came to their classrooms for an hour or two during the day. According to Ms. Akila, "When children go outside for classes, the learning

methods, that is crucial; that I am not refusing at all. But when the special educators come to school, I don't know". She also added that the special educators who came did not spend sufficient time with the teacher and the child, and indicated that it was a "fancy" arrangement rather than a practical one. Ms. Roopa, based on her experience and interaction with special educators, felt that their focus was very narrow, and that many times they did not address aspects such as the social behavior of the child, or how the child moved with his or her peers.

Of all the teachers, Ms. Banu felt strongly against special education centers and special educators, based on her experiences in the city. She said, "This special training has become too commercialized. Everybody has this [special education center] now. And for some children, poor thing, I think it is of no use. But the parents pay so much to go there". She added that special educators gave false promises regarding changing many of the behaviors seen in children, but the expected change was not there.

Ms. Anu and Ms. Banu had special educators visit one child in their classrooms on a daily basis; these special educators typically spent 1-2 hours with the child. Ms. Anu and Ms. Banu had very different opinions and feelings in this regard. Ms. Anu felt that the presence of the special educator was helpful as it was her first year of teaching, and the child whom the special educator visited had moderate to severe disabilities. She also said she could seek the help of the special educator in handling some of the other children in her class when she did not know how to do so herself. On the other hand, Ms. Banu indicated that the presence of a special educator in her classroom sometimes disturbed the rhythm of the other students; there were discrepancies in the way she and the special

educator handled behavior-related issues in the classroom. For example, there was an incident when one of the children was throwing temper tantrums in the classroom. According to Ms. Banu, she handled all children similarly, and therefore punished children with disabilities also, even when their behavior was inappropriate. However, the special educator insisted that she ignore the temper tantrums of this child. She felt it was unfair to other children, and indicated that it was an intrusion on how she handled her classroom.

Best practice in inclusion

Teachers reflected upon their perceptions regarding the most appropriate ways to teach academics or behavior in an inclusive classroom.

Classroom instruction and academic best practices. Teachers determined what the best approach to teaching their class was, based on their observations of the children, as well as their experiences with previous groups of students.

Teachers adapted the way they taught a concept based on their perception of how children would better understand it, rather than using specific instructional strategies to teach certain concepts with the expectation that children would grasp the material. Ms. Roopa said, "First time when I teach addition, I'll have my own concept; I'll teach based on my concept. So in that, after I saw how children learned it, how much they understood, I come to know [that] maybe instead of this method, if I used a different method, they'll understand a little better. So when I teach it next, I'll handle that one [differently]. It is all trial and error method only".

Two out of five teachers indicated that academic material should be presented in ways that would interest children, especially since they were very young. For example, presenting material visually using models or real-life objects, or doing small experiments in the classroom, would make the learning material more interesting. Teachers gave examples of how academic material could be made interesting for students. Ms. Jayashree said, "For example, if we are talking about how the earth is in between the sun and the moon… we can bring the globe or a ball or a mosambi [sweet lime], and we can bring a torchlight. We can understand that this torchlight is the sun. If you switch on the torchlight, the rays of the light will be on the earth. I mean, the countries on that side will have morning time, and the places which are dark, they'll have night. So like that we can explain it to the children [*sic*]". Ms. Roopa said she used a slightly different approach, "Like, just reading lessons will not be possible here. So I have to tell it so it is attractive to them: either as a story or amazing facts". According to Ms. Banu, "Visual thing… Instead of telling it is a pigeon, you show them a picture of a pigeon, I feel they will have a better memory of it".

While teachers predominantly used large-group instruction, three teachers used small-group instruction to teach certain lessons, while two others used peer tutoring. Ms. Jayashree said she used small-group instruction to teach mathematical concepts such as decimals. Ms. Akila used it during English composition lessons, so that students could share ideas. Ms. Akila felt one limitation of group work was that some children ended up doing more work than others. I observed the use of small group instruction twice, once each in standards 2 and 3. Ms. Banu used this in her classroom to play a word-game to

practice vocabulary. The classroom was divided up into teams. Each team would come up with a word, and the next team had to say a word beginning with the last letter of the word that the previous team came up with. Each team received 2 points for words of 4 letters or more and 1 point if they were 3 letters or less. Ms. Jayashree played a similar game after a lesson in addition, and gave simple addition problems for each team to solve. While teachers used small group instruction in these activities, only some children with disabilities participated in the activity. This was similar to children's participation during regular classroom instruction.

Ms. Anu and Ms. Akila paired children with disabilities with a peer. Ms. Akila indicated the role of the peer was to help the child with disability to follow the teacher's instruction and stay on task. The teacher selected a peer who was patient, able to get along with the child with disability, as well as able to manage their own classroom tasks, and provide additional support to the child they are paired with. Ms. Anu however did not consistently use peers to assist children with disabilities since the children were very young.

Teachers also added that certain accommodations they used in their classrooms could help children with disabilities. Examples of this included pacing instruction according to the needs of the children, reducing the workload, giving additional time to complete tasks, giving simpler tasks and giving individual attention to children with disabilities. Ms. Akila identified giving more drills for reading, vocabulary and pronunciation as an effective strategy. Ms. Roopa said she individually corrected the notebooks of the children in the classroom during the class period to ensure that they had

understood the concept. During an observation of Ms. Roopa's class, the teacher had written a few mathematics problems on the blackboard, which she asked the students to work out in their notebooks. After some time, she walked around the classroom and stopped at the desk of each child. She checked to ensure they were working on the problems correctly. She also stopped to explain and correct any mistakes children made. Once the bell rang, she asked the children to complete the remaining problems as homework. Ms. Jayashree also expressed a similar idea, "If children are writing two question-answers from the board, they should concentrate and write the two questions. We will not make the children write 20 answers at a time".

Personal attention and communicating with children with disabilities during classroom instruction was pivotal to their participation in the classroom, according to the teachers. Ms. Anu and Ms. Banu also felt that allowing children to make errors while learning rather than correct them every time they made an error encouraged the children to participate better in the classroom. They emphasized this aspect while talking about developing conversation skills in English in their classrooms. Ms. Jayashree reflected, "So this is the problem in maths; you try to make the children work out on the board if you know it. But appreciate those kind of children [*sic*], so that they'll feel encouraged to try however much they know".

Three out of five teachers indicated that instructional techniques used in special education could be beneficial in inclusive classrooms. According to Ms. Banu, "I am seeing the other special educators teaching. It is not only for those special children; even for normal child, these systems work very well". Ms. Roopa said, "Whatever the special

educator does, we will follow because if we do different things, the child cannot understand". Ms. Anu and Ms. Akila concurred with this perception. Ms. Anu and Ms. Jayashree sought the help of parents to supplement classroom instruction. Ms. Jayashree said, "So whatever thing [concept] I teach in class, I'll make the parents write the objective questions and answers. I'll ask the parents to teach [the children] at least the objectives". Ms. Anu added, "I'll slowly start the writing, and ask the parents also to do it in the home. So whatever they do in the home, I'll make them do in the class. So that is how I am first teaching".

Behavior management and best practice. While teachers predominantly discussed instructional best practices, they also talked about their perceptions regarding behavior management in the classroom in general, and specifically with respect to children with disabilities.

Teachers had two distinct views on best practices in behavior management when it came to children with disabilities. Ms. Roopa and Ms. Banu believed that behavior management should be (and was) similar for children with and without disabilities. When asked how she handled children with disabilities in the classroom, Ms. Banu said, "Like any other child, because once you treat them like other children, then they know that they have to follow the same commands that other children are doing. Only if you give them an option that they don't have to follow what the other children are doing, they'll not listen to you". Ms. Anu on the other hand felt that she could not be very strict with children with disabilities in her class; she focused on their ability and willingness to sit in the classroom first, and only then focused on academics. She felt she had to adjust to the

needs of the children because children's behavior was not the same every day and "children keep changing every day [*sic*]".

Teachers explained that they used different techniques and methods to handle different children in the classroom, because one technique did not necessarily work with all the children. Just as with instructional practices, teachers felt that personal interaction and communication was key to behavior management in the classroom. They discussed some techniques they had had success with: the use of punishment which was more common, and the less common use of peers to mold appropriate behavior, focusing on positive qualities of children or keeping children engaged with tasks in the classroom.

In many Indian classrooms, teachers reprimand children for behavior-related issues; a teacher may scold, beat or give another form of punishment like a time-out. In this school, punishments included the child being sent out of the class or the child being made to sit on the floor near the teacher's desk (Ms. Banu) or the child being moved to a bench that is closer to the teacher's desk (Ms. Jayashree). Teachers also sometimes told the child that they would be sent back to a lower grade level, which at times seemed to curb inappropriate behavior. There were only one or two instances of a teacher beating a child.

Teachers sometimes isolated certain children with disabilities from their peers. For instance, Ms. Akila said, "He was not very comfortable with Srinath. So purposely I made them sit separately". She also added that the same technique did not always work, and she had to modify how she handled children with disabilities from time to time. Citing an example of one of the children, she said, "With Raja, I'll just go and talk to him

in a nice way, repeatedly. If that doesn't work out, I have to be quite strict with him; I have to change places, or give him some work, engage him in some work. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't". I also asked how she followed up if these strategies did not work; she said she just separated children with disabilities from their peers for a brief time. During classroom observations, I noticed that Ms. Anu made one or two children with disabilities sit next to her most of the time. When asked about it, she responded, "Sometimes, I want them to be in my attention all the time because they'll be writing something and when they won't want to write, they'll be disturbing [the class] or they'll start playing with the other children. So I keep the special children [seated] near me".

Teachers said focusing on the positive qualities of children, and keeping them engaged and active, would reduce unwanted or improper behavior in the classroom. Ms. Roopa said, "Anupam, when he is very distracted, if he hears music, he'll be quiet. He'll sit quietly and do his work". She also said she used stories with morals to teach appropriate behavior in the classroom. Ms. Anu felt- and others concurred- that children with disabilities must play during physical education classes, because "the children needed exercise for the body and they were very fresh and more attentive when they came back from playtime".

Teachers also noted that the behavior and temperament of the teacher was important in how children responded to them. Talking about her students, Ms. Akila said, "Even if Raja screams or hits the other child, I should not scream. I should not get angry because that'll definitely worsen his behavior. I should tell him in a nice way". Ms. Jayashree also felt that the teacher had to be kind to her students regarding behavior

issues and “tell them softly” and “be a motherly image for them ”. Ms. Anu commented about one of her students, “I think shouting at them is no use. I think we should be very patient and humble”. Ms. Roopa said she tried to create an atmosphere where students felt they could approach her. She usually called upon children, asked them what the problem was and talked the issue through, which she found to be a successful approach.

Benefits of inclusion

Participants felt that many children with disabilities benefitted from inclusion. While parents generally spoke of benefits they had observed in their children, teachers discussed the positive impact of inclusion on peers of children with disabilities, teachers and parents of children with disabilities.

Teachers’ perceptions regarding benefits of inclusion for children with disabilities. Teachers’ experiences related to the school practice of social inclusion of children with disabilities. They felt that all children with disabilities would benefit socially in inclusion, especially in the long run. In some instances, they also indicated the improvements they had observed in other areas besides social and behavioral aspects.

Teachers also stated that most if not all of the students in their classrooms showed progressive improvement in social behavior not only over the academic year, but also over the years in the primary school. The teachers reflected upon improvements they had observed in current students as well as students from earlier years.

Teachers noted the atmosphere or environment in inclusive classrooms was an important factor that impacted behavior of children with disabilities. According to teachers, children with disabilities responded better to inclusive classrooms than

segregated settings, thereby making inclusion the more conducive atmosphere for learning appropriate social behavior. Ms. Akila said, "Definitely it [social behavior] improves when you come to a normal school like this because they are not isolated from the other kids, from the peer group". Ms. Jayashree added, "If the child goes to regular school, the child will know what a society is; one child may beat or pinch, one child will be nice. The child will see and experience all that".

Yet another important benefit teachers discussed during the focus group interviews was the impact of inclusion on the self-esteem of the child. Ms. Banu emphasized the importance of developing the self-esteem of children with disabilities. She said that in addition to social inclusion, she also tried to include children with disabilities in academics as much as possible. In her experience, children with disabilities sometimes asked her to give them the same exam or test that their peers wrote. She typically allowed them to write whatever they knew, which according to her made them feel part of the class. Ms. Roopa also stressed the importance of including the children with disabilities in the classroom as much as possible to boost their self-esteem and make them feel included. While other teachers concurred, they did not comment further on this aspect.

Teachers' perceptions regarding benefits for peers, teachers and parents. Teachers felt that peers of children with disabilities, teachers themselves and parents of children with and without disabilities also benefitted from inclusion. Families in India are closely knit in many Indian communities, and having a child with a disability in the family is still a source of stigma for the family. Ms. Roopa felt that since children

responded better and developed socially in inclusive settings: it was an advantage not only for the children themselves, but also for the parents. Ms. Akila took a similar stance, "So if the child is able to better adjust socially, I feel that the family is benefited and they get more relaxed and confident that there is some future for the child and that he or she will not be left out".

Teachers felt that peers of children with disabilities also benefitted from the inclusion because they developed qualities such as acceptance and tolerance to diversity at a very young age. Additionally they also developed feelings of empathy and respect for each other. Some teachers expressed that while they had had minor issues in their classes from time to time, they felt that the overall atmosphere of the classroom and school was improved due to inclusion.

Teachers' comments also indicated that inclusion not only benefitted the people who were directly involved in its implementation, but that the society in general also benefitted. It helped create awareness and acceptance of children with disabilities, even outside the school context. Ms. Akila explained, "When they go home and talk to the parent and tell them that there is a particular child in my class, I feel that slowly parents will also understand through their children that it benefits that particular child".

Teachers felt they had also benefitted from teaching in an inclusive classroom. Through their experiences, teachers said they became more aware of and sensitive towards children with disabilities and their families. Three out of the five teachers' experiences in inclusion were limited to their tenure at Shyamala School; these teachers said that while they had experienced some difficulties when they started working at the

school since they did not know anything about children with disabilities, they had slowly learned to handle them. Ms. Akila said, “Maybe I have developed more patience”. According to Ms. Anu, “So the first day I joined work, I came to know that I’ll be getting special children [in my classroom], but I didn’t know how to handle them. After mingling with them only I know, what kind of personality they have. I am trying to adjust with them”.

Teachers said they learned more about children with disabilities after they had started teaching in inclusive classrooms. They also felt they were better able to handle a diverse group of students. Ms. Banu commented, “I learned after coming to this school, that a child who cannot read or write is not because he or she does not know the basics. It is because the child has some problem that he or she is not able to read [*sic*]”. According to Ms. Anu, “I have only seen such people [persons with disabilities] but I don’t know their behavior, how they’ll be or how they’ll react. After coming here only I am getting that experience”.

Parents’ perceptions regarding the benefits of inclusion. Parents felt that inclusion was beneficial to children with disabilities in general, and specifically to their children. This was reflected in the improvements they felt their children had shown over the academic year and over their years in the primary school. They said they observed improvements in functional skills such as speech, academic skills such as writing and reading as well as social and behavioral aspects. Some parents also felt that inclusion made children a little more independent and less dependent on them.

Parents indicated that the most important benefit of placing their child in an inclusive classroom was the significant improvement in their social behavior. Ms. Prema said, “He has come to know all his classmates’ names, and he likes to sit with them. He is mingling with the students; he is sitting and eating with them, going to computer class”. Ms. Indira had also observed similar improvements in her child.

Yet another improvement that parents observed was in writing skills. One parent said that her child had shown significant improvement over the academic year in writing, because the teacher had insisted that her child should try to write as all other children in the class did. She felt this was an important reason for the improvement in her child.

Parents identified development and improvement in speech as a benefit of placing their children in inclusion. Ms. Kavitha said she had observed an improvement in her child’s speech over the years he was in the school, which also reflected upon his academic performance. Ms. Saritha however, said she was yet to see any improvement in her second child, but had seen improvements in her older child, who also had a disability and was a student in the same school. She said, “Speech is one very important thing, continuously listening to other children talk”, indicating that she felt the environment in inclusion would be very beneficial in speech development in children.

Some parents also talked about improvements in academic areas like writing and board copying. For example, Ms. Indira said, “Earlier, he used to not be able to copy from the board, but now he is able to do that”.

Issues in inclusion

Throughout their conversations, participants showed that they had concerns regarding certain issues in inclusion. These ranged from general issues in inclusion in India, to specific issues and limitations in the classrooms.

Teachers' perceptions regarding issues in inclusion. Teachers identified the following major issues and their impact on inclusion in India in general, and specifically in their school: general lack of awareness regarding persons with disabilities among general public, parents and teachers; lack of training among teachers; difficulties in inclusion in the current classroom set up; social/behavioral issues in children with disabilities and parents' expectations for their children.

First, teachers felt there was a general lack of awareness regarding individuals with disabilities among the general public, parents, and teachers. This compounded the social stigma already experienced by parents that was associated with having a child with a disability. Teachers reflected upon the negative effects that parents of children with disabilities faced due to social stigma. According to Ms. Jayashree, parents and teachers of children with disabilities were two factors in inclusion being uncommon in Indian schools. In her opinion, parents of children with disabilities did not want others to know they had a child with a disability, but rather insisted that their child was 'normal'. Talking about the mentality of people, she said, "In India, if I have a child with disability who goes to a special school, it is considered a symbol of disrespect and a big sin on my part. They are ashamed and pained to say that they have a child with a disability". She also felt that general education teachers did not accept children with disabilities because of the

added responsibilities in inclusion. According to her, “No teacher will have patience for that [inclusion] because we are getting paid to teach and finish the syllabus and check if the student has finished all the work. But what I feel is, and don’t take me wrong, but teachers who work in regular schools will not accept children with disabilities at all”.

Teachers also expressed concerns regarding lack of awareness among parents of children without disabilities. Ms. Akila, reflecting upon a recent experience she had in her classroom said, “This particular child [with a disability] may suddenly hit another child; that particular parent [of the child without disability] should not come arguing about every such incident”. Ms. Roopa felt that parents of children without disabilities worry that their children would behave like children with disabilities. She said, “For example, when if the child with disabilities has certain behaviors, the other children may pick up these behaviors by observing them. When they go home and exhibit these behaviors at home, parents fear about it”.

Second, teachers talked about the lack of training in handling children with disabilities. They described their experiences teaching inclusive classrooms over the years. Ms. Akila said, “Definitely a big problem will be that the teachers are not able to handle the situation. For example, the first term the child may be a little bit silent and suddenly over a period of time he/she may get restless. Even the teachers will not be able to understand why it suddenly changed like that”. Ms. Roopa emphasized the difference between trained and non-trained teachers, “There is a lot of difference between taking care of these children with the required knowledge and without it. If the teacher is not

properly trained and the child does something that the teacher doesn't know about, he or she may get angry about why that child is not behaving like other children".

Third, teachers discussed the current school set up: the placement of children with disabilities and the role of class size in inclusion, and how these factors impacted inclusion. Ms. Anu felt having many children with disabilities was difficult due to the overall class size and her lack of experience in teaching. Ms. Banu supported this opinion, and indicated that teachers should either have fewer students in each class, or that all children with disabilities should be placed in one class and two teachers be provided for this class. Ms. Jayashree felt that children with disabilities needed individual attention more often than not, and that it was difficult for the general education teacher to be able to constantly give them the required attention. She also felt that placement of children with disabilities based on their abilities and not their age would lead to problems, especially when these children reached adolescence.

Fourth, teachers talked about many incidents in their classrooms where they had issues related to children with and without disabilities. In particular, they discussed behavior-related problems that were specifically related to children with disabilities. Teachers felt that the behavior of children with disabilities was unpredictable; it sometimes affected the classroom atmosphere and was a distraction for their peers. Teachers also felt that this was especially true if children with disabilities were seated next to each other. Ms. Anu said, "When they don't want to write, they'll be disturbing or they'll start playing with other children. If that thing happens, these children [with

disabilities] lost concentration; they [children without disabilities] will also lose concentration".

Teachers felt different characteristics of children with disabilities also seemed to present issues sometimes. They added that while these characteristics reduced significantly over the school year for many children, it was still difficult to manage them. In addition, Ms. Akila talked about how characteristics of children with disabilities changed suddenly, and about the challenge associated with managing behavior changes. Teachers felt that it sometimes took away time from their responsibility towards the rest of their class and children. For example, Ms. Anu said that one of her students could not sit at his desk for very long and would walk around the class. She talked about yet another child with a disability who constantly ran out of the classroom when his mother was not present, who pushed and beat other children, and sometimes the teacher. She felt that since she could not leave the other children and pay full attention to this child all the time, she had requested that the parent stay with the child for the whole time he was in school (he was in school in the forenoon, for 2-2.5 hours). She remarked, "He used to run. He used to give me a hard time… running behind him. And I don't know, whether to control the class or run behind him".

Ms. Banu stated that people (and especially teachers) treated children with and without disabilities differently. She also felt that teachers were more lenient than necessary when it came to children with disabilities, which lead to issues in the classroom. She said, "Sometimes I see these special children, when they behave with temper tantrums or they push things and all that, we are very soft and relaxed. But if [it

is] the other kids, it is a different behavior totally with them. That I feel sorry for them [children without disabilities]". Ms. Banu talked about difficulties she faced with one of the children in her class, and how the presence of a special education teacher impacted this. According to her, the child sometimes ran into a smaller storage room when he had temper tantrums. The teacher said that while she wanted to punish the child just like she might any other child, the special educator sometimes prevented her from doing so; the special educator told her not to pay attention to the temper tantrums. The teacher felt it was not fair to the other children in the class, since they were also young and did not always understand why there was a difference in expectations regarding behavior.

Finally, teachers felt that parents had unrealistic expectations for their children at times. When parents initially came to the school, they agreed with school personnel regarding social goals for their children. However, their expectations gradually increased, and they began expecting more. Teachers also experienced difficulties due to under- or over-involvement of parents, as discussed earlier

Parents' perceptions regarding issues in inclusion. Only some parents talked about issues in inclusion in general; they were mostly concerned with issues specific to the school and their experiences. Like teachers, parents also felt that there was a lack of awareness among schools and teachers. They identified this as one of the most important reasons why many schools did not implement inclusion, or as the reason it was not implemented as well as it could be.

Parents discussed the different issues they experienced in the school. Some parents indicated an issue related solely to the teacher, while others discussed issues with

peers and teachers. According to Ms. Kavitha, children without disabilities sometimes exploited the lack of social behaviors in her child, and this resulted in her child getting into trouble with the teacher. Referring to some of the peers of her child, she said, “They ask him to draw something. Even if they draw something nice it is OK, but they write something wrong or do [something] wrong and then they say they didn't do it. They blame it on him, and then it has a different implication”. She added that her child did not know how to face such issues and could not tell the teacher what happened correctly. Ms. Kavitha discussed similar issues she had with her child. She also indicated that her child had impulsive disorders and when instigated, did not know how to respond. He would not go to the teacher. Instead, he would hit or shout at the child who instigated him, which the teacher looked down upon. However, the parent felt that not all children were like that and that some of the other children helped her child. Ms. Indira said the teacher contacted her about an issue pertaining to her child; the child used inappropriate language in the class. She felt that the child might have learned the language from other students in the class, but the teacher insisted that the child did not learn it in the class.

Ms. Prema discussed her negative experiences with the teacher; she said the teacher’s request for her to stay with her child during the entire duration (2-2.5 hours per school day) that the child was in the classroom affected both her child and her. According to the parent, the teacher did not acknowledge the child’s progress; rather, the teacher felt that the child was doing well only because the parent was present all the time.

Improving inclusive practices

When teachers and parents discussed limitations and concerns they had regarding inclusion in general, and specifically in their school, I asked them how they felt these issues could be addressed. I also asked participants to describe a school with ideal inclusive practices.

Teacher perceptions regarding improving inclusive practices. Teachers identified aspects of improvement that involved different stakeholders (teachers, parents, school administration). Three key aspects in improvements involved (a) training general education teachers, (b) providing teachers with the resources and supports necessary to implement inclusion, and (c) creating awareness regarding disabilities in general, and specifically inclusive education (among teachers and parents).

All teachers maintained that training general educators in academic and behavioral aspects could help implement better inclusive practices. However, two teachers indicated that placement of children with disabilities, class size and type of disability are factors that could affect how well inclusion is implemented. Ms. Akila felt that experience in teaching inclusive classrooms was more helpful in improving inclusion than simply training for it through teacher education programs. Ms. Banu said, "For example, I think we have four in my class. Another may have 3, another class 2. You can put everybody in one class and have two teachers. Then you can concentrate a little on these children". Ms. Roopa said, "So if there are 2-3 trained teachers to handle children with specific disabilities, it may be helpful".

Teachers also stated that by making resources available to teachers and parents, and ensuring that parents and school personnel communicated clearly their expectations for each other, the school administration could ensure improved inclusive practices. Ms. Roopa said, "Once the school makes this decision [to implement inclusion], the school should have some facilities for this, as well as faculties to provide for children". She added that a special educator could provide the general education, which would lead to improved inclusive practices. Ms. Banu said that she tried to put parents in touch with each other so that they might share their experiences and expertise with each other. Regarding communicating with parents, Ms. Roopa felt that the school must arrange regular meetings with parents, which not only helps create awareness, but also make the role of parents in inclusion clearer to them, and promotes positive perceptions among parent-groups regarding inclusion.

A third aspect that emerged from the interviews and conversations concerned creating awareness about people with disabilities. Teachers felt that there was insufficient attention in the media regarding such individuals as well as special education or inclusion. Ms. Jayashree and Ms. Roopa indicated that the school administration should not only ensure that there was awareness among teachers and parents, but also provide the necessary supports for these individuals. Ms. Jayashree added, "Only thing is if there is guidance and counseling for parents and teachers to help support the child, the child will come up very well in the regular schools". Ms. Banu, on the other hand, felt that teachers should be given incentives so that they are motivated to teach in inclusive

classes; that it serves as recognition of the hard work on the part of the teacher in implementing inclusion.

Parents' perceptions regarding improving inclusion. Parents identified certain improvements regarding how the school may be able to provide additional support to children with disabilities as well as their parents.

All parents unanimously felt that having a special educator in the school would be beneficial. Ms. Saritha said, "It should be a normal school and a special education teacher should also be there. I think that [this would help] because they will teach according to the child". Ms. Indira felt that while she was happy with the way inclusion was implemented in the school, the presence of a special educator could also help parents. Specifically, she said, "I think if there is an experienced special educator who can talk to parents of children with disabilities, it will be like there is a person to guide us; how to handle them when they do certain things, or get angry or how to patiently deal with them".

Parents felt proper communication between parents and teachers was an important component of inclusion and one that could be improved upon. Ms. Prema thought that communicating with the child and parent about the small things that the teacher did in the class would improve inclusion in the school. She added that creating awareness among teachers, making them more aware of difficulties faced by the parent, would also help improve inclusion in general, and specifically in the school.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The social stigma, difficulties and discrimination suffered by persons with disabilities and their families is widespread in India, and can be attributed to religious beliefs, lack of awareness among people about causes and characteristics of individuals with disabilities as well as to societal norms and perceptions of 'normalcy', which resulted in discrimination and segregation of individuals with disabilities. Consequently, legislature has focused on non-discrimination based on disability, caste or gender, protecting rights and providing equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This legislature has given schools the option to provide inclusive education. Currently, access to special education and inclusion is limited to larger towns and cities; therefore, only schools with resources, funding and trained professionals, offer these services. Schools that elect to offer inclusion may still face many challenges in implementing it because there is limited information available to educators, school personnel and parents about inclusion and how to implement it. Additionally, neither general education nor special education teacher training programs provide teachers training specific to inclusive classrooms. Socio-cultural factors also play a key role since there are many traditions and superstitions that guide peoples' daily lives. For instance, many people believe that an individual with a disability is cursed by the Gods and is being punished for his/her sins.

This study was designed to explore inclusive practices as well as the knowledge, perceptions and experiences of essential stakeholders viz. a viz., the principal, teachers and parents of children with disabilities, who play a pivotal role in implementing inclusion in a primary school in Southern India. Specifically, key ideas discussed based

on the findings are: (a) defining inclusion, (b) teachers' knowledge and perceptions regarding children with disabilities and inclusion, (3) implications for practice; (4) implications for research; and (4) limitations of the study.

There are few studies exploring teachers' perceptions of inclusion in India using survey methodology (Parasuram, 2006; Sharma, Moore & Sonawane, 2009). While they examined attitudes of teachers regarding inclusion and the impact of certain variables such as age, gender and work experience of participants, survey studies present certain limitations. First, they do not examine these perceptions in the context of school practices. In addition, they do not highlight if and how perceptions and school practices impact each other. This is especially important since literature regarding inclusion show that schools and stakeholders perceive inclusion differently. Through this study, I was able to explore the nuances of how school practices and participants' experiences in the school impacted their perceptions regarding inclusion. Additionally, Shyamala School implemented unique practices with limited resources, which provided the context that shaped participants' perceptions.

Through this study, I was able to explore inclusive practices used in a primary school, and the perceptions of the principal, teachers and parents of children with disabilities regarding inclusion. Participants' knowledge and perceptions regarding inclusion are a direct result of and consistent with their experiences and the inclusive practices in the school. School-wide practices promote social inclusion of children with disabilities. These practices are consistent with the principal's philosophy regarding education as well as the availability and access to resources and personnel. In conducting

this study, I found that the principal of the school was responsible for initiating the implementation of inclusive practices. She was candid and open from the very beginning when I approached her about conducting the study. The school personnel had a very positive attitude both towards teaching, and towards their school.

Defining inclusion

Inclusion is the practice of providing equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities, in general education settings. According to Hallahan and Mercer (2001), "Views on inclusion have ranged from full inclusion to a preservation of the continuum of placements" (p.30). Inclusion is a relatively new concept in India compared to the West. School personnel rely on information regarding inclusion from literature in the Western countries. However, they adapt the definition and practices to the context of education and schooling in India.

In India, special education services range from segregation to full inclusion. Resource room settings are most commonly used to include children with mild and moderate disabilities while children with severe disabilities continue receiving services in segregated settings. Special educators focus on developing age-appropriate functional skills such as reading in braille and communicating with sign language that aid children with disabilities in developing academic and social skills. School personnel in Shyamala School defined and adapted inclusive education based on their philosophy of teaching and learning, socio-cultural aspects of the society and resources available in the school. Participants in this study defined inclusion as placing children with disabilities in regular classrooms with additional support provided by parents, special educators and therapists

outside the school. They defined inclusion as providing students with disabilities the opportunity to interact with non-disabled peers, to learn socially appropriate behaviors, to adapt to the environment in the classroom and outside, as well as to acquire basic communication skills. There was little to no emphasis on developing academic skills; the development of academic skills was left to special educators or parents. Some children were more involved and were able to cope with the academic requirements of the classroom with minimal support. Other children were seated in the classroom, but not involved in the academic activities except in instances when their parents provided support. The responsibility of ensuring that children with disabilities received the services they need was placed on the parents. This could reflect teachers' beliefs that they were doing parents a favor by allowing their children in the school. Parents' definition of inclusion was similar to that espoused by school personnel. Their goals for their children while in the general education classroom included reducing inappropriate behavior and learning socially appropriate behavior and making friends at school. At Shyamala School, all stakeholders defined inclusion in the same way. Participants' perceptions regarding inclusion were also reflective of social inclusion of children with disabilities.

Perceptions regarding inclusion

Singal (2006a) indicated that scholars who attempt to study inclusion interpret it differently. Educators also interpret inclusion differently. These interpretations could reflect the socio-cultural aspects of the society, as well as perceptions regarding individuals with disabilities.

Perceptions regarding children with disabilities. In the United States, discussions related to individuals with disabilities have slowly evolved from pity and charity models to social empowerment. However, people in India still pity individuals with disabilities, or ascribe their disability to sins committed in a previous birth. The Indian Government has introduced legislature in the past two decades, in an attempt to ensure equal opportunities for children with disabilities (Sharma & Deppeler, 2005). The Government also provides educational opportunities in the form of resource room or inclusive programs that provide accommodations for children with disabilities. However, despite efforts from the Government and advocacy groups, the status of individuals with disabilities is far from equal, let alone empowering. While participants in the current study themselves did not perceive disabilities to be caused by peoples' sins, some participants identified this as a common perception among the general population. However, some teachers did express feelings of pity and empathy for children with disabilities and their parents, especially in light of the perceptions regarding individuals with disabilities among the general populace.

One of the factors impacting teachers' knowledge and perceptions regarding inclusion could be their perceptions of children with disabilities. Positive perceptions regarding inclusion could be the result of positive perceptions regarding individuals with disabilities. In the current study, some teachers felt it was possible to achieve full inclusion if they received the required support from the school and if teachers had positive attitudes. While teachers identified difficulties or deficits while discussing characteristics of children with disabilities, they also identified social, economic and

cultural factors that had an impact on individuals with disabilities and on inclusion. In the same way, if teachers perceived that children with disabilities had limited abilities, or that they could not be educated, it could lead to negative perceptions or limited inclusion. For example, some teachers in the current study explained that it was a challenge to include children with severe behavior problems in their classrooms; they felt that it was easier to include children with mild disabilities. This may be due to a lack of training, resources, or awareness among teachers. These beliefs could affect how teachers interact with these children in their classrooms. This is consistent with results from previous research (Singal, 2006).

Another factor that could impact teachers' perceptions is the belief that, it is better and more practical to provide vocational training to some children with severe disabilities after a certain age, so that they may obtain employment rather than continue academic coursework. This is a common perception regarding individuals with disabilities in India. It is also a common practice to provide individuals with disabilities, vocational training during or after high school.

It is likely that there are additional factors that impact teachers' perceptions of the benefits of including children with disabilities in general education classrooms. First, parents played an important role in supporting the teacher; it is therefore possible that teachers who were able to collaborate and communicate well with parents felt more at ease regarding handling children with any type of disability. Second, the lack of awareness among teachers about characteristics of children with disabilities, as well as training could play a role in how they felt about including children with behavioral

issues. On the other hand, if the expectation was that parents would help, teachers may be less positive about inclusive practices if parents' work commitments prevent them from helping in the classroom. Finally, lack of resources and access to information regarding inclusion could also impact teachers' perceptions.

Perceptions regarding inclusion. While participants defined inclusion in a very similar way, they had different perceptions and experiences in implementing inclusion. In particular, discussions regarding who can be included, and their dialogue regarding the extent of inclusion were significant. This could impact how much teachers involved children in the classroom, as well as whether they made any improvements/adaptations through the years.

All participants alluded to the necessity of access to special educators in order to provide inclusive education to all children with disabilities. Teachers felt that it was not always possible to include all children with disabilities. It is possible that a number of factors impact their perceptions of who could or could not be included. Teachers' knowledge and perceptions regarding children with disabilities seemed to be influential in determining who could be included. Additionally, teachers' experiences with inclusion also had an impact on their perceptions regarding including children with disabilities, and to what extent. For example, one teacher indicated she had difficulties managing a child with severe behavior difficulties in her classroom because the child ran out of the class, pushed other children and at times did not listen to her instructions. This experience led her to think it could be difficult to handle most children with behavior disorders. Experiences with individual children, both positive and negative, coupled with lack of

training, shaped teachers perceptions. Positive experiences led to positive perceptions regarding the feasibility of inclusion while negative experiences had the opposite effect.

Only two teachers felt that full inclusion was possible, and under certain conditions. Both teachers in this study who spoke about full inclusion had prior experiences in schools with a resource room program that had access to many resources and special educators. However, while one teacher attributed the feasibility of full inclusion to availability and access to resources and personnel, the other teacher felt that including any child with a disability completely depended on the perceptions of the teacher and whether or not the teacher was inclined to include children with disabilities in his or her classroom.

Teachers explained that some children required greater support of their parent or special educator. When teachers felt that they did not receive adequate support from the parent or special educator, they tended to have negative perceptions about the particular child, his or her parent or inclusion in general. While this was consistent with the goals of the school in focusing on social skills, it does not seem to pave way for general education teachers to take on a bigger responsibility and find alternative ways to include these children better in the classroom, and especially in instructional activities.

Data indicates that the principal, teachers and parents share important roles in implementing inclusion. The role of parents is both unique and essential in implementing inclusion at Shyamala School. Parents not only supported learning outside school, but also actively provided additional support to the teacher in the classroom setting when required. The role of parents could impact the implementation of inclusion both

positively and negatively. By being in the classroom, the parents are directly involved in their child's learning and may be able to provide appropriate supports to the classroom teacher. This could also ease the pressure on teachers, many of whom were not trained to provide inclusive education. On the other hand, if the expectations and goals of parents and teachers are different, it could lead to friction between them. Both teachers and parents felt that collaboration and communication were key to successfully implementing inclusion; their perceptions about the success of inclusion reflected their experiences in collaborating with each other. While there was informal communication between teachers and parents at times, there were times when both parents and teachers identified the need for improved communication. Clearly communicating the expectations and roles of each of these stakeholders could be vital in improving already existing practices, and prevent parents and teachers from having negative experiences in inclusion. This in turn could prevent negative perceptions regarding inclusion.

Benefits of inclusion. Both teacher and parent participants identified improvements in affective aspects of development as the most important benefit of inclusion. All participants felt that inclusive classrooms provided the appropriate atmosphere for social development of children with disabilities. They also observed significant improvements in children with disabilities in the affective domain over the school year and as they progressed through primary school. This is consistent with research studies conducted by other scholars (Cole & Meyer, 1991).

Teacher participants in this study also explained that by interacting with children with disabilities, non-disabled children developed tolerance and improved attitudes at a

young age. Teachers added that friendships developed between children with and without disabilities. Moreover, peers of children with disabilities were very helpful, and sometimes protective of them. Previous research studies (Banerji & Dailey, 1995) have also shown that inclusion as a positive impact on peers of children with disabilities.

According to Rafferty, Piscitelli and Boettcher (2003), preschool children with severe disabilities showed better language development and social skills in an inclusive setting as compared to those placed in segregated settings. In this study, parent participants felt that their children would learn appropriate language and behavior in the company of their non-disabled peers through imitation and that this was an important benefit for their child. These results are also reflected by parents' perceived benefits of inclusion in a study conducted by Palmer, Fuller, Arora and Nelson (2001).

Limitations in inclusion. While participants expressed predominantly positive perceptions regarding inclusion and its impact on children with disabilities, they also identified certain issues or barriers in implementing inclusion. Teachers identified a lack of awareness among parents and teachers, large class sizes, lack of resources, lack of access to information regarding inclusion and lack of support personnel as some of the barriers to inclusion. However, teachers reflected that these were general issues in inclusion; they did not identify all of these as issues in inclusion in their school. Teachers typically felt very positive towards the program in the school. Some teachers identified large class size, role of the parent and lack of sufficient training as the three main issues in their school.

Scholars have indicated that class size was another factor that affects teachers' perceptions regarding inclusion (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). In Shyamala School, there were, on average, 35-40 students in each class with one teacher. If there were 4-5 children with disabilities, it was, at times, difficult for the teacher to manage both groups of students in the classroom, especially since they were not trained to do so. Additionally, they emphasized that they were unable to give individual attention to children with disabilities, and that doing so would take away time from the other children in the classroom.

There were, at times, discrepancies in the goals for children with disabilities. The principal and teachers expressed that parents' goals for their children and expectations from the school changed once they observed improvements in their children's social development. However, the school continued to focus only on social goals, especially in primary grades. These differences, at times, caused difficulties. The parents had a vested interest in their child, and therefore wanted their children to continue to grow and improve, and as the children accomplished the goals that were set, they wanted to set higher goals. However, the principal said she clearly communicated to the parents that when a child was admitted to the school, that they would provide social inclusion, and that the parents should take care of the child's special education needs outside the school. This underscores the importance of communication among different stakeholders being a key factor in successfully implementing inclusion.

Scholars have studied the impact of teacher-training programs on teachers' perceptions of inclusion. According to Sharma, Moore and Sonawane (2009), teachers

with higher qualifications had more positive attitudes towards including children with disabilities. Additionally, the roles of general educators and special educators are different in inclusive classrooms. According to Hallahan and Cohen (2008), both general and special educators need to be trained specifically to teach inclusive classrooms, since the skills and knowledge needed to teach collaboratively in an inclusive classroom are different than those needed in self-contained classrooms. One of the main reasons for this lack of required skills between both groups of teachers in teaching inclusive classes is the way teacher training or teacher preparation programs are designed; there is no collaboration or bridge between the two programs. Neither program focuses on training teachers for inclusion; training programs for general educators focus on general education classrooms while special educators' training programs are geared toward providing instruction in segregated special education classrooms. This was evident in the current study as well. While teachers felt that instructional strategies used in special education could be beneficial to both children with and without disabilities, they did not undertake it as part of their role in bettering classroom practices and thereby improve inclusion. They identified their role as facilitating social inclusion and the role of the special educator in providing academic learning. Teachers identified a lack of training in "handling" children with disabilities, rather than teaching or educating them. This could reflect their perceived role in specifically providing social inclusion in their classrooms. It also delineates their role in inclusion of children with disabilities. This is consistent with the practice of social inclusion in the school. However, it limits the opportunities

that may otherwise be available to children with disabilities in academic learning in inclusive classrooms.

Findings in this study indicated that neither parents nor teachers were aware of legislature and laws pertaining to individuals with disabilities. In general, while there is some legislature regarding including children with disabilities in India, the implementation is inconsistent, and not monitored sufficiently. There is not enough guidance for schools implementing inclusion. At times, teachers felt that schools admitted children with disabilities since it was mandatory. This led some parents of children with disabilities to leave their children in the school under the complete care of the teachers. Given that parents play an important role in providing supports to the teachers when required, teachers identified this as a potential problem. This creates a further lack of clarity in the roles of stakeholders, thereby creating negative perceptions among stakeholders.

Implications for practice

While there is a limited focus on academics, social inclusion has been successful in this school. All participants indicated that children with disabilities' social and behavioral skills improved significantly over their years in primary school. This could be an effective model of inclusion for schools with limited resources and manpower, given that there are many such schools in India. School administrators could encourage parents and teachers to develop advocacy groups that in turn could help creating awareness regarding individuals with disabilities as well as inclusive practices. They could also share their knowledge and experiences with other schools and educators interested in

implementing inclusive education. Additionally, these advocacy groups could also help create awareness regarding children with disabilities as well as inclusion among educators, general public and administrators.

To address the issue of lack of awareness among the general public as well as among educators, the Government, support groups, advocacy groups as well as organizations providing services for individuals with disabilities could use popular mass media such as movies, television, radio in creating community awareness regarding individuals with disabilities especially in semi-rural and rural areas where there is a need for increased awareness. It can help address the issue among educators, policy makers as well as the general public and in promoting positive perceptions about children with disabilities and especially in their education and inclusion. Additionally making administrators and school principals aware of the benefits of inclusion and creating networks within schools to support the implementation of inclusion will benefit and encourage even small schools with very limited resources to be able to include children with disabilities.

While there are some policies and legislature developed by the Government for including children with disabilities in classrooms, school administrators, principals and teachers do not have the resources or tools to implement these policies in their schools and classrooms, especially given the limited resources and training. Inclusion must reflect more than mere placement of children with disabilities in the regular classroom. The Government must take into consideration, the limited access to support professionals like special educators or therapists, limited resources, large class sizes, condition of

classrooms and needs of teachers and students while developing policies regarding inclusion of children with disabilities.

In Shyamala Scool, children's instruction in general and special education were mostly separate, and there was minimal collaboration between general and special educators. The teachers did not seem to be aware of the specifics of what the special educator did, except for what was communicated through parents. In order to effectively include children with disabilities, it is essential that general and special educators work collaboratively. Communication and collaboration between the two groups of teachers should be on a regular basis. Additionally, general education teachers could benefit from the expertise of special education teachers in not only how to handle children with disabilities in the classroom, but also in providing improved accommodations with regard to academics. In addition to collaboration between general and special educators, there is a need for improved teacher training programs for both groups of teachers. Teachers must be equipped with the tools in instructing students with diverse needs. Both general and special education programs must focus on equipping teachers to handle children with diverse learning needs in an inclusive classroom.

In India, parents play an important role in the education of their children. The role of parents was pivotal in implementing inclusive education in Shyamala School because they were directly involved in classroom activities. However, as the school strives to move towards becoming more inclusive, the roles that parents play may be redefined. While the parents may not directly participate in the classroom to the extent they do currently, the principal and teachers must ensure that parents continue to be involved in

planning and improving inclusive practices. Additionally, parents' goals and expectations for their children changed over time, while school practices did not. Clearly defining the roles of parents and teachers, as well as expectations for each other will help reduce anxieties caused by miscommunication or lack of communication. Parents should be able to communicate their grievances or goals without difficulty. The presence of a resident special educator could also drastically improve the access to academic opportunities for children with disabilities within the school setting. The special educator can collaborate with the general educators and parents, to help improve accommodations in their classrooms. The presence of a counselor in the school or access to counseling could help reduce some of the stress parents and teachers may experience due to issues in communication.

Class size is an important issue that needs to be addressed, especially in the context of classrooms in many Indian schools. Teachers' ability to manage the classroom and provide adequate opportunities to all children is increasingly difficult when classes are large. Yet another issue pertaining to class size is that of safety. As one teacher is responsible for a large class, precautions must be taken to ensure that all children have a safe environment. The presence of a parent, special educator or aide could be helpful, especially on days when the teacher feels she could use the help of an additional person.

Implications for Future Research

This study focused on inclusive practices in a primary school, as well as the perceptions and experiences of the principal, teachers and parents of children with disabilities. Findings of this study indicate that children with disabilities benefited from

inclusion in affective domains. Future research can focus on classroom interactions with between children with disabilities and their peers over the entire school year.. This could provide valuable insights into actual improvements in social behavior over time.

In this study, the school implemented a model of social inclusion at the primary school level. Since academic goals change over time and a greater emphasis is placed on academics and preparation for college as children progress through middle and high school, studies examining the inclusive practices and the perceptions of teachers and parents in the middle and high school levels could also be conducted. In addition perceptions and experiences of children with disabilities or their peers could not be explored in this study due to the age and nature of disabilities of the children. A study exploring these aspects could be conducted at the middle and high school level, especially among adolescents, which would help give insights into social interactions among children with and without disabilities.

Through this study, I was able to identify the inclusive practices in a private, primary school through interviews and observations of classrooms. However, I was unable to observe students during tests and examinations or during other school related activities such as Annual Day and Sports Day. An in-depth study of one or two classrooms could provide further details regarding how teachers teach and handle children at different times and activities during the school year, and the participation of children with disabilities in school-level activities.

A study of other schools implementing inclusion could also be conducted, which would help compare inclusion at different schools. In addition, it could also be used to

identify inclusive practices that are successful, and how school practices may be adapted to include children with disabilities in regular classrooms.

Limitations

Some participants seemed open and forthcoming with regard to their perceptions while others seemed a little nervous or tense, especially when expressing negative aspects or limitations. While teachers did not seem very inhibited regarding my being an observer in their classroom, they were a little apprehensive regarding interviews and conversations at the beginning of the study. This could have impacted how they responded to certain questions.

Due to the class size, noise levels and seating arrangements in the classroom, observation of individual interactions among children with disabilities and their peers was limited in its scope. This data could help provide insights into how peers of children with disabilities responded to them, and provide insights into the general classroom atmosphere.

Due to the time of the academic year when the study was conducted, I was unable to include observations of school activities such as Independence Day, Sports Day or Annual Day celebrations. During these activities, students typically spend a lot of time together practicing for their participation in cultural and sports events. This data could provide valuable information regarding interactions outside of the classroom atmosphere, and add to the validity of teachers' perceptions regarding successful social inclusion of children with disabilities.

Due to the nature of the study and limited number of participants, the results of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population. This study provides an insight into how inclusion is adapted, implemented and perceived by stakeholders in one private, primary school in a developing nation like India. The school practices a social model of inclusion by providing children with disabilities opportunities to interact with their non-disabled peers in the general classroom setting. Overall, the principal, teachers and parents have positive perceptions regarding including children with disabilities, with some reservations. This study sets the stage for future research in understanding how educators in different school settings adapt and implement inclusion as well as the various factors that impact their perceptions regarding including children with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Appendix A

Consent form for schools

Dear Ms. Nithya. S,

January 7, 2011

We are extremely pleased to support your data collection on inclusive education in India. We understand that this research is for your dissertation and it is a requirement of your doctoral studies at The University of Texas. The current efforts nationwide and within this State in special education and inclusive education for children with disabilities is an extremely important initiative to the future of education of children with disabilities. Like you mentioned in your proposal, it is essential to understand the process of inclusive education in the Indian context. Your proposal also appropriately acknowledges the complexities and concerns raised by teachers, parents, students, principals as well as other decision makers involved in the process of implementing inclusive education, as well as the success that some of these projects have seen. The project's efforts to understand the implementation of inclusive education at the primary school level as well as stakeholders' perceptions and concerns regarding inclusion may help shed light on its implementation in India as compared to its implementation in other countries. It may also help examine perceptions of teachers working under different conditions in different

classrooms with children with a wide range of needs that are very different from one another.

Our teachers work hard to provide appropriate instruction to meet student needs, we always welcome research-based information that may assist our teachers –especially when working with children with disabilities. We feel that your study of inclusion in the few schools in this city may help give a different outlook to inclusive education, as well as valuable resources for our teachers.

On behalf of our school, I welcome and endorse your project. I believe that our school has the resources available to support your work, with as much assistance from the school and our entire staff and teachers. Once your proposal is approved, we look forward to discussing plans and taking next steps with the project.

Appendix B

Principal Interview Guide

1. Experience as teacher (years, subject, school)
2. Experience as principal (years, school)
3. Responsibilities as a principal
4. Teacher preparation (details regarding program, whether they had any training in special education, inclusion or any other type of settings). This could help get at the knowledge part.
    a. Probes based on the response. For example, if they do not have any training in special education, I asked how they came to know about special education, inclusion and what motivated them to start an inclusion program.
5. Including students with disabilities in school
    a. What do you know about inclusion? Defining inclusion, awareness of laws
    b. How and when it started, motivation, process
    c. What were your goals when you started the program (how have they changed since then, why)
    d. Who can be included? Do you have criterion for admitting children?
6. Description of the program itself
    a. Changes over time- progression
7. How is the effectiveness of inclusion evaluated?

a. What are the results you are seeing with inclusion—it could also be the other way around—ask them if they are seeing results, what kind and how it is measured.
b. How do you monitor teachers, instruction?

8. Interactions with students, teachers, parents
9. Resources and support for students, parents and teacher
10. Staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings
11. Issues faced as an administrator- in inclusion and besides inclusion
    a. With teachers, parents, students
12. Goals for school, inclusion in the future?
13. If you wanted to change anything in the school, inclusion program, what would you like to change?

Appendix C

Teacher Interview Guide

1. Experience as teacher (years, subject, school)
2. Responsibilities as a teacher
3. Teacher preparation (details regarding program, whether they had any training in special education, inclusion or any other type of settings). This could help get at the knowledge part.
    a. What did you wish you had in your training? How do you think it might have helped?
4. What do you hope to achieve for your students/classes
    a. What are your goals? How do you achieve these goals?
5. Including students with disabilities in your school
    a. How were you involved?
    b. Who can be included? Why?
    c. What do you know about inclusion? Defining inclusion
    d. Personal experiences
        i. Experiences in inclusion- first year (how did you handle students, instruction, parents, issues, successes)
        ii. How has it changed over time? How many years?
6. Tell me about the students in your class (probe based on response)
    a. Involvement in classroom, interactions
7. Instruction (modifications for children with disabilities)

a. Time spent on planning
b. Collaboration with other teachers, collaboration between general and special education teachers
c. Structure of lessons, structure of class work (including writing notes, or reading from the book etc)
d. Individual instruction, small group and large group instruction (which do you use, why- can also be observed)
e. Homework, assignments and tests (type and frequency, special accommodations)
    i. Ask about how the teacher handles each of these. Role of general and special education teacher in each of these

8. How is the effectiveness of inclusion evaluated?
    a. What are the results you are seeing with inclusion
9. Interactions with students, other teachers, parents
10. Resources and support for students, parents and teachers- what the school provides, what is needed, how do teachers share/create resources?
11. Staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings
12. Issues faced as an teacher- in inclusion and any other issues faced as teacher in classroom or administratively

Appendix D

Parent Interview Guide

1. Tell me a little about yourself and your family
2. Tell me about your child
    a. Disability, diagnosis, what has been done so far, interventions, previous schools, personal experiences, acceptance, family members' role, how they deal with education and other issues, whom they approach, how they get their information, how and why they chose this school, what they feel about kid being in inclusion, is there any other setup they prefer, why
3. Tell me about your child's school
    a. Tell me about inclusion at your child's school
4. Involvement in child's schoolwork- which parent is more involved, why and how?
5. How is your interaction with
    a. Principal of the school
    b. Teachers
    c. Other parents
    d. Children (your child's classmates, schoolmates)
6. How is the interaction of your child with
    a. Principal of the school
    b. Teachers
    c. Other parents

    d. Children (other children with disabilities, children without disabilities)

7. Parent-teacher meetings
8. What do you think has been successful with your child in this program?
9. What do you feel are some of the challenges you face as a parent related to inclusion (the school, teachers, administration, other children or parents, siblings)?
    a. As a probe, I asked them how they handled any issues that they discussed.
    b. I also asked them what they felt about any issues their child faced in the past or may face in the future
10. What would you like me to know about
    a. You/ your child
    b. Your child's school, teachers, principal
    c. Inclusion
11. Do you have any advice for parents of children with or without disabilities who may want to place their child in an inclusive set up?

Appendix E

Teacher Focus Group Guide

1. What would you want me to know about inclusion at the school?
    a. Probes for this question lead to how and in what aspects they collaborate, how they share their work and whom they go to when they need help.
2. What have I not asked about you that you think is important for me to know?
3. What advice would you give to other schools that may be interested in having an inclusion program?
4. What should parents/families know/understand about inclusive schools programs, and what do you think their role is/should be?
    a. This lead to a discussion about the problems that teachers faced due to the over- or under-involvement of parents in their school.
5. What do you foresee for this school regarding inclusion? What do you think is needed for that change? What is your role in this process?
6. If you wanted to change anything in the school, inclusion program, what would you like to change?

Appendix F

Table F1

Sample of open and focused coding for teacher interview data

Teacher Interview Data	Open coding			Focused coding
That does not mean that they cannot read or write.	Tch: Children	Tch: Indi diff	Tch: Know disab	Tch: Instructional best practice
But while writing you can find one or two children, even though they are reading well, while writing they'll make a mistake and instead of S they'll put upside down.	Tch: Know disab	Tch: Indi diff	Tch: Char of LD	
So, once if we found them and teach them that, because of the less concentration they have in the class, that time they'll be like that.	Tch: Indi diff	Tch: Role of tch	Tch: How teach acad	
If they are concentrating, they'll do correct and so I'll tell them not to talk while they're writing.	Tch: How teach acad	Tch: Class prac instr		
If you're writing 2 question answers from the board, concentrate and write the 2 question answers.	Tch: How teach acad	Tch: Instr acco		
We will not make the children write 20 question answers at a time.	Tch: How teach acad	Tch: Instr acco		
So, I used to help those children, I'll give two hours time for writing 4 or 5 question answers.	Tch: Role of tch	Tch: How teach acad	Tch: Instr acco	

They'll write because I want them to write neatly when they write.	Tch: Stud goal	Tch: Imp stud goal		

Table F2

Sample of open and focused coding for teacher interview data

Teacher Interview Data	Open Coding				Focused Coding
Now I have understood lots of things about the students.	Tch: Learning from exp				Teacher goals for students
When I first joined the school, I just used to correct the children; this thing should not be there, children should be perfect like this.	Tch: How teach beh	Tch: Per of child	Tch: Role of tch		
But they are not staying in a place like a museum to always stand stagnant in one place.	Tch: Per of child				
From one year of my experience I thought that, they also have lives; they should enjoy.	Tch: Learning from exp	Tch: Imp goal	Tch: Enjoying childhood		
We were also the same way when we were studying in the school.	Tch: Learning from exp	Tch: Enjoying childhood			Best practice
So we never sat in one place or we never kept our mouth shut always. We also used to talk.	Tch: Learning from exp	Tch: Enjoying childhood			
So why don't you sit in their shoes and see? How we also behaved earlier.	Tch: Learning from exp	Tch: How to handle children			
So from that day I thought that I should not behave as a teacher, just holding them strict and saying all this not to talk, not to do this, not to do that.	Tch: Role of tch	Tch: How to handle children			Role of teacher
Let them also enjoy. They have to enjoy.	Tch: Imp goal	Tch: How to handle	Tch: Classroom		

		children	atmosphere		
So if we allow them to mingle freely along with the other children, then only they'll love school and come to school.	Tch: Imp goal	Tch: How to handle children	Tch: Classroom atmosphere	Tch: Role of tch	
So, the children should love their school, first.	Tch: Imp goal	Tch: Philosophy of schooling			
They should love their teacher and then only they can love their subjects.	Tch: Imp goal	Tch: Philosophy of schooling			

Table F3

Sample of open and focused coding for parent interview data

Parent Interview Data	Open Coding		Focused Coding
I think normal school is better, but it depends on the child	Par: Who can be included		Par: Who can be included, conditional inclusion
I cant put him in a special school, because we need to find out where in the spectrum the children fall; some children if you see, they may be 18 or 20, but they still won't have speech, they may have a lot of behavior issues.	Par: Who can be included	Par: When incl. and when sped	
He has just started duplicating; he doesn't know whether it is good or bad; he just captures that thing.	Par: Char of child	Par: Unsure whether dev is good or bad	
When it is like that, when he is in a normal school, he is following what the other children do.	Par: Char of child		
So I think that if a child has some comprehension, and some speech, it is better they be in a normal school.	Par: Who can be included	Par: When incl. when sped	Par: Inc vs sped, spectrum of services
Academics is secondary; that parents try to teach.	Par: Imp goal	Par: Role of par	
But if you look at behavior, I feel it is better for the child to be in a normal school, atleast for a certain age.	Par: Benefit of incl	Par: When incl. when sped	
If you look at a special school, there are children with different abilities.	Par: Knowledge of disability	Par: Indi diff	
They don't segregate them according to their abilities; they all sit in the same room, they all do the same thing-- that I think needs to change a lot in special schools.	Par: State of sped in India	Par: Sped changes needed	

Some schools tend to think why they need to teach any academics; I think special schools themselves need a lot of awareness.	Par: Schools not aware	Par: Imp goals	
In fact, maybe we shouldn't blame normal schools at all.	Par: Schools not aware	Par: State of inc schools in India	
There are only very few schools in Chennai which are very good, but you don't even get an admit for a special child. They test the children, their IQ and then only give an admission. Not all special schools are like that.	Par: State of inc schools in India		

APPENDIX G

Codebook sample: Open coding

Tch Indi diff – Teacher acknowledges or identifies different characteristics among children

Tch Know Disab – Teacher shows some knowledge about disabilities (describes characteristics, tries to define disability)

Tch Role of Tch – Teacher perception of what role the teacher should play in the classroom

Tch How teach acad – Teacher perception of what is the best way to teach academics to young children or children with disabilities.

Tch how to handle child – Teacher talks about what the best way to handle/teach behavior of young children with disabilities

Tch Class prac instr – How teacher delivers instruction in classroom

Tch Instr acco – Any instructional accommodations provided by the teacher in the classroom

Tch Exam prep acco – How teachers provide accommodations in preparation of examinations and tests

Tch Exam grade acco – How teachers provide accommodations in grading tests and examinations

Tch Seating arrangements – How teachers seat children with and without disabilities in the classroom

Par imp goal – Parent perception of what should be (or is) the focus or goals of inclusion

Par benefit of inc – Parent discussed the general benefits of inclusion for children with disabilities.

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