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# Reading and writing in the mainstream : an observational case study of effective reading and writing instruction in an integrated setting

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**READING AND WRITING IN THE MAINSTREAM:  
AN OBSERVATIONAL CASE STUDY  
OF EFFECTIVE READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION  
IN AN INTEGRATED SETTING**

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### Abstract

Following the tradition of classroom ethnography, this classroom case study provides rich descriptions of the shared day-to-day experiences of the participants in an integrated grade five classroom during language arts instruction, with a focus on factors that contribute to effective reading and writing instruction in an integrated setting.

The data was collected using ethnographic techniques to describe actual practice. Two weekly visits of two hours in duration were made over a four month period. Detailed notes of teaching procedures, student activities, student work products, learning materials, and evaluation procedures were recorded. In addition, the classroom teacher, the special education teacher, teacher assistants, and students in this class were interviewed.

From the data analysis, several themes emerged: (a) time; (b) inclusive attitude; (c) structure of environment; (d) cooperative approach; (e) rules, values, and expectations; (f) choice; (g) purpose; and (h) invitation to literacy. Within each theme, a descriptive account from the perspectives of the observer, classroom teacher, and students is offered, and an analysis of the factors that appear to have contributed to successful literacy instruction is made.

A concluding discussion summarizes the results and suggests some conclusions and possible implications. It is anticipated that this study will add to the present knowledge of classroom practice regarding special needs students in an integrated setting. Although there have been many single subject mainstreaming case studies, there is a lack of mainstreaming case studies that describe classroom practice.

It is hoped that an understanding of how one teacher developed and refined the instructional program so that special needs students were able to receive effective reading and writing instruction in the mainstream may offer some helpful ideas or suggestions for teachers who are in the process of integrating special needs students into their own language learning classrooms.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Background

This study originated from a personal interest in the language arts instruction of special needs students. As a parent of a child with mild learning disabilities, I am interested in motivating my daughter to have a positive attitude toward literacy. As a teacher, I am interested in understanding the relationship between the classroom instructional approach to language learning and student attitudes to reading and writing, especially in regard to special needs students.

It is important to document the background from which this research arose, because "meaning exists at the beginning of any research as well as at the end" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 251). My interest in the literacy development of special needs students began when I was challenged by a student who had difficulties meeting the requirements of English 8 because of a learning disability. I created an individualized program for him.

However, this differentiated program prevented him from becoming a full member of the class. He was not able to participate in the same activities or discussions, or learn from the other students. I wondered if language learning could be organized so that special needs students could have



a program adapted to their individual needs and yet be integrated into the classroom as full participants.

A subsequent experience as a graduate student research assistant increased my interest in this question. I spent six months as a participant observer collecting ethnographic data in a grade three classroom in which three students with mild to moderate learning disabilities had been successfully integrated. The research goal was to investigate how the classroom teacher adapted the whole language approach for special needs students. From that investigation (Walker, Sumara, & Ronda, 1991), several themes emerged:

(a) Learning is a noncompetitive, collaborative, social endeavor in which students learn according to their ability; (b) language skills are learned through meaningful use in real communication and thinking tasks; (c) language learning is a developmental process in which students make successive approximations to conventional language use; (d) knowledge is socially reconstructed; and (e) the whole language classroom is a carefully structured learning environment.

From our observations, we concluded that the teacher's view of learning as a collaborative, noncompetitive endeavor in which students learn according to their ability, was one of the major reasons for the academic and social success of the integrated students. The special needs students were

fully integrated into the life of the class, not just physically placed in a regular classroom.

This teacher combined the whole language approach to language learning with cooperative learning and peer-tutoring. The classroom was organized so that all the students were paired with partners or buddies. The students were also often placed in groups of four or five to work together to achieve a common goal. Individualized expectations, adapted according to the needs of each student, were planned for each group member. Although the special needs students achieved goals outlined on their Individual Educational Programs, they did so within an integrated classroom structure. The goals were modifications of the regular classroom program according to the developmental level and learning style of each student. Thus they were engaged in parallel programs, not obviously different programs that would socially isolate them.

#### Research Question

From these experiences and observations, I began to try to "make sense out of the ways that learning and literacy come together in various settings" (Cambourne, 1988, p. 2). I was interested in recording ethnographic data in another integrated classroom that was also effectively implementing an integrated approach to language arts instruction.

After selecting the setting for this research study, my initial question was: What are the day-to-day experiences of all the participants in this classroom during language arts instruction? This question allowed me to focus on the classroom environment as well as literacy activities.

Although I continued to make wide-angle observations, the emphasis gradually changed to focus on the question: What practices contribute to effective reading and writing instruction for special needs students in an integrated classroom setting? Further questions continued to emerge:

1. How are students helped to develop literacy skills in an integrated classroom setting?
2. How is this assistance the same and how is it different for special needs students?
3. What instructional approaches, strategies, or practices, are effective for all students, including special needs students in this classroom?
4. What role do teacher and student attitudes play in the literacy development of special needs students?

#### Rationale

The questions are significant, especially in the context of the 1990s. As a result of American and Canadian political policies, there is an increasing number of students with special needs integrated into regular

classrooms. In Alberta, former Education Minister Dinning stated his intentions regarding students with special needs: "Integration will give them the chance they need to learn, to grow, to become full participants in our schools and in our society. Only for a small few will specialized programs be required to meet their complex medical and learning needs" (cited in Alberta Education, 1991b, p. 4).

However, the integration of special needs students is criticized by some because it is feared that these students will be right back where they were thirty years ago, experiencing "failure, frustration, and social isolation" (Martin, 1975, p. 5). It is suggested that in an integrated setting, the instruction should be individualized so that it does not result in a program that is the same for everyone, but one in which the needs of all students are special (Gilhool, 1975). Individualizing the program to meet special needs may address the problem of failure and frustration, but it does not address social isolation.

In the past, the instructional focus for special needs students has emphasized the remediation of skills in an individualized program often carried out in the segregated setting of the special education room. With the introduction of integration, these students are increasingly being placed or retained in regular classroom settings.

As the integration movement gained in momentum, the instructional approaches of whole language and cooperative learning have also gained popularity in Canadian classrooms. These approaches view the classroom as a microcosm of an inclusive, democratic society that respects the development of all learners. This view seems compatible with the aims and philosophy of the integration movement.

Since language arts is a major part of the classroom program, it is relevant to describe what is happening in an integrated classroom during language arts to begin to discover what is effective practice. Students' attitudes and self-concepts as readers and writers significantly affect performance (McKenna & Kear, 1990); therefore it is important to describe students' attitude to reading and writing in the classroom.

This study's description of daily life in an integrated classroom during language arts instruction involves many areas of educational knowledge. An understanding of the process of integration, integrated instructional approaches to language arts, and the role attitude plays in literacy development are essential prerequisites for an understanding of this particular classroom and its effect upon the integration of special needs students. The review of the literature that follows will highlight the history, background, and present state of knowledge in these areas.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

This literature review presents a background for the educational areas involved in this study. It explores some factors that contribute to effective reading and writing instruction in an integrated classroom setting. The review begins with a definition of terms, and continues with a summary of the history, implementation, and rationale of the integration movement concerning special needs students in the school system. The review ends with a discussion of the whole language and cooperative learning integrated instructional approaches, and the role students' attitudes toward reading and writing plays in literacy development. This background will aid in establishing the relationship of the data collection to external theories.

#### Definition of Terms

##### Integration

Integration refers to the move away from segregated schooling toward the inclusion of special needs students within age appropriate classrooms. Social interaction and participation is the purpose of integration and is required for physical integration to be relevant (Haring & McCormick, 1986). Alberta Education (1991b) defines integration as

the process of inclusion of exceptional students in regular school programs because of: (a) a belief that exceptional students have a right to participate fully in the educational, social and recreational life of the school on equal terms with their "regular" classmates; and (b) a philosophy that accepts individuals as being of equal "worth" while acknowledging that we are all different in one way or another and that we have different needs. (p. 2)

Although the terms integration and mainstreaming are often interchanged, they have conceptual differences. Integration reflects the Canadian idea of multiculturalism or integration through "positive acceptance of differences." Mainstreaming reflects the American idea of assimilation or the merging into the mainstream through "elimination or reduction of differences" (Boud, 1987, p. 77).

### Special Needs Students

According to Alberta Education's 1989 policy manual, children with special needs are "those students who require a different program or an adaption or modification to the regular school program" (cited in Alberta Education, 1991b, p. 1). In this study, observation of students with special

needs was limited to those with mild learning disabilities. Alberta Education (1991b) defines mild to moderately disabling conditions as: "educable mentally handicapped, trainable mentally handicapped, behavior disordered, learning disabled, hearing impaired, visually impaired or low vision, or speech and language impaired" (p. 2).

### Integration

#### History

Integration has its roots in the ideas of Wolfensberger (1972), who pioneered the principle of normalization for those with disabilities living in an institutional setting. He believes that the setting with the best potential for people with disabilities is the one that more closely resembles normality. This principle moved to the school system where it became known as the least restrictive environment. The school environment for special needs students was to resemble the setting of regular students as much as possible.

The move toward normalization in the school system is largely due to the efforts of parent advocates. Forty-five years ago most schools did not have any special education classes. Parents of children with disabilities had only two choices: to keep their children at home with little or no assistance or educational opportunities, or to separate their children from the family and community by



institutionalizing them. In the 1950s, organized parents demanded that their children had the right to an education. The government responded by establishing special segregated schools for children with special needs.

Political action in the United States and Canada, mainly due to parental advocates, has caused a shift in the way the school system deals with special needs students. In the United States, since the *Brown v. the Board of Education Suit* of 1945 (cited in Taylor, 1990, p. 40), educational integration moved from including the poor and racial minorities to including exceptional children. Later in the United States, class action suits were influential in the passage of the *Education For All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975* (PL 94-142), which guarantees appropriate education for all exceptional children.

The passage of the *Canadian Charter of Rights* in 1982 added a new dimension to Canadian educational decision making because parents now have the right to challenge what they consider to be discriminatory educational practices, such as segregation, all the way to the Supreme Court. Sections 7 and 15 of the Charter made clear that all children were to have equal access to appropriate educational opportunities (cited in Alberta Education, 1991b, p. 8).

To summarize, slowly changing attitudes toward the disabled that began with Wolfensberger's principle of normalization and legislative changes demanded by parent advocates have resulted in the right of special needs students to enroll in regular schools to receive education in the least restrictive environment possible.

### Rationale

One rationale given for integration is the democratic principle of equality and justice. Special needs students are viewed as an oppressed minority who are denied the educational opportunities that are their right through the discriminatory process of segregation. Segregation suggests to students that they are deficient. This notion negatively affects their self-image and society's image of them as well (Taylor, 1990, p. 42). People cannot be segregated because of differences of race, gender, or ethnic background, and they should not be segregated because of differences in mental or physical capacity either (Gilhool, 1975).

Rawls (1971) takes the equality and justice rationale one step further. In terms of equity in the distribution of educational resources, everyone is to receive what they deserve but not at the expense of anyone else. However, Rawls argues that it is right to give certain people more resources providing that it is to the advantage of the least

advantaged, as this levels out the playing field. Special needs students deserve more educational resources, such as special programs and more of the teacher's time, because they do not start from the same place as students without disabilities.

A second rationale, the consequentialist, can be argued from the perspective that an action is right if it leads to the best consequences for everyone. A consequentialist argument for the integration of students with special needs is made by Singer (1979), who formulated the principle of equal consideration of interests. An interest is an interest no matter whose it is. All human beings have interests in the same things, such as hunger, pain, shelter, autonomy, freedom, and loving relationships. A just society will take everyone's interests into account. Singer says that an action is right if the consequences or results lead to equality for everyone. Sometimes unequal treatment is justified if it brings about an egalitarian result. It is right to provide special needs students increased educational resources, if this will bring about a more egalitarian result in improving their ability to live a reasonable life in terms of basic interests.

Utilitarianism is a common consequentialist argument against the integration of special needs students. It argues that the needs of society must be weighed against the

number of people. The argument is made that the "regular" children will suffer and academic excellence will be sacrificed when a student with special needs is placed in the regular classroom because the teacher will spend more time with the disabled student, so that for the greater good, more educational resources should be given to the brighter students as they are the ones that will benefit society later, perhaps for example, by becoming doctors, scientists, or great leaders. Therefore, students with special needs should not be given any special educational resources, as it is considered unlikely that these students will greatly benefit society. This argument however, is only guessing about the consequences, and requires one to make judgments for other people that one may not be capable of making (Strike & Soltis, 1985).

A third rationale, the moral imperative, can be argued from the perspective that all children, by virtue of being born, are members of the human race and by right of that virtue are to be included as full members of the regular classroom. For our society to become fully inclusive it needs to stop valuing people only for their profitable skills, and start valuing others as human beings. This ideal of integration as a moral responsibility is promoted by advocacy groups as a way to help facilitate integration.

The premise of the moral imperative forms the basis for the inclusive school and the classroom-as-an-inclusive-community philosophy. An inclusive school does not label special needs students, but instead describes them as students with particular strengths and weaknesses. It provides all students, including those with special needs, appropriate educational programs, support, and assistance. (Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

An inclusive school places all special needs students in age-appropriate regular classrooms within their neighborhood schools as full members of the classroom community. Its perspective is that we as human beings are inextricably connected to each other through a web of relationships and we need to become part of an inclusive community in order to learn from each other. Values such as decency, tolerance, cooperation, and caring can be learned through interaction with people with special needs. (Perske & Perske, 1988).

In an inclusive classroom, students benefit from acceptance of students that are different from themselves. When students begin to appreciate the unique qualities of others, they will begin to understand their own weaknesses. When they share in another's vulnerability, it is then that they can accept themselves with their own brokenness. Community comes from the paradoxical reality that human

beings not only have the need to be recognized as unique individuals, but also have a compelling need for interdependence, to be a part of a community (Peck, 1987).

To summarize, three rationales for integration are discussed: equality and justice, the consequentialist, and the moral imperative. The perspective of the first rationale, equality and justice, is that special needs students are an oppressed minority who have been denied their educational rights and unjustly segregated from society. Further arguments are made that special needs students deserve more educational resources because they do not start on a level playing field.

The perspective of the second rationale, the consequentialist, is that an action is right if it leads to the best consequences and equality for everyone. Special needs students have a right to the provision of appropriate educational resources as this will bring about a more egalitarian result. A consequentialist argument against integration is that the education of the "regular" students will suffer because more teacher time and educational resources will be given to the special needs student.

The perspective of the third rationale, the moral imperative, is that all students, by virtue of being members of the human race, have the right to be included in regular schools. The inclusive school places all students

in age-appropriate classrooms within the regular school. The classroom-as-an-inclusive-community philosophy views the classroom as a microcosm of society in which the participants are interdependent and learn from each other.

### Implementation

Because of pro-integration political changes in Alberta, the question now being asked by many educators is not whether integration should occur, but how to make the integration process a success for all children. For integration to be successful, it needs to be supported in action as well as in words. As more children are integrated into the regular classroom there is the temptation on the part of the government to cut funding and support services rather than to increase them. Integration is not the panacea for budget cutbacks.

The implementation of integration must be done with care, or it may be a step back for special needs students, who are in a vulnerable position (Karugianis & Nesbit, 1979). In order to consider the best interests of both students and teachers, The Alberta Teachers' Association (1990) suggests that: the class size is not too large; the classroom teacher is to be given full support, including materials,

equipment, inservice, and adequate information; resource personnel are available for assistance; and time is scheduled for consultation.

A crucial factor in successful integration is the attitude of the classroom teacher. The teacher's acceptance of special needs students will set the tone and influence the positive or negative attitudes of the other students. A teacher that believes integration is the right thing to do will see problems as opportunities for creative solutions rather than as insurmountable obstacles (Kunc, 1984).

Special needs students should be allowed the opportunity to try and the opportunity to fail within the regular classroom. If a special needs student does fail at a particular task, the teacher should see it as an occasion for learning for both the student and teacher, instead of using the situation as an occasion to label the integration of this student as a failure (Kunc, 1984).

The support of the school administration plays an instrumental role in the success of the integration process. Negative teacher attitudes can be changed, especially with the full support of the administration (Stainback & Stainback, 1989). Some administrators do not feel that they have adequate resources and training, or they do not believe special needs students belong in the regular classroom, and as a result, they do not fully support the integration



process. An administrator that believes in integration is more likely to encourage and support the staff in order to make the process a success.

Consultation between teachers and professionals involved in the education of special needs students should be collaborative, not hierarchical. Classroom teachers have special knowledge and understanding through daily interactions with special needs students. Special education teachers also have their own areas of knowledge about these students. Both parties, as equals, should be able to share their knowledge and information in a collegial rather than an adversarial manner (Glatthorn, 1990). It is recommended that the final decisions resulting from this joint consultation should rest with the classroom teacher (Alberta Education, 1991c).

Collaborative consultation should also include parents and students. The McGill Action Planning System, or MAPS, facilitates integration by asking the significant people in a student's life to make a plan for the implementation of the integration process based on the answers to specific questions. The basic MAPS questions are: (a) What is your dream for this person? (b) What is your nightmare concerning this person? (c) Who is this person? (d) What are his or her strengths and weaknesses? (e) What are his

or her needs? (f) What should be done? When? Where? By Whom? (Bracewell, 1990).

Integration of special needs students can be successful if the regular classroom teacher is able to adapt classroom instruction to satisfy a broad scope of student needs (Stainback, Stainback, Courtnage & Jaben, 1985). Too much emphasis has been placed on fitting the person to the program instead of modifying the program to fit the person. The concept of the least restrictive environment, could lead to further segregation and might be used as an excuse to restrict opportunities for students with special needs (Taylor, 1988). We must recognize the limitations, but not be limited by them, for "if we limit our children, their lives are limited accordingly" (Bracewell, 1990, p. 39).

One of the major barriers to the facilitation of this objective appears to be the existing structure of regular education. The rigid lock-step graded structure of regular education makes it more difficult for the classroom teacher to adapt to individual needs (Stainback et al., 1985). After conducting a year long analysis of one urban elementary school in the United States, Baker & Zigmond (1990) conclude that fundamental changes in the school structure have to occur before special needs students can be successfully accommodated in the regular classroom. Their data suggests that the majority of classroom time is spent

managing classroom routines, and teaching is geared for large group instruction that is not adapted to meet the needs of individual students.

The description given of this school is remarkably similar to the profile that Goodlad (1984) offers in his book, *A Place Called School*. This extensive study of the United States public school system took place over a period of several years. His data suggests that it is increasingly difficult to meet the needs of special needs students in the regular classroom as the instruction becomes more differentiated in the upper grade levels.

To summarize, careful planning, adequate funding, and access to resource personnel will enhance the implementation of the integration process. Other factors to consider are: the attitude of the classroom teacher toward integration, collaborative consultation between the classroom teacher and other professionals, parental and student involvement, and administrative support.

Research suggests that one barrier to integration is the existing structure of regular education that is geared for large group instruction. The program should be modified to fit the student instead of fitting the student to the program. The classroom teacher needs to adapt classroom instruction for a wide range of abilities and needs.

## Discussion

Does integration necessarily mean that the special needs student be placed in the regular classroom for the entire day, or can an individual program that also makes use of special resources be set up? One possibility is partial integration in a regular classroom for the major part of each day. The student also receives special instruction from a resource teacher for a limited time each day. An experimental study of 131 elementary students (Beltempo & Achille, 1990), concluded that learning disabled students who were integrated into the regular classroom, but also received special instruction, had significantly higher self esteem at the end of the school year than did special needs students who were fully integrated or not integrated at all.

Is integration an effective instructional approach for special needs students? The review of the Yellowhead School District (Alberta Education, 1991c), which was the first district in Alberta to fully integrate all of its special needs students, found that integration had enhanced the social development of both regular and special needs students, but did not have a significant impact on academic improvement. However, over half of the elementary special needs students' parents did report positive academic change.

Another question is whether the integration of special needs students will negatively affect the academic

achievement of the other students. It is possible that much of the teacher's time will be spent addressing the needs of the special needs students. Although integration is ideal, further study is needed to address whether it can successfully meet the needs of all students.

Will integration be successful in removing the barriers that keep special needs students from full and equal participation in society and the educational system? It is suggested that the main barrier is not inadequate resources, but the attitude of discrimination and prejudice against those who are different and those whose disabilities make others uncomfortable (Biklen, 1974).

Although integration raises many questions and can be controversial, it finally comes down to a question of values: "What do we want our society and our communities to look like? What life do we want for ourselves and our children?" (Forest & Lusthaus 1988, p. 29).

#### Integrated Instructional Approaches

Individualizing programs to adapt for children's special needs would seem to address the problem of failure and frustration, but on its own, individualization does not address the question of social isolation. What is needed then, is an individualized program within an integrated classroom structure.

An integrated classroom structure refers to heterogeneous or mixed ability grouping while a differentiated classroom structure refers to homogeneous ability grouping according to academic ability. Differentiated instruction rewards students according to their individual efforts.

An integrated approach appreciates differences rather than minimizes them. Whole language and cooperative learning are instructional approaches that facilitate an integrated classroom structure in which instruction may be adapted to meet the needs of individual students. The best strategy for both academic and social development of special needs students is to adapt instruction without differentiating the students according to ability groupings. Instruction can be adapted by the analysis, remediation, and compensation of a student's weaknesses while building on the strengths (Snow, 1975).

### Whole Language

The whole language approach is not just a set of methods or an exact curriculum, but is a complex philosophy of learning based on the premise that learning cannot be separated from the personal experience and culture of the learner. The history of whole language can be traced back to the seventeenth century educator, Comenius. He believed

that optimal learning occurs when students are taught in their native tongue what is meaningful to them within their own life experiences (Goodman, 1989).

Language is viewed as a tool for the communication of meaning and for interaction with people and the world. In a whole language classroom, speaking and listening are as important as reading and writing. It is this emphasis on language as a way to communicate with others or with oneself, rather than on its surface polish, that provides a special needs student with the possibility of a successful and self-motivating encounter with language (Ramsey, 1985).

Whole language believes the strength of a classroom is in its social purpose: the classroom is non-competitive and supportive, a place where interdependence is valued. Students are allowed the possibility of "appreciating the nature of difference as part of a democratic tolerance" (Friere & Macedo, 1987, p. 21) that is rooted in trust and sharing. The students' own voices and cultural background are affirmed as the "means by which they make sense of their own experiences" (p. 158).

This approach is child centered which means that the student is the "starting point, the center, and the end" (Dewey, 1943, p. 9). It is the student's growth and development that are to be the standard of measurement. Errors are seen as an opportunity for further learning

rather than as a failure to meet the standard. This viewpoint allows students with special needs to be appreciated as successful learners in spite of limitations.

The teacher's role is the facilitation of guided discovery. Students are given some responsibility for their own learning in a climate of mutual respect. The teacher plans the learning experiences and adapts the environment in such a way that it will build on the background and experiences that learners take with them (Goodman, 1989). The teacher learns to observe and evaluate the students as they interact and work, and so develops a good understanding of the full range of human variability. This understanding is necessary in planning an appropriate environment for all students, but especially for students with special needs (Reynolds, 1975). In the past, language arts instruction for special needs students has been an analytical skill-centered approach in which each step or skill was mastered before going on to the next step. Thus, a great emphasis was put on isolated bits and pieces of language, as well as on the importance of testing (Farris & Andersen, 1990).

Some educators view testing as a way to sort and stratify students according to ability that leads to a devaluing of those on the bottom rung. Whole language in its acceptance of differences, tolerance of voices, and emphasis on language as a tool for communication takes a



political stand. "Its declaration for democracy, equality, and empowerment is also a declaration against social stratification, grouping, tracking, and testing" (Edlesky, 1991). However, other whole language practitioners find assessment of students' strengths and weaknesses useful in planning an appropriate environment (Ramsey, 1985).

Whole language has been criticized as not being suitable for students with special needs. Truch (1991), a Calgary-based psychologist, believes that whole language puts too much emphasis on meaning at the expense of phonological processing in the teaching of reading. Although the whole language approach has many positive aspects such as encouraging a love of literature, showing respect for the learner, and being language-rich, Truch emphasizes that beginning and poor readers need to first master the bottom-up process of learning to sound out letters before they are able to employ the top-down process of reading for meaning.

Other studies also challenge the whole language contention that reading is best learned in the context of meaningful text, and that words should not be taught in isolation. One study replicated Goodman's research on reading words in context as opposed to reading words in a list. The replication study (Nicholson, 1991) suggests that Goodman overestimated the importance of reading in context,

as the new study concluded that it was only the "poor and younger average readers that clearly read better in context" and suggests that Goodman's contention that good readers rely on "enlightened guessing" is incorrect (p. 449).

Two more studies on the importance of phonics instruction for young children, challenge the emphasis whole language places on not presenting words out of context, and the lack of emphasis on sounding out words as a reading strategy. An experimental study of preschool children concluded that children "who knew relevant letter sounds could use their knowledge to decode unfamiliar printed words" (Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1991, p. 451). Another study of six first grade classrooms concluded that the "classrooms with more letter-sound instruction improved at a faster rate in correct spellings and readings" (Foorman, Francis, Novy, & Liberman, 1991, p. 456). Perhaps the most important implication from these three studies is that the research supports a "balanced approach" (Vellutino, p. 442) in which both whole language and word identification type of activities are necessary to build a successful reading program. In actual practice, many whole language classrooms incorporate word identification, phonics, and spelling skills in a literature based program (Walker et al., 1991).

To summarize, the whole language approach is a philosophy of learning that stresses learning cannot be

separated from the experiences of the learner, so that optimal learning occurs in a context that is meaningful to the learner. All aspects of language are viewed as tools for meaningful communication. Errors are seen as opportunities for further learning which encourages risk-taking.

The classroom structure is noncompetitive and supportive, interdependence and the appreciation of difference are valued, and the social purpose is emphasized. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator who appropriately plans the learning environment based upon observation of the needs and abilities of the students. Students are respected as responsible learners who are expected to actively participate in their own learning and decision-making.

The whole language approach has been criticized by some for putting too much emphasis on the role of meaning and whole texts at the expense of phonological processing, word attack skills, and correct spelling. Research supports a balance between the whole language approach and word identification activities.

### Cooperative Learning

An instructional approach often used in conjunction with an integrated language arts program is cooperative learning. Cooperative learning falls under the educational

label of adaptive instruction. It organizes instruction in response to the needs of individuals and small groups.

Johnson and Johnson (1991) define cooperative learning as a structure in which students are involved in group activities. Group members develop or are assigned a common goal and everyone is encouraged to work together to reach that goal. Individualized objectives, adapted according to the developmental level and learning style of each student, are also expected from the group members.

Johnson & Johnson (1989) have shown that cooperative learning is a successful strategy in the integration of special needs students because the cooperative environment promotes "caring and committed relationships" among students as well as provides a context in which "social skills may be learned, practiced, and perfected" (p.5). They argue that the isolation and alienation of differentiated instruction will produce negative attitudes toward school that will affect self-esteem and achievement.

Cooperative learning can be used as a method to bring students of various levels together in a positive way while at the same time allowing each student to work at his or her own individual level and pace (Slavin, Madden, & Leavey, 1984). Interaction and motivation among students are achieved through positive interdependence. In order for the group's goal to be reached, all students must coordinate

their efforts to achieve that goal. When group rewards are based on the group member's individual contributions, student achievement is increased (Slavin, 1983).

A review of 122 North American studies found that cooperative classroom goal structures are considerably more effective in promoting achievement and productivity than competitive or individual effort (Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, & Nelson, 1981). Another study concluded that in cooperative learning classrooms, the reading, language arts, and writing achievement of all children, not just those with special needs increased, with the biggest improvement found in reading comprehension (Slavin, Stevens & Madden, 1988).

However, other researchers believe that the evidence to support cooperative learning is mainly based on descriptive data, so before changing the present practice of special education and advocating the implementation of cooperative learning approaches, experimental research based on hard data needs to be conducted to identify the limitations of the new approach. A review of the literature suggests that cooperative learning may have value in reducing the social alienation of students with special needs, but that there is no conclusive evidence to support the assertion that cooperative learning increases academic achievement (Lloyd, Crowley, Kohler, and Strain, 1988).

To summarize, cooperative learning is adaptive instruction which responds to individual needs, yet takes place in a group situation. Students with a wide range of abilities and needs work cooperatively to achieve a common goal. Research suggests that cooperative learning is a successful strategy in the integration of special needs students because it encourages social learning, positive productivity, interdependence, academic achievement, and reading comprehension.

#### Attitude

Attitude and the impact of feelings on behavior are difficult to define or measure. However, that students' attitude toward reading is a major factor that affects reading performance has a long history in the literature.

Negative self-concepts and attitudes often go hand in hand with learning difficulties and poor motivation. A student will be motivated to do careful work if he or she feels happy, has a positive attitude, and is given what is perceived to be an important task. (Bachor & Crealock 1986). Cambourne (1988) observed that students with a positive attitude to reading and writing enjoyed involvement in classroom literacy activities, were willing to take risks, and engaged in literacy activities outside formal instruction. The importance and role that attitude plays in

the development of literacy have often been ignored and requires more research (McKenna and Kear, 1990).

A teacher's positive attitude toward students and the job is an important component of inspiring a positive attitude in the students. Students are more motivated in an individualized, non-competitive classroom structure where they can set their own learning goals and are made aware of their own progress (Bradley, 1988).

To summarize, there is a significant correlation between a positive attitude toward reading and reading achievement. Special needs students may have poor motivation and negative attitudes. Students with positive attitudes toward reading and writing enjoy literacy activities, both in and out of the classroom, and are more willing to take risks. A teacher's positive attitude toward the students and teaching inspires a positive attitude in students. Students are more motivated in an individualized non-competitive classroom.

## CHAPTER 3

### Purpose, Design and Setting

#### Purpose

As suggested in the literature review, many factors contribute to the effective teaching of reading and writing in an integrated setting. This study is a systematic inquiry that provides insight into the life of the classroom by using an ethnographic approach to describe instructional approaches and actual practice in a classroom in which special needs students are integrated.

These descriptions provide insight into the relationship between effective reading and writing instruction and other practices such as instructional approaches, strategies, and classroom structure, as well as generate hypotheses about this relationship that are grounded solidly in observational data.

#### Design

The naturalistic research paradigm of the ethnographic case study was selected for this research because it is concerned with describing the real world or in this case the classroom with all of its life, complexity, and contradictions. By delving deeply into the daily life of a classroom, this study provides rich details of classroom



life and its complex relationships that might be missed in a quantitative study. Qualitative research assumes that there are "multiple realities," and that all reality is "interrelated so that the study of any one part necessarily influences all other parts" (Guba, 1981, p.77). The a priori assumptions of qualitative research are "that meaning and process are crucial in understanding human behavior, that descriptive data is what is important to collect, and that analysis is best done inductively" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 55).

The method for this study is the ethnographic case study. Yin (1984) defines a case study as an "inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). The strength of the case study is the interpretation of meaning through the context of the real world, with all the complexity and contradictions left intact (Mishler, 1986).

The underlying goal of the ethnographic approach is the description of culture. It attempts to "share in the meanings that the cultural participants take for granted and then to depict the new understanding for the reader and for outsiders" (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 36). This description

requires a deep understanding of the attitudes and ideals that drive a group's behavior.

Ethnographic case studies of individual classrooms have led to new insights into the relationship between specific instructional approaches and actual practice. For example, using participant observation, an inner city grade six class was observed at the beginning of the school year to understand how a teacher gets her students to comply with her expectations. The researcher was able to show the relationship between the teacher's whole language philosophy of learning and what was happening in the class (Edelsky, Draper & Smith, 1983).

Another example is a research study composed of what was essentially six case studies of individual preschool children in the natural setting of their own homes, in which an ethnographic approach was used to observe emergent literacy. This study (Taylor, 1983) examined the ways in which a family's personal biography affects literacy development. The underlying assumption was that an understanding of literacy development cannot be separated from the context in which it is learned.

The ethnographic case study design has also brought insight into the integration process because the qualitative inquiry procedures of participant observation and interviewing are uniquely suited for the investigation of

issues that arise when special needs students are integrated in the regular classroom (Stainback & Stainback, 1989; Miller, 1990). The research results can be used to develop and refine the instructional program so that special needs students receive a quality education in the mainstream.

A review of the literature on mainstreaming revealed that a case study profile of a single special needs student, has been used extensively as one type of research design. However, there is a lack of contextually based research that describes classroom practice with a focus on the school community rather than on an individual.

To summarize, following the tradition of classroom ethnography, this study provides rich descriptions of the shared day-to-day experiences and meanings that are understood by the participants with a focus on practices that contribute to effective reading and writing instruction in an integrated setting.

#### Data Collection

The ethnographic research tools of participant observation, insiders' accounts, video taping, and document analysis were used to collect the data in the field. These instruments were selected not only because they are frequently used methods, but because of their appropriateness for the nature of an educational inquiry.

Because of its complexity, this study required looking at the question in its total context, rather than looking at bits and pieces (Wolcott, 1975). The three ethnographic tools provided triangulation to cross-validate the data collected and served as a built-in apparatus to exclude biased interpretations (Sevigny, 1981). As well, approximately four hours of classroom interactions were video taped during language arts instruction.

Participant observation (Spradley, 1980) was carried out over a four month period from the beginning of February 1992 to the end of May 1992. Two hours a day for two mornings a week, observations were made in the selected classroom during language arts instruction for a total of 74 hours of observation. Detailed field notes were made of the teaching procedures, student behavior and interactions, and evaluation procedures. The notes from each observation were recorded to provide a detailed record.

In an ethnographic study it is important to take good contextual records so that the description is accurate (Martin, 1986). The detailed notes from the observations gave a "thick" description that "captured what people say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world" and gave an understanding of the classroom culture "through the participant's perspective" (Sevigny, 1981, p. 68).

After the first two weeks, I was able to develop a level of trust and rapport with the teachers and students so that they felt comfortable with my presence in the classroom. The four month observational period enabled the participants to behave in ways that were typical for this classroom. Any comments or changes in behavior that appeared to be influenced by my presence were documented.

Initially a wide-angle approach to observation was employed to lend a holistic understanding to the complex cultural scene of this classroom. A mainstreaming case study observation guide compiled by Bogdan & Biklen (1982, pp. 164-165; Appendix D) was used to give structure to these observations. Although wide-angle observations continued to be made, the emphasis gradually changed to focus on the special needs students and practices that contributed to effective reading and writing instruction.

Insiders' accounts were both informal and formal. Informal measures included the eavesdropping and recording of casual conversation of the students. Formal measures included in depth interviews and the administration of a reading survey. The objective was to search for meaning as the participants understood it.

The key informant for this study was the classroom teacher. He was selected because of the important role the teacher plays in setting up the classroom environment,

structure, and tone, all of which impact students' attitudes and achievement. He was interviewed several times over the course of the study. The special education teacher and the two teacher assistants who assisted in this classroom were each interviewed once. These semi-structured interviews (Spradley, 1979) gave insight into what the teachers and assistants do in the classroom and what it means to them.

The other informants were the students in this class. Informal discussions with the students helped me understand their attitudes and progress in learning and literacy. A student questionnaire (Appendix A) that was authored by the researcher was administered to all of the students. A reading and writing interview (Appendix B; Rhodes & Dudley-Marling, 1988, p. 62) was administered to eleven of the students in the classroom, and included all of the identified special needs students. These interviews were semi-structured and conversational in nature.

*The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* (Appendix C; McKenna & Kear, 1990, pp. 630-634) was administered to all students in the study to provide insight into students' attitude toward reading. The survey has been previously tested in wide-spread studies and meets the criteria of reliability and validity for a psychometric instrument. This instrument was chosen to complement the qualitative main data collection instrument of participant observation.

Hammersley (1990) argues that those involved in classroom ethnography should not rule out the use of quantitative data if it will enrich the descriptions.

Attitude is difficult to define and measure. According to the Random House College Dictionary (1972), attitude is a "manner, disposition, feeling, position, etc., toward a person or thing (p.87)". Using this definition as a starting point, more data on the positive or negative feelings of the students toward literacy was collected through observation, interviews, and conversations.

Documents such as student work, unit and lesson plans, and the school's mission statement were reviewed to give a better understanding of the underlying classroom culture and structure. Permission was sought, but was not given, to study the records of the identified special needs' students. However, the interviews with the special education teacher, the teacher assistants, and the classroom teacher were sufficient to identify and give a solid perspective on the special needs students in the class.

### Interpretation

It is the interpretation of the data that allows the researcher and the reader to make sense of what is happening in the setting. Data was interpreted through the patterning of events, description of the social meaning of behavior,

and the relationship of the data to external theories (McCutcheon, 1981).

As the patterns emerged, they were color-coded and later organized into representative themes in order to provide an emic or insider account of this classroom (Agar, 1980). The themes are patterns that agreed with each other. Data was validated through the triangulation of methods used, such as participant observation (the field notes and video tapes), insider accounts (the interviews), document analysis (student work), and a psychometric instrument (reading survey). Pieces of data that agree with each other are the evidence that supports the interpretations and conclusions. When data that disagreed with the interpretations was encountered, measures were taken to find out the reasons for the contradictory data and any correlated differences were noted.

In order to provide more reliability, the results of the observations, student questionnaires, reading and writing interviews, and the attitude survey were discussed and reviewed in collaboration with the classroom teacher.

### Limitations

One limitation of this study is that all of the observations, and recording of the data were made by one observer. Had there been more resources available, it would have been better to use several observers to compare



results. However, the triangulation of methods was used to validate the data and to counteract subjectivity and personal bias.

Although this study does not have generalizability because the results are specific to a single classroom setting, it can be compared to other research results that have been carried out in similar settings. As well, because of the rich description, other teachers reading this case study might be able to generalize from the themes that fit their own situation.

### Setting

#### Selection of Setting

The selection of the classroom to be studied was purposive rather than random. In an ethnographic approach, Goetz & LeCompte (1984) recommend that the researcher compile a list of criteria that describe the group they wish to study and which are appropriate to the research question. A search is then made for a setting that will meet these requirements. I followed these recommendations in my selection of a classroom. It became a rather lengthy process. Special education teachers, principals, professors, and school superintendents were phoned in an attempt to find a classroom that would meet my requirements. I was looking for an elementary classroom that was effectively implementing an integrated approach to language arts

instruction and at the same time was integrating students with mild to moderate learning disabilities into the regular classroom. The recommended classrooms were visited during language arts instruction and the teachers interviewed to determine whether the criteria were indeed being met. A grade five classroom in an inner city neighborhood was selected because it met all the criteria, and the teacher was articulate in expressing his philosophy of teaching and was enthusiastic about participating in the study.

#### School

The mid-size elementary school (K-6) where the observations took place is over eighty years old, and is located in a city of 60,000 in southern Alberta. Since the catchment area of the school includes a significant number of new immigrants, approximately one third of the student population are ESL students. The neighborhood surrounding the school is a diverse community of small businesses, recreational facilities, and middle to lower class homes.

The teachers and staff routinely work cooperatively together to solve the growing challenges that confront the educational system. Their strength is in the support system they have created for each other. They are proud of the school's philosophy and tradition of acceptance for multicultural and special needs students. The administration is

supportive and enthusiastic concerning special needs students and encourages teachers to take risks, implement new strategies, and be innovative in their teaching styles.

### Classroom

My first impression was that this classroom is a comfortable place, more like a home than a school. The room is of an average size, and is rectangular in shape. Although there is a place for everything, the amount of items makes it appear cluttered. Almost every square-inch of space is filled with books, written information, furniture, student and teacher art work, plants, and even a keyboard. Every student is given an equal amount of wall space where they can display a few self-selected pieces of their best art-work, or writing projects.

The reading corner has an inviting, homey atmosphere due to its comfortable furniture and rug. An old couch draped with a fake zebra skin partitions the space. An overstuffed easy chair (the Author's Chair), a shelf of books, (the Classroom Library) and an old claw-type bathtub further reinforce the homey atmosphere. The bathtub is painted with student handprints and signatures. Typically, it is filled with brightly colored pillows, a few stuffed animals, and two or three students reclining in the tub while they read or write.

The reading corner is partitioned from the desks with a room divider on which a Best Sellers list is posted and updated each month. The students nominated books they were currently reading for the list and then had a vote. The results were listed by title and author according to the number of votes received. Six of the top ten books during the study were by Roald Dahl. The divider also typically displays other reading material such as a handout on how to get published, an article about an author, and some short stories and articles.

During the study, the 26 student desks were usually arranged in three rows that formed an open square area. The teacher makes the seating plan and changes it monthly. The teacher usually honors student seating requests, but also reminds students to be responsible about their choices.

At the front of the room, a chalkboard displays the weekly schedule, the daily schedule, and the organization of the different cooperative learning groups. A bulletin board to the left of the chalkboard displays the various letters that the students received from the people and agencies they wrote concerning environmental issues.

The teacher's desk, filing cabinet, and bookshelf are located in the back of the room near the door. The teacher's desk is where the managerial aspects of the classroom, such as collecting money or permission slips,

take place. The teacher is rarely at the desk during classtime, as he is usually moving from group to group to monitor and assist the students.

Behind the teacher's desk is a bulletin board which displays the cartoons the teacher and students bring to share, and the current mystery paragraph. The mystery paragraphs are copied from the novels students are reading, and when students can identify a paragraph, they win a book. A row of windows and a shelf run along the left side of the room. Students store their writing portfolios on the shelf.

To summarize, the classroom has an inviting, homey atmosphere that makes the students feel comfortable. The Reading Corner, Author's Chair, Classroom Library, Bestseller's List, and informational bulletin boards are part of an environment that encourages literacy.

### Teacher

The teacher, Mr. K., grew up in southern Alberta, and is a recent graduate of the University of Lethbridge teacher education program. He taught a variety of subjects at three different grade levels during his first year of teaching. During this study he was in his third year of teaching overall, and in his second year of teaching grade five. All of his teaching experience has been at this school.

Mr. K. is enthusiastic and has a positive attitude toward teaching and special needs students. His personal teaching style includes the use of humor, art, music, and drama to motivate students, and to make learning an enjoyable experience, or in his words, "a place where children love to be." His instructional style incorporates cooperative learning with a thematic, literature-based, whole language approach to language learning, and the classroom-as-an-inclusive community philosophy. He believes that students need to become "risk-takers, free thinkers, problem solvers, and cooperative learners." His primary classroom goals are: "no child left-out and no child unsuccessful."

#### Special Education Resources

In this school, all special needs students assessed as having mild to moderate disabilities are integrated into regular classrooms. Severely handicapped students are taught in a separate classroom within the school.

The classroom teachers have a support system in place to assist them in the integration process that includes: access to on-going consultation with the resource teacher and other professionals, access to teacher assistants, and access to the resource teacher for pull-out time or in-class assistance.

The resource teacher does the initial assessment and works with the classroom teacher to plan materials, strategies, and individual programs. Three full-time teacher assistants help various students in seven different classrooms. The progress of all special needs students is reviewed in December.

### Students

The 26 students in this class come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds including European, Chinese, South American, and Cambodian. The social and economic status of the students is from lower middle class to middle class. There are 9 girls and 17 boys who range in age from ten to twelve years. The class includes five ESL students; two students with learning disabilities; two students with social and learning difficulties; and four students in a program for gifted students. A more detailed description of the special needs students follows.

Greg was formally tested and assessed as learning disabled. Greg has attention, processing, articulation and general learning difficulties. He requires an adapted language arts program in terms of a lowered reading level, shortened assignments, and assistance with writing.

Carrie was formally tested and assessed as learning disabled. Carrie received in-class aide assistance until

Christmas. She requires an adapted program in terms of a lowered reading level, shortened assignments, extra rereading and explanations, and assistance with writing.

Joe and Tamara both have mild social difficulties in peer relations and mild general learning difficulties, especially in writing and spelling that require some extra teacher assistance during language arts.

Han is a recent immigrant who is non-English speaking. He received five hours of pull-out assistance per week until Christmas, and now receives two to four hours of pull-out assistance per week. The special education teacher assists him with beginning reading skills, and a teacher assistant takes him out into the community to expand his English acquisition. Han requires an adapted program in all academic areas.

Nina, Bryan, and Yin are ESL students who can now communicate in basic English and receive some extra help from a teacher assistant during science.

### Daily Scheduling

A description of a typical morning schedule during the research study follows. My observation periods begin with the ringing of the first bell at 8:30. The students usually listen to school-wide announcements that are heard over the intercom, and then stand at attention while they sing the national anthem. The teacher's sense of humor comes



through, as he typically adds extra refrains such as: "and do not fight, and keep it clean."

After the teacher takes attendance, the Person of the Day takes the absentee list, along with a few candies for the secretary, down to the office. The teacher then gives a handshake and personalized greeting to each student.

The first hour and a half is usually engaged with language arts activities in the format of a Reading and Writing Workshop. The students read, write, discuss, and communicate, while the teacher's role is that of facilitator and monitor. Evaluation is through anecdotal comments written during the reading and writing conferences.

The daily schedule is usually written down step-by-step on the chalkboard so that the students can refer to it throughout the day for projects that are due and for the order in which work should be completed.

On Thursday mornings the students have an in-class book exchange from the classroom library. A rotating schedule allows a new student librarian to be in charge of checking out the books each week.

On Friday mornings, time is booked in the computer room to enable students to work on word processing. The students are either typing up final drafts of writing projects, or doing journal writing on the computers.

Every afternoon the teacher reads to the students. He often selects novels by Roald Dahl or texts that relate to the current language arts theme. The students then have an uninterrupted 15 minute silent reading time on Mondays and Wednesdays, and a 15 minute sustained journal writing time on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The students also keep a listening journal in which they write their responses to guest speakers and films.

### Program

The grade five language arts program in this classroom is based primarily on the revised *Program of Studies* (Alberta Education, 1991a) for language learning. The main principles are as follows:

1. Learning and language growth are interwoven.
2. Meaning is central to language learning.
3. Language learning builds on what learners already know about and can do with language.
4. Language is learned from demonstration of language in use.
5. Language is learned in supportive environments.
6. Language learning is enhanced through interaction.
7. In and of itself, language can be a source of satisfaction and delight. (pp. A.1 - A.2)

The program objectives are derived from the general learner expectation that: "students will demonstrate increasing confidence and competence in their abilities to use language to explore, construct, and communicate meaning" (Alberta Education, 1991a, p. B.1). The objectives are often integrated across the curriculum. For example, during a typical science lesson, students are expected to read, summarize information, and write down experiment results. The teacher requires the students to think about the purpose of their writing by asking such questions as: "As a scientist, how would you best present the results of your experiment? Do you want to make a chart, do you want to write it in sentences, or another way? You must decide the way you want to present it."

Seven overlapping levels represent a continuum of progress. The teacher observes the position of the special needs students on the continuum in order to assess progress and make instructional plans. Program objectives are applied through the utilization of reading and writing workshops that are organized around themes.

The Reading Workshop is organized according to thematic units that change about every two months. The texts are mainly short stories selected from basals or novels. Each unit or theme has a kick off opener, and a celebration closer. During the first week of school, the

teacher explains how the themes will be executed throughout the year. The units are usually five weeks in duration, with the last week for publishing written work. A year long plan of the units is:

1. Animalia: animals in literature, endangered species, fictional animals, and pets.
2. Getting Together: literature that emphasizes families, friendship, feelings and fun. It includes a class sleep-over in the school gym and a secret friendship week.
3. Recipes Novel Study: students are given the choice of several novels to read and discuss using the format of the elements of a novel as a recipe.
4. Clever, Foolish, and Farside: literature that includes comics, tricks, jokes, funny stories, poems, clever tricks, and dumb mistakes.
5. Bats, Caves, and Trapdoors: literature that includes fantasy stories (trapdoors), non-fictional stories (caves), and in-depth research (bats). It concludes with a fun day.
6. Flavors Novel Study: seven different genres or "flavors" of literature are introduced from which the students can choose novels to read and respond to.
7. Take Wing: literature that includes the islands of Hawaii, Canadian heroes, mythology and dungeons.
8. Poetry: an introduction to poetry including an extensive writing component.

Stations are introduced during the first unit study and are five weeks in duration. From both the teacher and student perspectives, the stations have been a hit. Some of the different types of stations and activities are: (a) at the Drama Station students make a commercial using a video camera, (b) at the Listening Station students listen to tape-recorded instructions that tell them what to do, and (c) at the Writing Station students are instructed to write a paragraph that is theme related. During the fifth week the students are publishing, viewing, celebrating, and reading aloud.

A similiar plan utilizing stations is followed in several other units. The students usually work in cooperative learning groups as they access each station. From the teacher's perspective, this approach is ideal because the unit themes provide consistency and continuity, while the stations provide the freedom and license to incorporate many different activites. As well, in the groups the students work at their own pace and level and can receive peer assistance.

In the first novel unit, the students are taught the recipe that most authors use for writing novels: setting, characters, plot, solution, and problem or conflict. The students make predictions and sign a literature study contract before they read their first novel. As they read

the first four chapters, they are given mini-lessons which teach the ingredients of a novel recipe and how to identify the protagonist and antagonist.

Although they are not all reading the same novel at the same time, the students notice that the basic recipe remains the same. The students can choose how many novels to read. Some students read one novel during the unit study, while other students read nine novels in ten days. The stories for the short story units are mainly selected from an assortment of donated basal reading series that the teacher has collected. The current theme is used to select stories from the basal readers, and other texts. A total of forty-five stories are selected for each thematic unit. The selections include stories that will accommodate the various reading abilities of the students in the classroom.

Students are asked to set their own reading goals. The baseline is to read at least eight short stories from the selection. It was observed that two students read forty-five stories, while a special needs student read eight.

For every eight stories that a student reads, they get a certificate that acknowledges their accomplishment. Students then have an individual conference with Mr. K. A brief checklist is filled out for each student during the conference. The conferences are limited to five minutes each, and are carried out during the reading workshop time.

Students are asked to read the teacher's comments, and if they agree with what is written, and have been truthful about the number of books they have read, they sign the conference sheet. Students earn a few candies at the end of their interview.

The teacher can usually conference five students during each Reading and Writing Workshop time. According to the teacher, the idea of conferencing is to catch the students in the process of reading and writing. During the conference the teacher asks the students to respond to a story they have read by talking about how they feel about it. Typical conference questions are: Can you tell me who some of the main characters are? What did that person do in the story? Could you respond to this story?

Reading Workshop is followed by a Writing Workshop. The Writing Workshop teaches students to go through several stages in the writing process. Written work is kept organized in writing folders with sections for Pre-writing (Web), Writing (Edit), and Post-writing (Published). Written work cannot go into the Published section unless it is polished writing because published means that it is for a public audience.

The first stage is making a web. The teacher tells the students that making a web is like using a roadmap so that you know where you are going. The principle that good

writers always revise is emphasized. Before students begin to write their first draft, they are expected to discuss their web with the teacher or with a peer.

After the students have written their first draft, they are expected to ask three other students to edit their work, using a checklist that is provided. Mr. K. teaches the students how to edit using specific codes, such as using the symbol P to indicate a new paragraph, so they only need to write out the rough draft once.

The teacher edits the draft copy during a writing conference, after the peer editing is completed. The polished draft is now ready to be typed on a word processor. After typing the polished draft, the student edits one more time.

Mr. K. teaches word processing skills to the first students that are ready to type their final drafts. After that, each student is taught by the preceding student at the time they are ready to type their final draft.

An opportunity to read published work to a peer audience is provided during the Author's Chair. Students can choose to participate in the Author's Chair, or to stay at their desks to write. On the average, five to ten students will join the Author's Chair at any one time. The teacher models for the students the purpose and the questioning techniques of the Author's Chair:



Pretend you are editing the story you are listening to in your head. You could say something like this: This is the part that I liked. I like the way you described how the man fell. This is my question. I'm not sure I understand how he get on the roof to start with? This is my suggestion to make your story better. You could make the story so much more awesome by having the friend fall through the roof and land in a bowl of flour instead of a bowl of strawberries.

Individual writing conferences occur during Writing Workshop time and monitor writing through all the stages. A conference binder lists the students and provides a checklist for each stage, along with space for evaluative comments. Students sign their name if they agree with the comments.

Students are taught to conference with each other. When students read their stories out loud to another student, the verbalizing helps them understand where to use the writing mechanics such as paragraphing, and punctuation.

The students respond to books they are reading by keeping a writer's response journal and participating in Book Talks. Students work in groups to present a skit or talk about a book they have read. The first time a group meets, the teacher models the listening and questioning

skills that he would like them to develop. For each book talk, students must come up with one good question and one good comment that may not be repeated by other students. They take turns summarizing the comments.

During journal writing the students write without stopping for fifteen minutes about something that bothers them or anything else. Mr. K. writes in his journal while the students write, and he often reads a portion of his journal aloud to the students.

Some students write personal entries, while others write about educational concerns. The teacher finds that the students' journals are his own best evaluation about his teaching practice, as they reveal to him what the students are thinking about school, and what they like or don't like about classroom activities and what they are learning.

The teacher responds back very personally to all 26 journals each week. He models in his response to their entries the kind of writing he would like to see them engaged in. His comments are positive, communicative, and interactive.

## CHAPTER 4

### Case Study Discoveries

The broad purpose of this case study is to describe the day-to-day experiences of the participants in this classroom during language arts instruction. A more specific purpose is to describe practices in an integrated classroom setting that contribute to a positive attitude toward literacy and effective reading and writing instruction.

#### Identification of Themes

The results of the case studies are organized according to eight themes. The themes are representative generalizations of patterns that are consistent throughout the data collection. The themes provide a structure in which to identify and describe practices that appear to contribute to effective reading and writing instruction. Each theme will be discussed in relationship to the research question, and conclusions will be drawn. The identified themes are as follows:

1. Time
2. Inclusive Attitude
3. Structure of Environment
4. Cooperative Approach
5. Rules, Values, and Expectations

6. Choice
7. Purpose
8. Invitation to Literacy

### Description and Analysis of Themes

#### Time

The first theme that will be discussed describes an improvement in attitude toward reading and writing and an improvement in reading and writing skills as reported by the students. They attributed this to the extensive periods of time provided for on-task reading and writing. The students report that: (a) they are reading and writing more, (b) their attitude toward reading and writing has improved, (c) they have become self-motivated to read and write outside of the class, and (d) their reading and writing skills have shown improvement.

The results of the *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* (Appendix C) which was administered to all of the students, show that overall, the students' attitude toward reading is positively skewed, but because of the small sample size, the results are statistically insignificant. However, the results of the survey do agree with the qualitative data describing the positive attitude toward reading that the majority of the students reported.

When all of the students in the class were asked, Has your attitude toward reading become more positive or more negative over the course of this year? (Appendix A), 96% of the students said their attitude toward reading was more positive this year than last. The most common response was that students said their attitude had improved because they were reading more than they had ever read in school before, and because reading was more fun this year. Many students said they were now reading outside of class as well which is illustrated in the following answers.

Steve: "I used to hate reading. But now, I read all I can...I read every day after school."

Daniel: "In grade four down I hated reading books, but now I read lots...I read three or four books a week."

Angie: "My attitude toward reading is more positive because we read more. In last year's class we only got to read at USSR. Now that I read more in class I read more at home."

Darlene: "I have been reading a lot more than I did at the end of grade four, because in grade four, we had to read the same book with the whole class."

John: "When Mr. K. read the first Roald Dahl book to us at the beginning of the year, I started to like reading. Anything he says is a good book, I'll read. I didn't like to read before...Now I say, Oh good, I can read another Roald Dahl book! I borrow the books from Mr. K."

When all of the students were asked, Has your reading improved this year? (Appendix A), 92% of the students said their reading had improved. The most common response was that students said reading had improved because they are reading more and have a choice in what to read. Other students said that reading more helps them to sound out and read harder words. Carrie, a student who has learning disabilities, said that her reading had improved because she could read more, it was more fun, and not as hard as last year. Greg, another student who has learning disabilities, said that his reading had improved because the teacher encouraged the students to read more, and because he felt more positive about reading. The response of the ESL students was that their reading had improved because they were learning more English.

When all of the students were asked, Has your attitude toward writing become more positive or more negative over the course of this year? (Appendix A), 92% of the students said their attitude had improved. The most common response was that students said their attitude was improved because they write every day and they now have more ideas. Carrie said that she now enjoys writing stories. She said that it was hard at first to think of an idea, but once she knew what to write about it was easier. Greg said he has a

better attitude toward writing because the teacher encouraged him.

When all of the students were asked, Has your writing improved this year? (Appendix A), 92% of the students said that their writing had improved. The most common student response was that students said their writing had improved because they were expected to write more, and could choose what to write about. Other students said that their writing had improved because they have better ideas that make more sense, and they had learned how to write. Greg's response was that his improvement was due to writing more. Carrie's response was that her writing had improved because she could spell better. The ESL students said that writing more helped them learn more English.

From the observer's perspective, the students are given the opportunity to engage in daily on-task writing. It was this immersion in the writing process via all the stages that demystified the writing process for the students. The teacher encourages the students to become authors and gives them recognition for their efforts: "Here's a writer! You can't say you are a writer until you've written oodles."

To summarize, the data shows that the students report improvement in their attitude toward reading and writing and in their reading and writing skills. The main reason that the students give for this improvement is that they are

reading more and writing more than in previous school years. Many students reported that they were now reading and writing at home on a regular basis. The results are true for the special needs and ESL students as well as for the challenge and "average" students and suggests that providing extensive periods of time for on-task reading and writing is a practice that is effective instruction for all students.

#### Inclusive Attitude

The second theme describes the teacher's inclusive attitude and the effect this has on the integration process. The attitude of the teacher toward all students in the class, including special needs and ESL students, is positive, accepting, and appreciative of difference. This positive attitude promotes the successful integration of special needs students.

The inclusive classroom climate is reinforced every morning as the teacher welcomes each student with a handshake and a personalized greeting: "Good morning, how are you?...Good morning, how is my reggae friend?" This handshaking ritual communicates to each of the students: I am glad you came; you belong here; you are a valued member of this class, you are important; I like you. The teacher is articulate about his relationship to the students, and his belief that each one has something to offer:



I build my relationship with all children on a few basic principles: (a) I believe all children are innocent and honest and I don't mind being proven wrong; (b) I believe that it is an honor, not a job, to be able to teach and learn with children; (c) I believe that respect is earned not through fear, but through sincere, devoted admiration and will come naturally when it is, and will never weaken once established; and (d) I believe everyone has something special to offer the world and it is my quest to simply recognize this and promote it.

From the observer's perspective, the classroom becomes an inclusive community in which everyone is accepted. The students are made to feel that they are important and appreciated for their special qualities. A poster on the wall proclaims, "What makes you different makes you beautiful," and reinforces a classroom climate that appreciates uniqueness. When all of the students were asked, Do you feel safe in this class and are you ready to try new things, or are you afraid you will fail and be put down? (Appendix A), 96% of the students said that they feel safe. In terms of being willing to try new things, the most common response was that students were willing to try new things because they know the teacher will help them and the

teacher and their peers will not laugh at them. They said the teacher is always there for them when they need someone to talk to and they can trust their classmates for advice.

The classroom teacher has a positive and accepting attitude toward special needs students. He says that in his own childhood he had no experience with people with disabilities, and so in a sense, he was handicapped. He now has a better understanding and appreciation for people with disabilities, and he holds a firm belief that special needs students belong in the regular classroom.

I do not like to see exceptional children removed from my classroom because I feel the key aspect of mainstreaming is not mainstreaming the disabled child, but also mainstreaming and educating the support group of children that will grow up around that child.

The feelings of safety and being free to fail without being put down are important for ESL students. The teacher gives the ESL students two or three months to feel comfortable in the classroom before he lays out expectations for them, because "the world can be an intimidating place, but this classroom is not." From the observer's perspective, the special needs and ESL students feel

comfortable and secure in this classroom as they are willing to ask questions and contribute to discussions.

A positive, accepting climate is also created by the teacher's encouraging comments and positive feedback in which he acknowledges improvement or appreciation of quality: "Boys, what you've done is fabulous! Excellent! I'm glad you remembered the way he said those words." Appreciation for positive behaviour is given to the class as a whole for positive behaviour through such things as the Quiet Class Award, and The No Overdue Books Award.

From the observer's perspective, the teacher's practice would suggest that social relationships are as important as academics. A typical illustration demonstrates this position. The teacher spent 20 minutes during Reading Workshop to resolve a conflict concerning a student who had been teased by some boys because she wanted to play field hockey. The boys were given an understanding of how their thoughtless remarks had affected the person teased.

From this incident, the students realized that this type of behaviour is not tolerated, and that treating others with respect and caring about others is a priority. Putting a priority on social relationships is vital in being able to form a sense of community. The students feel secure because they know the classroom is a safe place.

However, as in any community, conflict is inevitable. Conflict is viewed by the teacher as an opportunity for learning: "Fortunately the room is not without conflict and this provides even more opportunities for growth and acceptance." A conflict that can occur during cooperative learning is some students' inability to work with others.

Social skills teaching is done informally by the teacher as the need arises, and is demonstrated by a typical illustration. One of the students has been annoying the other group members. Mr. K. addresses this conflict by talking privately to this student. He says, "Joe, I notice you always have your hand out first to grab things. If there is frustration in this group, I can see why. It's starting to seem unfair to the other children. It's just a suggestion that might help you to make friends."

The teacher doesn't assume that students know how to work cooperatively, but he clearly sets out expectations for social behaviour within a group situation.

If your group doesn't get along, you're not getting switched, that's life. You have to make the best out of life and your situation. We are a family. You may never find a better family in your life than our family. So make a commitment that you will try to work with the other person no matter who it is. If you want

to get along with others you need to learn to problem solve, to give a little. Always give everyone the benefit of the doubt, try to like them first.

The students are learning valuable skills as they resolve group conflicts. A typical illustration involves a situation where one member is not contributing: "Gee, Joe. We would like you to be involved, too. You have to solve it for yourself. If you had listened and paid attention, you would get it. Just read the paragraph."

To summarize, this class became an inclusive community that gives the students a feeling of acceptance, which in turn gives them the security to take risks in areas they found difficult. For Carrie and Greg this means taking risks in reading and writing activities, and for ESL students it means taking risks in language-based activities. Conflict is seen as an opportunity for social learning. Social skills are taught informally in the context of student interactions. Social relationships are valued as highly as academics.

#### Structure of Environment

The third theme concerns the teacher's implicit beliefs about the developmental nature of learning. The classroom environment is structured so that students with a wide range

of abilities and needs can be successful. The teacher views all students as equal learners.

The children in this classroom relate and interact with each other with one common and powerful trait in mind: they are all here to learn. Differences among children may or may not be obvious, but they are accepted and dealt with each day, in each new learning situation.

The special needs students are not segregated by giving them a different instructional program. This is illustrated by the fact that the observer could not identify the special need students from the other students on the first day of the study. Instead, the structure of the classroom reflects the developmental nature of learning, by ensuring that learning materials and goals are appropriate for a wide range of academic ability. This type of individualized structure sets the student up for success, not failure. The teacher believes that the classroom should be a safe place:

I want the students to feel comfortable enough to be able to take risks, and not have them fear failure, especially in a testing situation. I want the students to develop a kinship for each other, to develop an

appreciation for the safety in this classroom that they will always remember.

The reading program is structured to make it possible for students of a wide range of abilities to be successful, because of the selection of texts at many different reading levels and the flexibility in the number of texts to be read. The students set their own goals, from reading a minimum of eight stories up to a maximum of 45.

It was observed that Greg was successful at reaching his goal of reading eight short stories, and a challenge student was successful in reaching his goal of 45 stories.

The teacher believes language learning is a developmental process, with students in one classroom in many different stages, and progress is what is important.

There are 26 children in my classroom and I believe they are all exceptional. I have some students who are writing successfully and with promising progress at a grade three level. I have others who are reading six novels in ten days at a grade seven or eight level...I'm still looking for a typical so-called grade five student, but in a way, I hope I never find one.

The teacher's belief about the developmental nature of learning corresponds to his view that evaluation must also reflect the developmental nature of learning.

The assessment of children at a young, highly developmental age is difficult. I have no idea what the child may be capable of as a learner in two years or even two days, and I find this exhilarating. It gives children the hopeful benefit of the doubt...You have no idea of a student's potential. Achievement is difficult to define. Growth is easy to define.

A new report card has recently been implemented. It has three simple codes report a student's progress: C for commendable progress, S for satisfactory progress, and NI for needs improvement. Other codes indicate the student's program and placement: a checkmark indicates meeting grade five standards, a \* indicates a modified program, a + indicates exceeding grade five standards, and a - indicates not achieving grade five standards.

This type of report card allows special needs students to feel great satisfaction for receiving C's for working hard and making progress without being compared to other students. Mr. K. appreciates the new Progress Report:



Children are no longer evaluated by some magic grade five standard, but they are instead assessed at their own progressive level and are encouraged and supported for every effort they make to improve their own learning. This report card openly acknowledges the vast range of levels of learners in the classroom while at the same time provides individual, accountable assessment and reassures teachers that meeting individual needs is the right thing to do.

To summarize, the structure of the classroom reflects the developmental nature of learning and allows students to be successful by providing materials and programs that are appropriate for a wide range of academic ability and social needs. Evaluation also reflects the developmental nature of learning and is a record of each student's progress.

#### Cooperative Approach

The fourth theme describes a cooperative, social, collaborative, and noncompetitive approach to learning that allows students of varied academic abilities and social needs to work in a group setting. How this cooperative structure impacts the ESL and special needs students will also be highlighted.

The members of a cooperative learning group are carefully planned by the teacher because if the students are

left to choose their own groups, someone is always left out. Once a group meets together for the first time, the members have a draw that determines their assigned role. If there is a disagreement within a group, the person with the role of captain makes the final decision. One person within each group has the role of being the spokesperson to bring the group's questions to the teacher's attention.

It is not assumed that students automatically understand how to put cooperative learning into practice, so the principles of cooperation are taught. While the students are working in cooperative groups, Mr. K. reminds them of his expectations: "Everyone in the group is expected to read the pages in the textbook and thoroughly understand the assignment sheet. Remember to share responsibility, work cooperatively, and don't be bossy."

From the observer's perspective, most of the students engaged in cooperative learning perceive it to be a positive experience. It is the students with social difficulties that find working in groups challenging. Special needs students were observed to be receiving much peer-support, and were willing to take risks. These observations agree with the perspective of the two teacher assistants.

Teacher Assistant 1: I was skeptical about the cooperative learning structure at first, because it

looked a bit chaotic. It seemed like the kids were playing, doing their own thing. However, I found that cooperative learning was really good for ESL and special needs students because of the different groupings. The kids have really improved. Before, Han couldn't do a thing without asking his aide, now he is much more independent...The kids are more willing to try, to take risks. Emotionally they fit in better. Carrie is more willing to take risks, more confident.

Teacher Assistant 2: After observing cooperative learning from September to April, I feel very positive about it. I see that there is a whole structure governing it. I also find that the kids are much more self-confident and independent, and much more risk-taking. The kids become better at working with people and with verbal communication because of the different groupings which makes necessary the talking and discussing. I think that cooperative learning is especially good for ESL and special needs children. I really see them blossom, their self-esteem zooms.

When all of the students were asked, Would you rather work alone or in a group? (Appendix A), the majority of the students, 58%, preferred to work in groups, 32% preferred to

work alone, two students had no preference, and one student preferred to work in pairs. The majority of students that preferred to work in groups said they enjoyed the social aspect and the peer-assistance because if they "get stuck" or "fall behind", then "the group can help" them. Greg's response is as follows:

I would rather work in a group because I can get it done faster. Otherwise I might be saying what do I do. The group explains how to do the work. Otherwise I have to wait for the teacher and that might take a while. I get more information from the group than by myself. They might have answers to questions I can't answer.

When all of the students were asked, What problems did the groups you were a part of have, and what did your group do to solve the problems (Appendix A), the most common response was that students said the problems were due to members that did not pull their own weight, or disagreements such as students fighting over books and worksheets, one member not agreeing with the group decision, or one member telling everyone else what to do. The most common response for solving a problem was that the students said they would solve the conflict by talking things over together, and if

the offending student would not change, they would ask that student not to participate in the group for a day.

The social structure of a cooperative learning classroom benefits the ESL students as they have a communicative purpose for improving their acquisition of English. The teacher believes that it is more beneficial for an ESL student to be integrated in the regular classroom than to be pulled out for formal English lessons. The teacher assistant can be utilized as a translator so that the ESL child can interact with the other students.

The social atmosphere, the Author's Chair, and the Book Talks provide opportunities for social and collaborative learning. The teacher communicates this purpose to the students: "Go to listen to someone else's story, not just because it helps them, but because it helps you. It might give you ideas for your own story." From the observer's perspective, much peer conversation is typical during language arts. Although not all the conversation appeared to be relevant, much of it is. The atmosphere was similiar to being in a large office.

The social aspect of cooperative learning gives students the opportunity to discuss and verbalize what they are going to write about before they begin the writing process. This strategy of verbalization is especially important for special needs students, such as Carrie.

I talk about what I'm going to write with my friends. They tell me if it's too confusing or if I'm going too fast, or give me different ideas. I have problems thinking of what to write about. We do a web. We put down the characters, setting, problem, and solution. That helps me think of what to write. We write our first draft, kids edit three times, and then we do our good copy. That helps me to edit my spelling.

To summarize, in a cooperative learning structure the students are learning life-long skills of cooperation, leadership, and negotiation. The students are viewed as teachers as well as learners. The cooperative structure allows students to work at their own pace and level within in a group setting. The special needs students benefit from the peer-support and opportunities to verbalize before writing. The social aspect of cooperative learning is especially beneficial for special needs and ESL students.

#### Rules, Values, and Expectations

The fifth theme describes the clearly articulated rules, values, and expectations of this classroom environment, which create a safe environment for learning and risk-taking.

The classroom belief system has two unbreakable rules:  
(a) You are here to learn, therefore make good use of your

time; and (b) Respect each other; teasing or put downs are not allowed.

The values that the teacher models for the students are: (a) Each person in this classroom is included as a member of the family, (b) all people are special and have unique qualities that should be appreciated and promoted, (c) interpersonal relationships are as important as academics, and (d) all students are equal as learners.

The expectations that the teacher has for the students. are: (a) I believe in you. You can do it! (b) I expect you to be the best that you can be, and continue to make progress; (c) I trust you and you can trust me; (d) you are a mature, responsible student who can handle life's situations; and (e) there is no limit to your potential, no matter how you may have been labeled in the past. These expectations are often clearly articulated by the teacher:

Class, I want you to pledge to be the most excellent, awesome, exciting writer, editor, revisor, and reader as you could possibly be here on earth. You can be leaders, be originals. You don't have to follow the crowds. That's why I respect you kids, you have the courage and confidence to be yourselves.

From the observer's perspective, the social atmosphere at first masks the structure governing the classroom environment. My first impression was that the classroom appeared somewhat chaotic, as the students were quite relaxed concerning casual conversation, walking around, wearing hats in class, and chewing gum. Behaviour that many teachers would not allow is ignored in this classroom. On a typical morning the teacher is sitting on the couch reading aloud to the students during a Book Talk. The students are listening quietly in various relaxed positions. Some of the students are sitting in the bathtub, others are perched on the shelf, and two girls are sitting on the floor while they brush each other's hair. Other students are sitting on the couch or on chairs near the couch.

In spite of the relaxed atmosphere, it was observed that the actual time spent on discipline or classroom management was minimal. This is in direct contrast to the study done by Goodlad (1981) that concluded much time in class is spent on routine procedures and classroom management.

When disciplinary measures became necessary, they were usually non-confrontational. To illustrate, John is not on task, and has been instructed by the teacher to begin writing his story web. Instead, John chooses to play with his pen, and look around the room. The teacher writes down the negative behaviour on a card, and drops it on the



student's desk without saying a word. The student now knows that the teacher is aware of his behaviour. The result is that the student reads the message, and begins to write his web. There has been no confrontation, the student is not embarrassed, and communicative writing has been modelled.

The teacher does not believe in setting up too many rules, but instead rewards positive behaviour, and takes away privileges for poor behaviour. His line of reasoning is based on a philosophy of mutual respect.

Teachers feel threatened about being the boss so they set up a lot of rules. Instead I ask myself, is it productive behavior? Is it detrimental to their learning? I base my rules on mutual respect. Based on this philosophy students may sit on the counters, wear hats, chew gum, and eat food if it is adult behavior.

From a student perspective, the rules are clearly understood as is illustrated by this student comment: "Mr. K. has an optimist attitude toward everything except bad behavior. He will reward you when you're good and take away privileges when you're bad. Just because he is a nice teacher does not mean you can get away with it."

A classroom management strategy based on the adult world enables the class to run smoother so that more instructional

time is available. The teacher's philosophy is that he will treat students the way they would be treated in the adult world. They earn rewards in the form of paycheques for good behaviour, they lose cheques for poor behaviour, and they are expected to be responsible for their "chequing" account.

At the beginning of the year all of the students receive the same number of cheques. Students need a cheque for such things as being excused to use the washroom. A student might lend a cheque to one who is out of cheques. As the year goes on, they can earn more cheques for positive behaviour such as cleaning their desks, or they may lose cheques for negative behaviour. For example, if one student is offensive to another student, they might be asked to give an apology and a cheque to the offended student.

Many students have internalized the expectation that they are to be responsible learners. When all of the students were asked, What would you tell the incoming grade four students about this class? (Appendix A), the most common response was that students said they would tell the new students "to come and be prepared for responsibilities."

To summarize, students are able to effectively learn in the context of this classroom environment because of the clearly articulated value system, rules, and routines. More instructional time is available because less time is devoted

to discipline. The special needs and ESL students have a safe place to learn without being afraid of being put down.

### Choice

The sixth theme concerns the empowerment of choice that provides opportunities for students to develop self-discipline, self-motivation, and self-control. The choices students are given and how these choices impact the special needs students and literacy learning will be discussed.

Students are given a sense of ownership and self-control by being given choices within boundaries. Mr. K. reflects, "The more choices, the more successful." Students are asked to decide how many stories they plan to read, and then discuss their goals with the teacher. Their goals seemed reasonable. I observed that two students set goals of reading 40-45 short stories, whereas the student average was 15, and Greg's goal was eight.

Two students said what they liked the best about this reading program was that they could choose to read what a peer recommended. This agrees with the student opinions (Appendix A) that one of the main reasons for a positive attitude toward reading was because of choice concerning the selection of reading texts and writing topics.

The students can choose to come for the Author's Chair, or to stay at their desks and continue writing. From the

teacher's viewpoint, it is important to make the author's chair optional. He says that often after the first reader begins to read, it gets very quiet and most of the students wander over to listen on their own. He says if you force the students, it would spoil it for them as some students may not want to listen to a story at that moment.

The students have a sheet of options to choose from in their Response Journals. Murphy, Meyers, Oleson, McKean & Custer (1988) suggest that students with learning difficulties have greater motivation and a more positive attitude toward writing if they are given choices.

To summarize, the students are given opportunities to become responsible learners by giving them choices within boundaries concerning the selection of reading texts and writing topics, as well as the amount of work. This enables the special needs students to be in control of their own learning. Choice was a strong motivational factor in promoting a positive attitude toward reading and writing.

### Purpose

The seventh theme describes how language learning skills are taught in a meaningful context that has a purpose for all of the students, including those with special needs. The teacher's approach to language learning is a literature-based, whole language approach.

It is my belief that the only way to become literate, active, interested readers, writers, speakers, and listeners is by doing just that - reading, writing, listening, and speaking every day. All the strands are part of one another and all are equal. In the language learning classroom students learn from each other, they set their own learning goals and progress on a year long continuum. Students are challenged daily according to their own individual ability and grow to become whole speakers, actors, listeners, readers, writers, viewers, risk takers, and questioners. Language has no restrictions and thus we explore whatever material and subject matter that interests us.

The teacher provides opportunities for the students to read and write for a purpose. During the environmental unit, the students were encouraged to write to agencies that interested them. Nina (ESL) wrote to the Kenya Wildlife Fund about her concern over the killing of elephants, and received an anti-poaching brochure which she pinned to the bulletin board to be read by interested students.

Guest speakers are often invited to class to share their knowledge. After a guest presentation the teacher asks the students to write a response: "Try to express your response in an important and meaningful way. Don't just say

something like, I don't like animals and stuff. What did you learn, what wouldn't you have said before yesterday?" The students then share their response with the class.

When students are working in the different subject areas Mr. K. tells them to think, read, and write like an author, artist, poet, or scientist: "Write about what you see happening during the experiments. So go ahead, you're the scientist. I want you to talk about what you see happening and then put it in sentences."

Word processing and writing skills, such as paragraphing, etc., are taught as the need arises. To illustrate, Mr. K. teaches computer and word processing skills to the first students that are ready to type their final drafts. After that, each student is taught by the preceding student at the time they are ready to type.

In this way the students are motivated and become successful because they have a purpose for learning. The teacher's belief is that "if the need is there, if the student asks the question first, then the student has the answer for life. If I had taught them this skill in September, no one would remember it now. But since they need this skill now, and want to learn it, they will remember it." This is in agreement with Resnick and Klopfer's statement that "knowledge is acquired not from information communicated and memorized but from information

that students elaborate, question, and use" (cited in Farris & Andersen, 1990, p .5)

If only three or four students need to be taught a specific skill, they are taught in a small group during the reading or writing workshop time. If the majority of the class needs to be taught a specific skill such as editing or paragraphing, a whole class lesson is given.

Other skills such as phonics are taught in context. It was observed that when a student asks the teacher about an unfamiliar word, he helps the student break the word into syllables to sound it out, or to think of a familiar word that had the same phonetic pattern.

The teacher selects words for the spelling list from the students' most common errors. All of the students take the same pre-test, but the final test consists of each student's individual errors on the pre-test.

Students are taught that whether spelling counts depends on the purpose for writing. To illustrate, the students are working on the final drafts of their poems and the teacher makes the point that these poems are for publication, as they will be going home as Mother's Day cards. When a student tells the teacher that he doesn't care about spelling, the teacher says:

Spelling does count in the final copy. You won't find spelling mistakes in the Bible, Roald Dahl's books, or in a book telling you how to drive a car. So when you're publishing your final copy, you shouldn't have any spelling errors either.

To summarize, skills are taught as the need arises because the students have a purpose for learning. Language is identified as a tool for the communication of meaning. The writing format depends on its purpose, with the expectation that writing for publication will be polished.

#### Invitation to literacy

The final theme describes how the teacher invites students to participate in literacy by presenting reading and writing as enjoyable activities. The role motivation and attitude play in the development of literacy, and how the desire to read and write is created will be discussed. Reading and writing skills are put into practice because of the attention given to motivating the students (Brandt, 1988). Motivational techniques include enthusiasm, modelling, enjoyment of literature, rewards, monitoring, and written feedback.

From the observer's perspective, the teacher encourages the students to read by modelling his enthusiasm for reading



and his love of books. He introduced the students to one of his favorite authors, Roald Dahl, and let students borrow books from his own Dahl collection. Two books that he read aloud are *Mathilda* and *Charlie in the Chocolate Factory*. Carrie has her own copy of the book the teacher is reading so that she can follow along, and will later reread the book independently. Carrie enjoyed the Dahl books so much that she bought two and has taken another out of the library.

The teacher notices when students discuss books that they have been reading at home and gives them positive feedback: "Nothing makes me happier than to find that you've been reading novels in your spare time." He rewards them for recreational reading by recording their novels in the conference binder.

The teacher models the desired literacy outcomes. He writes in his own journal while the students write in their journals, and reads to the students from his journal on a regular basis. Writing as a way of holding a conversation is modelled by the teacher when he writes humorous messages to the students on the chalkboard: "Yuk! I went peeping through desks last night, they are very scary. Let's clean them at recess. Science Sub: WELCOME MRS. SMITH! Stations, yay! Phys. Ed.: soccer outside Dinner Yum!"

Literacy is modelled as being an enjoyable activity as the teacher invites the students to read: "We have a

full delightful hour now of reading ahead of us. Share a good book with a friend. Let them know if you find a good book; don't keep it to yourself students."

When all the students were asked, What would you tell the incoming grade four students about this class? (Appendix A), the majority said the teacher makes learning fun.

"You'll love it! Mr. K. is so cool he may seem just fun, but he also makes you work hard which is okay because he gives you a fun way of learning. But don't think you can fool around. I just wish the year would never end. It's the best year of my life.

Students are also motivated through the use of rewards. For every eight stories that students read, they are given a certificate. After each conference, students are rewarded with a few candies. Students who identify the mystery paragraph are presented with a book. Students are given cheques for positive behaviours: "I notice that you are always here to listen to the other's stories. You are always giving the other children your best listening skills and suggestions. You don't care who they are. Thank you. Please come to my desk to get a cheque." The cheques can be redeemed for rewards such as Slurpees or big sour candies.

When all students were asked, How do you find that language arts was different this year, and what do you like about the way it was taught? (Appendix A), the majority of students said they like the stations and being able to choose their own books and writing topics. Other students said they enjoy being able to read more, the kick-offs, the flavor unit, and the poetry unit. Greg said that language arts is "strange, but fun." Carrie enjoys the writing journals, stations, plays, poems, and the teacher's funny stories.

Another successful motivational practice is the evaluation and monitoring of student progress. The teacher does on-going monitoring of student progress during the conferences because he believes it is important for students to know they are being monitored, otherwise they may not feel the teachers cares or that there is any purpose for their writing. So he gives the students much written feedback: "You will find that someone snuck into your folder last night and wrote some comments and added a sticker. Good luck with your writing!" The written comments are positive and communicative as illustrated in this example.

Greg, I was here on March 9. I was really impressed with all your pre-writing ideas. A good writer always has lots of ideas and many drafts of them. Your next

step is to start editing and revising these pieces so that they can be published. Remember: you must get yourself to the publishing stage so that you can reevaluate your work!

To summarize, the desire to read and write is created by presenting reading and writing as enjoyable activities. The teacher models his own love of reading and writing and the desired literacy outcomes. He gives on-going positive written feedback for the student writing projects. These motivational practices appear successful for all students.

## CHAPTER 5

### Final Discussion

#### Conclusions

The broad purpose of this research was to describe the day-to-day experiences of the participants in an integrated classroom during language arts instruction. This purpose was achieved through the rich description of this classroom which gives insight into the relationship between effective reading and writing instruction and classroom practice.

The research took place in an integrated class of students with varied abilities and experiences, including special needs, and ESL students. The classroom teacher did not have special training to work with special needs students nor years of experience. Yet, other teachers, professors, and administrators spoke highly of his reading and writing instruction. The specific purpose of this research was to describe at least some of the factors that contributed to this success.

The assumption that the reading and writing instruction in this classroom was effective was not just based on the teacher's reputation. The data collection contained several behaviours exhibited by the students that would lead to this

conclusion: (a) the majority of students reported an improvement in attitude toward both reading and writing; (b) the majority of students reported an improvement in reading and writing skills; and (c) many students reported that they had become self-motivated to read and write outside of class.

Why did this positive change in attitude and behaviour occur? And how was the desire to read and write created? General patterns emerged that begin to answer the questions. As the classroom is a complex setting, there is no single answer, but several conclusions can be drawn.

First, the development of positive attitudes toward literacy played a major role in the effectiveness of the reading and writing instruction in this classroom. The students became self-motivated readers and writers as they took their reading out of the classroom and into the world.

The desire to read and write was created through both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Reading and writing were presented as enjoyable and desirable activities. Students were rewarded for demonstrating desired literary outcomes. Literature appealing to grade five students, including texts by Roald Dahl, was read aloud daily. This motivated students to read independently. Students were motivated to write because they were able to choose their

own topics and share original ideas and stories with their peers.

Second, during language arts instruction, the students were observed to be engaged in authentic reading and writing tasks. The reading tasks included reading self-selected short stories, poems, articles, letters, library books, novels, and other texts. The writing tasks included thinking of ideas, making a web, writing a rough draft, editing, and polishing the final draft of a letter, original story, or other writing projects.

The students reported that they had never written or read so much in school before. The students said that a more positive attitude and improvement in reading and writing skills were a result of "reading more" and "writing more." This practice of providing numerous opportunities and extensive periods of time for students to engage in on-task reading and writing was of benefit to all students in the class, regardless of academic ability or experience.

Third, the majority of the students reported that being allowed to choose their own reading materials and writing topics was one of the main reasons for an improvement in their attitudes toward reading and writing. A desire to read was created as students listened to the enthusiastic comments of peers concerning texts that they recommended.

Fourth, reading and writing were meaningful activities for the students. Students had a purpose for reading as they were reading texts that they had chosen to read, usually from a peer's recommendation. Students were encouraged to write like an author. This gave a purpose for their writing. Students were taught specific writing skills at the time it was needed. The students were motivated as they had a need to learn a particular skill.

Fifth, the integrated learning structures of cooperative learning and the whole language approach played an important role in both the academic and social success of the special needs students. The fear that special needs students would experience "failure, frustration, and social isolation" (Martin, 1975) did not happen in this classroom. The students were not isolated by a different program because the language arts instruction was structured from the beginning to accommodate a wide range of abilities through the use of student choices concerning both the text and the amount of material to be read. The program was individualized, as was recommended by Gilhool (1975), so that the needs of all children were special.

Sixth, the students worked mainly in formal or informal cooperative group situations during Reading and Writing Workshops. The peer-support for reading activities included students helping each other with word identification and the



meaning of unfamiliar words. The peer-support for writing activities included brainstorming for ideas, as well as the planning and editing of writing projects. This peer-support was of great benefit to the special needs and ESL students, and enabled the teacher to assist more students.

Finally, the vision of the classroom-as-inclusive community gave a sense of acceptance to all the students. This security enabled the special needs students to be more willing to take risks in areas of perceived difficulty, such as reading and writing.

It is possible for a classroom teacher to successfully meet the needs of special students without special education training. The practices that this teacher used to accommodate the wide range academic ability and social needs were regular classroom practices that were successful for all students, not just those with special needs.

### Implications

These conclusions suggest that the day-to-day experiences in a classroom constitute a complex process in which many factors are interrelated. Therefore, in order to understand how effective reading and writing instruction takes place in the mainstream, it is appropriate to explore classroom practice rather than to focus only on the special needs students. The survey of literature shows that although

there have been many single subject mainstreaming case studies, there is a lack of mainstreaming case studies that thoroughly describe classroom practice. This study is only one response to that recognized dearth. More studies are needed to provide comprehensive descriptions.

Although the unique circumstances of one class were observed, the resulting descriptions shed light on the broader concepts and theories about learning within the context of a real classroom. From an understanding of the meaning of practice in this classroom, it is hoped that readers will be able to gain some new insights that are applicable to their own situation. As well, this study has given insight into two of the issues that the Stainback & Stainback (1989) identified as requiring further research: "What actually happens in integrated classrooms and schools?" and "What are some innovative ideas for making regular class integration successful?" (p. 275).

This research has achieved its purpose. It presents a clear picture of how one teacher developed and refined the instructional program so that special needs students were able to receive effective reading and writing instruction in the mainstream. It also offers some helpful ideas and suggestions for other teachers who are in the process of integrating special needs students into their own language learning classrooms.

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## APPENDIX A

## STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you feel you are included as a part of this class or do you feel left out? Explain ...
2. Do you feel safe in this class and are ready to try new things, or are you afraid you will fail or be put down? Why?
3. Has your attitude toward reading become more positive or more negative over the course of this year? Explain ...
4. Has your reading improved this year? Why or why not?
5. Has your attitude toward writing become more positive or more negative over the course of this year? Explain ...
6. Has your writing improved this year? Why or why not?
7. What would you tell the incoming grade four students about this class?
8. How do you find that Language Arts was different this year, and what do you like about the way it was taught?
9. Would you rather work alone or in a group? Explain ...
10. What problems did the groups you were a part of have, and what did your group do to solve the problems?

## APPENDIX B

READING AND WRITING INTERVIEW

## A. Reading

1. When you are reading and you come to something that you don't know, what do you do?
2. Do you like to read? Why or why not?
3. Do you think you're a good reader? Why or why not?
4. Name your favorite books. Where did you read each of them?

## B. Writing

1. When you are writing, what kinds of troubles or problems do you have? What do you do about them?
2. Do you ever make changes when you are writing? If so, what things get changed?
3. Do you like to write? Why or why not?
4. Do you think you're a good writer? Why or why not?

Rhodes, L.K. & Dudley-Marling, C. (1988). *Readers and writers with a difference: A holistic approach to teaching learning disabled and remedial students.* (p.62). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

## APPENDIX C

ELEMENTARY READING ATTITUDE SURVEY

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey provides a quick indication of a student's attitude toward reading. It consists of 20 items and can be administered to an entire classroom in about 10 minutes. Each item presents a brief, simply-worded statement about reading, followed by four pictures of Garfield. Each pose is designed to depict a different emotional state ranging from very positive to very negative.

McKenna, M.C. & Kear, D. (1990). Measuring attitude toward reading: a new tool for teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, May, 626-639.

## APPENDIX D

Observation Guide for Mainstreaming Case Studies

Data is to be collected in the ways it relates to mainstreaming and children with special needs.

## Description of the School

- Physical
- Historical
- Student population
- Neighborhood
- Teachers
- Special distinctions
- Reputation
- Well-known graduates or people affiliated with school
- Location

## The class or program

- Location in school
- Its history (how and when it got started with children who are handicapped) e.g., placement procedure, how child is assigned, teacher involvement, parental choice

## The teacher and /or other personnel

- Style
- Physical description
- History as teacher
- Perspective on what he or she is doing, especially how he or she tries to integrate disabled children
- Perspective on mainstreaming, handicapped children, the administration, parents, etc. What affects successful mainstreaming?
- How he or she came to see things as he or she does
- Typical day
- Relationship to typical and handicapped children
- Additional personnel in classroom (aides, ect.)
- Resource personnel relating to classroom (their role, perspective)
- Use of "special" teachers - art, music, gym, - how relate
- Relation to other regular teacher peers (support)
- Whom teacher perceives as supportive

## Children defined as handicapped

- How what they do is the same or different from what typical kids do

- Peer relations - what are they; how teachers affect
- Typical day
- Physical description
- Clinical description (severity of disability, independence
- School and family history
- How they feel they are treated and thought about by others in the class
- Physical location - where seated, ect. in relation to teacher, other kids
- Words others use to describe them
- How teacher defines child's progress (same/different from others) balance of social vs. academic goals
- Individual Educational Plan (I.E.P.)
- amount and nature of contact with teacher compared to typical children

#### Typical Children

- Physical description - dress
- Academic description
- Background
- How they get along with each other and the teacher

#### Curriculum

- Content (materials, adaptive equipment, individualized?)
- Process (whole groups, individualized, one-on-one, integrated or handicapped served separately)
- Amount of time spent with disabled vs. typical
- Individual Education Plan - is there one, who wrote it, is it implemented, is it appropriate?

Bogdan, R.C. & Biklen, S.K. (1982). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. (p. 164-5) Boston: Allyn and Bacon.