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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION CATHOLIC SCHOOLS' REGULAR EDUCATION PROGRAMS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Jill Ann Perry Hall

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of School Psychology

August, 2013

This Dissertation by: Jill Ann Perry Hall

Entitled: *Including Students with Special Educational Needs in Rocky Mountain Region Catholic Schools' Regular Education Programs*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Program of School Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Hall, Jill Ann Perry. *Including Students with Special Educational Needs in Rocky Mountain Region Catholic Schools' Regular Education Programs*. Published Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, August 2013.

Through a consensual qualitative research and phenomenological approach, this study explored the function of serving students in Catholic schools with special educational needs. Utilizing a survey, a breadth of data were collected from teachers and administrators on the incidence of special educational needs, services available, accommodations and interventions provided, governance of the schools, and training of staff. Additional interview and observation data were coded to provide depth to the understanding of this unique context. Findings suggest a variety of special educational needs are addressed in Catholic schools and that these needs are increasing in both number and severity. Four overarching themes emerged from the data: (a) Pride; (b) Action; (c) Willingness; and (d) Tension. Information from this study can be used to help Catholic school districts develop a comprehensive system of service provision for their students with special educational needs.

Keywords: Catholic Education, Phenomenology, Inclusion, Special Education, Systems Change

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nationwide, there is an increase in the number of non-public schools, such as charter, private, and parochial schools (United States Department of Education, 2009). There are many reasons why parents elect to send their children to non-public schools. Non-public schools often foster a student body that values education, maintains religious and/or cultural traditions, promotes school values that align with families' beliefs and aspirations, and are dedicated to academic success, (Ascher, 1986; Martinez, Godwin, Kemerer, & Perna, 1995). Arguably, there are public schools that offer many of these foci as well. However, the qualities of non-public schools are important when the issues of student achievement and disability services are raised because private schools are not subject to the same legislative mandates as public schools.

The movement away from free public education, a right extended to all children in the United States, may be a response to data suggesting that many public schools are struggling to educate students at grade level standards (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). In 2005, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) acknowledged that nearly 40% of public school 4th grade students could not read at grade level (Perie et al., 2005). Despite concentrated efforts to increase this rate, an updated report indicated that the percentage of proficient readers had increased, but more than one third of fourth grade students still were reading at or below a partial mastery level (NCES, 2011). As

evidenced by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 20 U.S.C. § 6301) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) legislation, it has become a national priority to increase educational outcomes for public school students so that all students may reach their potential for success. Regardless of the reforms designed to address the problems, an increasing number of parents are sending their children to non-public schools (United States Department of Education, 2009).

There are many differences between public and non-public schools, including funding sources, philosophical underpinnings, and governance. Of these, the fundamental difference between public and non-public schools is the funding sources for their operation. Public schools are primarily funded through state aid provided by the United States government (e.g. NCLB and IDEA funding) and revenue generated from property taxes (United States Department of Education, 2005). Because private schools typically do not receive federal or state funding, they are provided more leeway in the personnel who are employed, including special education and other support staff for children with diverse learning needs (Eigenbrood, 2004).

For instance, charter schools are independently administered, but because they still receive funding from taxpayers, they do not charge tuition. Typically, charter schools have a different philosophy and curriculum than their public school counterparts, and often attract a specialized group of students, such as gifted and talented students or students with disabilities (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2008). Private schools, on the other hand, are schools that are run by a private group and have limited or no government funding. They, too, have their own philosophy of educating students, but

enrollees are charged tuition and may be subject to a competitive application process (Council for American Private Education, 2007).

Parochial schools are private schools that are under the auspice of a religious organization. One type of parochial school is the Catholic school, which is maintained by the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic schools are one of the oldest, largest, and most established private school groups in the United States, currently serving over 2.1 million students (Eigenbrood, 2005, United States Department of Education, 2009). There are predominately two types of Catholic schools; private Catholic schools are independently run, whereas parish-based Catholic schools are run by individual Catholic parishes and are supported by the parishioners and the Diocesan or Archdiocesan governing body.

The history of Catholic education in the United States spans 300 years, with the first recognized Catholic parochial school established in 1782. The first Catholic schools were formed in order to teach girls from poor families and homeless or orphaned youth (Garrone, 1977). According to the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) historical data, Catholic schools found great support by the mid-1960's, enrolling over 4.5 million students in Catholic elementary schools and around 1 million Catholic high school students. Due in part to demographic changes (e.g. shifts in population from urban to suburban settings) over the past five decades, and negative sentiment following accusations of molestation by Catholic priests, the Catholic school population has dropped to about 2 million students (NCEA, 2010; United States Department of Education, 2009).

While there are likely numerous factors behind the decline in enrollment, one factor is the perception, and often fact, that Catholic schools are unable to serve students

with disabilities (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2002). The incidence of childhood problems has become more widely recognized, thanks in part to identification processes in public schools in response to mandates from education law (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* [IDEA]: PL 108-446 Section 612(a)(10)(A)). However, it stands to reason that student problems are not merely public school phenomena, but are also evident in Catholic schools (Eigenbrood, 2005). In fact, researchers have found that a growing number of Catholic schools are serving students with special educational needs (Bello, 2006; Hunt, Joseph, & Nuzzi, 2002), and that the proportion of students served with disabilities is similar to that of students served in the public schools (USCCB, 2002). However, Catholic schools are much less likely to have special education resource rooms and personnel (Eigenbrood, 2005, USCCB, 2002).

The Mission of Catholic Education and Disability Service Provision

Researchers have found that Catholic schools have made accommodations to assist students with disabilities by utilizing the skill and knowledge base of their teachers and staff (Bello, 2006; USCCB, 2002; USCCB, 2008), which is consistent with the mission of Catholic schools. For nearly 40 years, documents and decrees from the USCCB, and more recently from Pope Benedict XVI, have made it clear that one of the missions of the Catholic Church is to teach (Pope Benedict XVI, 2008; USCCB, 2008), and another is to promote the well-being of people with disabilities by "furthering [their] spiritual, intellectual, moral and physical development," (USCCB, 1978, p. 1). Documents from the governing bodies of the Catholic Church (Garrone, 1977; Laghi, 1997; McDermott, 1997; Pope Benedict XVI, 2008; Second Vatican Council, 1965; USCCB, 1978) have supported Catholic education as a fundamental aspect of the

Church's mission, stating that the basis of Catholic school's educational work is based in religious doctrine. One document states that:

> Education is not given for the purpose of gaining power but as an aid towards a fuller understanding of, and communion with man, events and things. Knowledge is not to be considered as a means of material prosperity and success, but as a call to serve and to be responsible for others (Garrone, 1977, p. 9).

This statement indicates that, although catechesis (i.e., teaching the Catholic faith) is a pervasive aspect of Catholic school philosophy, forming knowledgeable and philanthropic individuals is also paramount to Catholic school philosophy.

The combined missions of teaching and helping the less fortunate of society, including those with disabilities, reach their potential is the backdrop upon which Catholic schools were formed, and continue to teach, with faith as their foundation. Yet, many teachers within Catholic schools may feel unable to fulfill the mission to teach students with disabilities given the increasing prevalence of disabilities in their classrooms (USCCB, 2002). Catholic schools are being called, at a minimum, to identify and refer students suspected of having a disability to outside resources. In the meantime, many Catholic school teachers find themselves including those students in their regular education classrooms.

In 2002, the USCCB conducted a study entitled "Catholic School Children with Disabilities," (USCCB, 2002). This study was completed during the Congressional process of reauthorizing the IDEA, and looked specifically at the impact the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 had on Catholic school students suspected of having a disability, the referral process for these students, evaluation/testing, diagnosis of disability, and service provision to eligible students. The study included survey and interview data from teachers, administrators, and parents of over one million students,

from 2,864 schools, in 21 states. This study reported that the proportion of Catholic school students with identified disabilities differed only slightly from public school students: 7% versus 11%. Furthermore, Catholic schools reported enrolling students in the same disability categories as public schools. Learning disabilities, speech/language problems, emotional disturbances, and other health impairments were at the top of both Catholic and public school student disability prevalence lists (USCCB, 2002). Ultimately, the study found that Catholic schools were impacted by students with disabilities, and the IDEA could or should influence service provision within private schools.

The Impact of the IDEA on Catholic Education

There are two aspects of special education law that are applicable to both public and non-public educational institutions, including Catholic schools. First, the IDEA mandates that non-public schools address the needs of students with suspected disabilities and students requiring services for their disabilities (IDEA: PL 108-446 Section 612(a)(10)(A)). Second, non-public schools are able to assist students with disabilities by referring students with needs to federally funded programs through the IDEA, with the aim of identifying and providing special education for all children with disabilities. However, when those programs do not completely meet the special educational needs of students in Catholic schools, it is the Catholic school personnel who must address those needs.

The IDEA was developed in response to public desire for more regulated service provision for all students with disabilities (United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, & Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2000). There are various aspects of the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA that

pertain to parentally placed private, including religious, school students (Section 612(a)(10)(A)). These aspects include: a) identifying all children with disabilities; b) service provision for students with disabilities; c) timeliness of services; d) consultation requirements; and e) appropriation of funds, among others.

Many of the services provided through the IDEA to non-public school students are executed through an IDEA mandated program known as Child Find; a service that is provided by the local education agencies (LEA) in which a school is located. Through Child Find, all children with suspected disabilities, including those who attend non-public schools, are sought out and evaluated (IDEA, 2004). Thus, the LEA is responsible for locating, identifying, evaluating, and using the IDEA funds to serve children with disabilities enrolled by their parents in non-public, including religious, elementary and secondary schools in that district.

It is important to note that the IDEA does not provide private school students with an *individual right* to *all* disability services available to public school students. In other words, the IDEA requires Child Find procedures to locate, identify, and evaluate all children suspected of having a disability, but the LEA may determine which services it will provide (*K.R. v. Anderson Community School Corporation*, 1997; IDEA, 2004). For instance, if a group of Catholic school students is found to have a reading disability, and another group is found to have a math disability, the LEA can determine it will only serve those students with reading disabilities using the IDEA funds. Therefore, the students with identified math disabilities would have no right to receive these funded services despite having been identified as having a disability through the Child Find process.

Inclusion

Inclusion of students with disabilities has been a widely researched topic in education since the 1980s (see, for instance, Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, & Scheer 1999; Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006; McLesky & Waldron, 2009; Odom et al., 2004; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Smelter, Rasch, & Yudewitz, 1994; Taylor, 2005; Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996). Although there is no agreed upon definition (Taylor, 2005), the general idea of inclusion simply implies that students with disabilities will be educated for at least part of the day within the regular education classroom. The concept of inclusion is consistent with the IDEA mandate that students be educated in the least restrictive environment possible (Section 612(a)(5)). Much of the discourse over the past 30 years regarding inclusion has been on the pros and cons of inclusion based on teacher attitudes (see, for instance, Forlin, 2010; Houck & Rogers, 1994; Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995; Lifshitz & Glaubman, 2002; Ruijs, Van der Veen, & Peetsma, 2010; and Ryan, 2008). Obviously, inclusive practices have repercussions for regular education teachers who are required to modify tasks or accommodate the students with disabilities while ensuring the material they are teaching is appropriately challenging to *all* students.

The IDEA stipulates that the LEA must provide services to parentally placed private school children in a manner similar to those provided to students with disabilities in public schools (*Fowler v. Unified School District*, 1997; IDEA, 2004: Section 612(a)(10)(a)(ii)(III); *Natchez-Adams School District v. Searing*, 1996; *Peter v. Wedl*, 1998; *Russman v. Board of Education of the Enlarged City School District of the City of Watervliet,* 1997). Based on recommendations set forth in the IDEA (Section 612(a)(5))

and researchers who have found that inclusion models benefit students with disabilities (Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006; McLeskey & Waldron, 2009; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), public schools are adopting protocols that provide more identification, assessment, and remedial services within the regular education setting. According to the IDEA, then, those same regular education protocols should also be utilized in private school students' service provision.

Catholic schools typically do not have special education teachers or programs and, therefore, educate all children within the general education classroom (USCCB, 2002). By default, then, they are providing aspects of inclusive education for students who may have disabilities whether they are identified or not. Given this "default" system of inclusive education for students with disabilities within Catholic schools, the purpose of this study was to determine the model of classroom inclusion provided to students with special educational needs.

Serving Students in Catholic Schools

Teachers in Catholic schools may notice a student is struggling in a particular subject and seek assistance for that student from parents, other school personnel, or through a referral to Child Find. Alternatively, parents may decide to pay for assessment and services out of pocket, an additional financial burden to families who are already paying for their child's education (USCCB, 2002). If a disability is identified, parents and school officials must decide if the support the Catholic school services are sufficient and will appropriately benefit the student. Some parents believe their only option is to pull their child from the Catholic school and enroll him or her in the public schools where services are more readily identified and available (Eigenbrood, 2005; USCCB, 2002).

Catholic schools throughout the country provide services to students with mild to moderate disabilities, usually within the regular education classroom and with teachers who are not trained specifically in special education (USCCB, 2002). Service provision is largely based on the philosophy of the school administrator and/or classroom teacher. The types of services are generally based on a teacher's past experience with teaching and inclusive practices; most often these approaches include preferred seating, test taking accommodations and individual classroom help (Bello, 2006; Eigenbrood, 2005; McDonald, 2008; USCCB, 2002). In order to continue to fulfill their mission to welcome and teach all students, regardless of their disability, Catholic schools would benefit from an in-depth look at current inclusion services. With this information, Catholic school administrators and teachers could determine how they could assist a greater number of students in need. An inclusion model would not only help maintain, and perhaps even increase, enrollment in the Catholic schools, but would be in direct alignment with the overall mission of Catholic education.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increase in non-public school enrollment, the percentage of students enrolling in Catholic schools has been decreasing for the past few decades (United States Department of Education, 2009). One aspect of this decrease may be related to the perception that not all Catholic schools are able to provide sufficient accommodations to students with disabilities. Catholic schools also do not have a consistent and comprehensive model of services for inclusion of students with disabilities (Bello, 2006; USCCB, 2002). Because these services are not consistently mandated or monitored, little is known about the implementation of inclusive services within Catholic schools. This

study explored the practices of Catholic schools in a Rocky Mountain region in order to better understand how they serve students with disabilities.

Significance of the Current Research

There are two significant ways in which the current research is important. First, meeting the needs of all students with disabilities in a consistent and structured manner helps to reduce students' struggles in the classroom. When implemented effectively, supporting teachers' application of inclusive services in their classrooms supports both students with disabilities as well as those who have different styles of learning. Furthermore, as has been presented above, the incidence and/or identification of childhood disorder is on the rise, and, as Bello (2006) found, this indicates more students in Catholic schools will also be found to have special educational needs. Therefore, it is important to identify the practices within Catholic school classrooms that support students with special education needs.

Second, the current structure for serving students with disabilities within the Catholic schools must be determined in order to supplement, but not necessarily supplant, services to better serve students with special educational needs and disabilities. As a result of the current study, Catholic school staff and supporting stakeholders (e.g. parents, superintendents, clergy members, and other community members) working with private schools may have a better understanding of the key issues in ensuring an appropriate model of support for students with special educational needs. An additional desired outcome would be that Catholic school personnel may be able to coordinate with available services to develop a consistent and comprehensive framework for serving

students with disabilities, thereby giving families more choices in where to educate their children.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study focused on the state of inclusion practices for students with disabilities in Catholic schools in a Rocky Mountain region. Using qualitative methodology, the researcher examined multiple sources of data, such as interview responses, observations, and survey data to better understand inclusive practices within Catholic schools. While survey data were useful in gathering a broad understanding of inclusive practices in Catholic schools from a number of participants, the addition of interview and observation data from a smaller number of participants provided significant perspective on the areas of need as well as areas of strength of those inclusive practices.

Q1 What are the experiences of teachers in Catholic schools regarding students with special educational needs?

Q2 What are the experiences of administrators in Catholic schools regarding students with special educational needs?

Q3 What is the interaction of the experiences of teachers and the experiences of administrators regarding students with special educational needs?

Delimitations

For the purposes of this study, a purposeful sample of private schools within a Rocky Mountain Catholic organization was chosen. The schools were within urban, suburban, and small-town regions and prior to the year of study did not employ a school psychologist on either a part-time or full-time basis. All schools had the option of receiving Child Find services from their local public schools for the purpose of identifying students with learning disabilities and other educational disabilities. Because

this process was optional, not all Catholic schools within the area of study made equal use of the Child Find process. Each school utilized in this study had a student population from Kindergarten through Grade 8.

Because student problems may be different at the high school level (e.g. greater emphasis on transition services to college, vocational training, or community; social, emotional, and mental health issues can be different for older students; and identification of special educational needs are more often made with younger students) the needs of teachers and administrators at the high school level may also be different. To retain a focus on a set of needs pertaining to younger students, and because of the inadequate number of representative teacher and administrators available at the high school level, the high school population of teachers and administrators was not utilized for this study.

Additionally, students were not direct participants in this study, meaning it was unclear how many students struggled with special educational needs or identifiable disabilities within the schools that participated in this study. Because the focus of this study was on the teacher and administrator experience and practice of inclusion in Catholic schools and not student outcomes, the needs of students was not fully represented. Therefore, the effectiveness of the practice of Catholic school inclusion was not available from the data in this study. Finally, although it would be ideal to determine the perspective of every teacher and administrator in the participating schools to obtain a complete dataset of inclusive practices, such an undertaking would cost an exceptional amount of time and effort, and therefore this study represents the perspectives of only a sample of potential participants.

Definitions of Terms

Administrators – The word administrators will be used to refer to both principals and assistant principals. Catholic schools may have one or two administrators at each school, and because of their common leadership role in the schools, information from both the principal and assistant principal is relevant to the current research.

Catholic school – Catholic school will refer solely to the parish-based Catholic schools governed by the local Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Office.

Child Find – The Child Find service is an IDEA mandated service provided by the local education agencies (LEA) in which a school is located. The LEA is responsible for locating, identifying, evaluating, and using the IDEA funds for services for children with disabilities enrolled by their parents in private elementary and secondary schools, including religious institutions, located in that district. Child Find teams are identified by different names, but for the purposes of this study any reference to a team serving the role as defined above will be referred to as Child Find.

Inclusion – This study utilized Farrell's 2004 definition of inclusion as a measure of the overall effectiveness of a school based on the broad context encompassing the presence, acceptance, participation, and achievement of students with special educational needs. In this definition, *all* students a) are educated within the same classrooms for the great majority of the day; b) are accepted by staff and peers and welcomed as full and active members of the school community; c) participated in and contributed actively in all aspects of school activities; and d) learned and developed positive self-concepts, despite whether they had a special educational need (Farrell, 2004).

Non-public schools – These are schools that tend to receive limited or no public funds and are also referred to as parochial schools, religious schools, faith-based schools, non-public schools, and private schools. The terminology used in this study reflects the terminology used in the original articles. The term non-public school is used to describe any school that is not governed by a state-supported public school system.

Services - Education services for students with disabilities includes initial identification of disabilities, referrals for assessment, evaluation/testing, diagnosis of disability, and provision of interventions or accommodations related to disabilities or special educational needs (USCCB, 2002).

Special educational needs – The IDEA defines a child with a disability as a child with "mental retardation, hearing impairments…, speech or language impairments, visual impairments…, serious emotional disturbance…, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services," (20 U.S.C. §1401 (Section 602(3)(A)). Furthermore, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines disability as: "a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; b) a record of such an impairment; or c) being regarded as having such an impairment" (ADA, 1990: Sec. 902.1 (b)). Taking these two definitions together, the current research will use the term "special educational needs" to describe students who have or are regarded as having impairments or disabilities as outlined in the IDEA that limits their ability to succeed in school.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature surrounding aspects of inclusion of students with disabilities using the ecological theory of human development as a framework. Research regarding the structures of inclusion systems (e.g. mission and vision statements, special education law, service provision, and teacher satisfaction) and a model of inclusion are embedded within Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system levels. This ecological model of inclusion is presented to provide a backdrop for the concept of inclusion, and serves as a general guide for understanding aspects of inclusive practice as experienced in Catholic school settings.

Inclusion

The concept of inclusion gained popularity in the 1980s, and much of the early work focused on defining inclusion. Subsequent studies focused on teachers' acceptance of and perceived efficacy toward including students with special educational needs in their regular education classrooms (e.g., Anderson et al., 2007; Houck & Rogers, 1994; Janney et al., 1995; Lifshitz & Glaubman, 2002; Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006; Mukherjee, Lightfoot, & Sloper, 2000; Ryan, 2008; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Despite 30 years of research, there is no agreed upon definition or conceptualization of inclusion (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Smelter et al., 1994; Taylor, 2005) because it

is a general concept that is implemented differently across school districts. Furthermore, the concept of inclusion is often interchanged with terms such as mainstreaming (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), the Regular Education Initiative (Houck & Rogers, 1994), universal design (Hardman, 2009), and integrated classrooms (Hardman, 2009). Farrell (2004) described a transition from uses of "integrated" or "mainstream" classrooms prior to the 1990s to "inclusion." This term represented a philosophical shift from the functional integration of students (i.e. physical placement of students with special educational needs in the regular education classroom but not necessarily including those students in the educational activities taking place in that setting) to the welcoming and full participation of all students within regular education classrooms (Farrell, 2004). Inclusion is a philosophy that fosters involvement of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom who are welcomed for the unique contributions they are able to make (Anderson et al., 2007; Farrell, 2004; Taylor, 2005).

For the purposes of this study, inclusion is further defined in the manner consistent with that of full-inclusion (Smelter et al., 1994). Full-inclusion refers to programs and classrooms where all students with disabilities are educated full time with their non-disabled peers. In other words, students are not removed from the regular education classroom to be taught or assisted in separate settings for particular subjects or skills in the curriculum. Teachers in fully inclusive classrooms will often individualize instruction for students with disabilities and may give one-to-one attention to particular students, but this is still considered part of full-inclusion practice. Brice and Miller (2000), in their case study research on inclusion, identified four critical features in inclusive classrooms:

1. All children learn together.
2. Labels or other methods to identify students with special educational needs are not utilized.
3. All students are taught in a manner that helps them reach their maximum potential.
4. Specialized curriculum is not necessary.

Those who practice inclusive education value the diverse nature of students with special educational needs, expect and support all students to participate in learning and other school activities to the student's full potential, and expect all students to make educational and personal gains as a result of these inclusive practices (Farrell, 2004). This framework is consistent with the educational practices in place in many Catholic schools (Taylor, 2005; USCCB, 2002) and further support the idea that inclusive practices are already in place in Catholic schools, even if not in a standardized manner (Bello, 2006).

There are few models of inclusion that have been developed for public school implementation (Pickard, 2008), and no model of inclusion specifically designed for Catholic schools (Bello, 2006; Taylor, 2005). Though inclusion is practiced in a number of public schools across the country, a thorough search of the literature revealed only three formalized models of inclusion. These inclusion models are based on different underlying paradigms and have been termed the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (Wang, Rubenstein, & Reynolds, 1985), the Strategies Intervention Model (Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996), and co-teaching models (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996). These models are explained below to provide examples of aspects of inclusion that

may be evident in the inclusion experiences of teachers and administrators in Catholic schools.

The Adaptive Learning Environments Model of inclusion. Wang et al. (1985) described the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM) implemented in inclusive classrooms in New York City during the 1982-1983 school year. The ALEM program goals included creating learning environments where all students were able to learn basic academic skills and demonstrate increased confidence in their ability to learn and interact with others. Aspects of the ALEM program included the use of direct instruction (i.e., the explicit teaching of a skill set), self-responsibility, social cooperation, and supporting student inquiry.

The ALEM classroom is arranged in a manner that facilitates student movement from station to station in the classroom and allows for small group, large group, and individual class work. The student determines the pace of his or her progression through the curriculum, with individual and group support from the teacher and other students. Learning goals are broken down into small steps, allowing the teacher to determine if the student requires more support in one area or should be challenged in another. Adaptive education, upon which ALEM is based, is similar to a more widely known method of schooling called Montessori education (International Montessori Index, 2011). Both programs require that teachers individualize curriculum plans for each student, that supports are put in place when adequate progress is not being made toward curriculum goals, and that students are held responsible for their progression through learning tasks. Other aspects of the ALEM program rely on a data-based approach to supporting the

education of students with special educational needs and assessing the abilities of each student before individualizing their learning experience.

The Strategies Intervention Model of inclusion. Another inclusion model was developed at the University of Kansas Center for Research in Learning, and was researched by Tralli et al. (1996). This inclusion model, called the Strategies Intervention Model (SIM), focused on three categories: learning strategy interventions, content enhancement routines, and empowerment interventions. The first category, learning strategy interventions, was developed to assist students with disabilities who may be ineffective learners and lack the information processing skills to respond to the range of content and tasks they were being asked to perform. The students were given an explicit list of behaviors or steps that were believed necessary to lead them toward successful completion of these tasks. Individualized feedback and multiple opportunities to practice the learning strategies helped the student utilize the strategies throughout their learning experiences (Tralli et al., 1996).

The second category in the SIM program was content enhancement routines (Tralli et al., 1996). These were routinized aspects of instruction used by the teacher to assist the students with needs to understand and recall the content of what is being taught. Especially beneficial to students struggling with cognitive or emotional challenges, this strategy helped the students organize, store, and remember information due to the teacher's predictable delivery and emphasis on important content. One key to content enhancement routines was the overview of concepts prior to teaching. Graphic organizers were also utilized routinely to focus on key concepts (Tralli et al., 1996).

The final category of intervention in the SIM program was empowerment interventions (Trall et al., 1996). Students were empowered to perform to the best of their ability and to have positive interactions with others in the school setting. Self-advocacy and other social and motivational strategies were utilized to support and promote these positive interactions (Tralli et al., 1996). For instance, students were encouraged to inventory their learning strengths and weaknesses, set goals for themselves, and become active members of decisions regarding their educational experiences. In these ways, students began to exhibit ownership over their education and life choices and were therefore empowered to invest themselves in their schooling (Tralli et al., 1996). This final category of interventions addressed the "whole child" aspect of inclusion, with an understanding of the interconnectedness between one's personal and educational lives.

The co-teaching model of inclusion. According to Walther-Thomas et al., (1996), the co-teaching model had many names, such as collaborative consultation, mainstream assistance teams, teacher assistance teams, and cooperative teaching. However, the common element of these types of co-teaching was that they are designed to use various interaction formats to assist professionals to work together to support positive student outcomes for all students in the classroom. Equality in the co-teaching relationship was important, as was the cooperative planning, teaching, and evaluation of student performance. Key aspects of successful co-teaching practice included (a) administrative support and leadership; (b) capable and willing participants; (c) ongoing staff development; (d) classroom rosters that are balanced in terms of student need and ability; (e) provision of adequate, weekly planning time; and (f) development of individualized education plans for students. Explicit planning for duties for each teacher

throughout each learning activity was suggested to streamline the experience for the teachers and students (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996).

Current perspectives on inclusion. Despite the above-mentioned inclusion models, researchers consider a classroom as "inclusive" based on the amount of time the student with disabilities spends in the regular education classroom. As previously stated, there is the distinction between full-inclusion, where students are in the regular education classroom for the entire school day, and inclusion that allows for pullout opportunities for students requiring one-on-one assistance in certain subjects (Smelter et al., 1994). The ALEM and co-teaching inclusion models are full-inclusion programs (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996; Wang et al., 1985), whereas the SIM program allows for pullout sessions for students with disabilities, if warranted (Tralli et al., 1996).

Philosophically, there are differences of opinion as to whether full-inclusion is beneficial for all students with special educational needs (see for instance, Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009). In an international review of inclusion research from 1975 to 1995, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found teachers believed outcomes for all students were neither positive nor negative. Across 15 surveys, only 54.4% of the teachers agreed with statements suggesting that students benefited from inclusion experiences. Educational researchers continue to study inclusion practices to explore the possible positive and negative impact of inclusion on students with and without disabilities. For instance, conclusions from Ruijs, Van der Veen, and Peetsma's (2010), who conducted their research in the Netherlands, found similar results to those of Scruggs and Mastropieri. There was very little difference between the academic and social outcomes for students without disabilities in inclusive and non-inclusive elementary school classes. This finding

partially supports inclusive practices, because it allays common fears that students without disabilities will experience negative academic effects if students with disabilities are included in the regular education classroom (Ruijs et al., 2010). Many continue to believe that non-disabled peers will suffer because of the time the teacher might spend assisting students with special educational needs.

In their review of the literature, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found that teachers' willingness to perform, and satisfaction with, inclusive practices were often mitigated by the amount of support they felt from administrators and other personnel. Support may take many forms including structural components. For example, Houck and Rogers (1994) reported that respondents in their study indicated that inclusion was being implemented in their schools without formal guidelines or written policies relating to inclusion. In their conclusion, Houck and Rogers (1994) stated that the needs of the school and personnel must be taken into careful consideration in order to formulate the type of support, including guidelines and policies, necessary for successful inclusion practices (Houck & Rogers, 1994). Buell et al. (1999) also found it was necessary to adequately assess the needs and supports for teachers and students for inclusion models to be perceived in a positive manner.

As might be expected, much has been written on what constitutes effective and ineffective inclusive practices. For instance, O'Shea and O'Shea (1998) found four key elements to successful inclusion. First, ongoing inservice training for teachers supported effective implementation of inclusion. Teachers in the study needed an understanding of the long-term commitment to inclusion that was necessary for student success. Second, the ability to carry on effective consultation, complete with compromises and

understanding, was essential to positive inclusion experiences for teachers. While consulting with administrators, parents, and other service personnel, teachers needed to be flexible and open to alternative suggestions and ideas regarding the best way to educate students with special educational needs. Third, contact with and support from parents was seen by teachers as instrumental to the education of the child and his or her area of need. Finally, involvement of students without disabilities was found to have positive implications on the success of inclusion. Teachers reported using different sizes of learning groups and encouraging a school-wide atmosphere of acceptance and support for all students, particularly those with special educational needs (O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998).

Janney et al. (1995) found similar examples of positive support for inclusion. Additionally, Janney et al. found administrator support to be a vital aspect of successful inclusion. As part of that support, information, orientation, and training for teachers regarding inclusion of students with special educational needs were viewed as beneficial. A balance between giving teachers freedom to determine how inclusion would operate in their own classroom and providing supports to those teachers was important. Teachers have authority over their classroom, and in order for their efficacy to remain high regarding their ability to teach students with special educational needs, they need to retain that authority. At the same time, the teachers in the study reported they needed interpersonal support, task-related support, and problem-solving support in order to be the most effective in their classroom (Janney et al.,1995).

More recently, Odom et al. (2004) found similar results regarding effective practices for inclusion. Student's participation and engagement in classroom activities

was important for all students, regardless of whether or not the student had a disability (Odom et al., 2004). Classroom environments play an important role in encouraging student participation, just as it is in regular education settings. In other words, a good school environment (i.e., positive interactions between staff and students and between peers, accessible and engaging environment, highly trained teachers, and administrative support) produced positive effects for students with and without disabilities. Instructional approaches, such as group instruction and adapting teaching approaches to address individual students' needs were also found to have positive effects on outcomes for all students. Social aspects of inclusion were also addressed, and an overt attempt to promote positive social interactions between all students, regardless of disability, were seen as a primary goal of inclusive education.

Common themes throughout these and other studies suggest a few key components of effective inclusion. It is apparent that teacher training and ongoing education about inclusion and teaching students with special educational needs are important aspects of inclusive education (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Janney et al., 1995; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998). Similarly, administrator support is another important aspect of successful inclusion (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Janney et al.,1995; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998). Although less studied, aspects of the environment (Odom et al., 2004) and student involvement in the structure of and/or meetings regarding their education (Odom et al., 2004; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998; Tralli et al., 1996; Wang et al., 1985) are examples of aspects of inclusion that also have a profound effect on student success. Table 1 provides a summary of the six most cited elements of successful inclusion based on available research.

Table 1

Key Elements of Successful Inclusion

Element	Supporting Research
Ongoing Teacher Training	Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995 Odom et al., 2004 O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998 Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996
Student Input	Odom et al., 2004 O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998 Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996 Wang, Rubenstein, & Reynolds, 1985
Administrative Support	Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995 Odom et al., 2004 Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996
Direct, explicit instruction	Odom et al., 2004 Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996 Wang, Rubenstein, & Reynolds, 1985
Positive Environment	Odom et al., 2004 O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998
Accommodating Classroom Arrangement	Odom et al., 2004 Wang, Rubenstein, & Reynolds, 1985

Public and private school support for inclusion. The IDEA emphasizes the importance of teaching students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE), regardless of whether the student is educated in a public or private school. The IDEA states:

> to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions …, are educated with children who are not disabled, and … removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the

> use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 2004: Section 612(a)(5)(A)).

Based on this mandate, state education agencies and school districts have interpreted the law to be supportive of inclusion (Kavale & Forness, 2000).

It is important to recognize the majority of inclusion studies occurred within public school systems and not a Catholic school system (Taylor, 2005). Nevertheless, the inclusive attitudes of those within religious schools may be more positive than those in secular schools (Lifshitz & Glaubman, 2002). Lifshitz and Glaubman (2002) studied teachers-in-training in a secular university program and in a religious university program. They found that teachers in the religious program were more likely than those in the secular program to report openness to inclusive education and believed themselves better prepared to teach students with special educational needs. Therefore, religiously based mission statements and a greater focus on moral and virtuous development may have an effect on the attitudes and beliefs that teachers bring to Catholic schools.

Although Catholic schools already have components of inclusive education in place (USCCB, 2002), giving Catholic school practice a name ("inclusion"), supporting this inclusive practice, and increasing teacher efficacy with inclusion would likely have a positive effect on teachers' and administrators' acceptance of students with disabilities (Taylor, 2005). Catholic schools educate students with disabilities at rates similar to the public school (Eigenbrood, 2005; USCCB, 2002) and are able to do so with few or very limited special education personnel or pullout services (USCCB, 2002). As a result, teachers in Catholic schools include students with disabilities into their regular education classroom on a daily basis. Therefore, it is important to create a support structure (Anderson et al., 2007; Buell et al., 1999; Forlin, 2010; Houck & Rogers, 1994; Janney et

al., 1995; McLeskey & Waldron, 2009; Mukherjee et al., 2000) in Catholic schools to aid teachers and administrators in their practice of inclusion. This type of structure should address broad contextual factors. An adapted model of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) original theory provides a useful framework for understanding how Catholic schools experience these influences across different contexts.

Theory of the Ecology of Human Development

Catholic schools, like public schools, are constantly influenced by the social context or ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) in which they reside. Bronfenbrenner recognized that human beings are both influenced by and act as influences in the world around them; he observed that their "immediate setting" is embedded in larger social contexts. Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, as presented in 1977, an individual can be observed across the different systems to which that person belongs. For instance, a student's peer, family, and school system interact on different levels and effect the development of all persons in that system. In an effort to organize the framework within which Catholic schools operate, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is utilized to conceptualize the driving forces behind inclusion in Catholic schools.

The most intimate part of a system, the microsystem, represents the relationship between a person and the setting in which he or she functions. Settings involve a particular place, with certain activities, in which people engage in specific roles. For instance, a teacher's microsystem likely includes his or her home and family as well as the classroom. Part of this system may also include the relationship established with each of one's students and other school personnel. Moving out a step further is the

mesosystem, which represents the interactions or linkages between the microsystems. Attitudes and behaviors that are common among the microsystems create mesosystems, such as the greater school community, including interactions with the administrator and interactions with service providers (e.g., Child Find, private testing providers, grant funded services, etc.). Microsystems and mesosystems function within a broader context, which Bronfenbrenner referred to as the exosystem. In terms of a school system, the exosystem includes federal and state special education law, and public and private school education philosophy and protocols. The outermost system level is the macrosystem. At the macrosystem level, the paradigms and practices are established for the society. In the case of Catholic schools, the mission and vision of Catholic education and acceptance of people with disabilities, upheld by Catholic social teaching occur at the macrosystem level. Additionally, greater societal issues, such as an increased interest in and diagnosis of disabilities in children, also occur at the macrosystem level. Interaction occurs between all of the systems levels, each level affecting and being affected by the others. Change at one level has a ripple effect across the entire system (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Definition and Interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's Theory

There are many interpretations of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Eldering, 1995; Greene et al., 2010; Odom et al., 2004; Seginer, 2006), and there are distinctions that must be made to clearly describe the focus of the current study regarding Bronfenbrenner's theory. The current study utilized Bronfenbrenner's 1977 explication of his theory, which has since been expanded. In the late 1990's, Bronfenbrenner added two additional levels to his theory: at the lower end, the biosystem, and at the upper end, the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The biosystem refers to the specific

worldview of any one person. This is influenced by past interactions with the other system's levels, and encapsulates the person in all aspects of his or her life. For the current study, the person as teacher is the focus, which places the person in a setting (the classroom of students), and therefore the microsystem level better describes the first level of interest in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory.

At the upper level of the ecological system, Bronfenbrenner has added the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). This level acknowledges the change people experience over time, and changes over time in the interaction of the other systems levels. Because the current study will not attempt to directly influence any aspect of the systems being studied, development or change over time is not an aspect of interest. Instead, the focus will be on the reality of inclusion practice within a school year. Therefore, the four levels Bronfenbrenner presented in 1977 were utilized.

Since Bronfenbrenner published the first version of his ecological systems theory, researchers have sought to interpret and study phenomena in the context of systems (Eldering, 1995; Greene et al., 2010; Odom et al., 2004; Seginer, 2006). However, interpretation of the structure of the systems is muddled at best. For instance, regarding research of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory related to schooling, Odom et al. (2004) and Seginer (2006) agree that special education law's influence on the system occurs at the exosystem level. However, Eldering (1995) describes the law in the context of the macrosystem. In Bronfenbrenner's 1977 publication, the macrosystem is described as existing "in explicit form as recorded laws, regulations, and rules," (p. 515), but goes on to discuss the more commonly informal and implicit nature of the outer system level. The culture and general prototypes of behavior – expectations of a person's position or

"institutional patterns" of society (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) – better explain the macrosystem level, whereas, for instance, these influence law makers in their duties to create regulations to benefit and protect all children in the education system. Therefore, because law is influenced by culture, the current researcher agrees with Odom et al. and Seginer that special education law is an exosystem level construct and not at the macrosystem level.

Similarly, Greene et al. (2010) places constructs such as religion and community at the exosystem level, whereas Seginer (2006) explicitly places it at the macrosystem level. Both authors reference the same source (Bronfenbrenner's 1977 and 1979 work), but come to different conclusions. It is important to recognize that Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is based on interrelations among the different levels, and that the influence one has on another often blurs any lines between the system levels.

For the purposes of this paper, reference to Odom et al.'s (2004) research in preschools provides the basis for the development of a system based on inclusion. Although the current study is based within an elementary school setting and focused on the teacher and administrator population, there are many aspects of Odom et al.'s work that are applicable to this study. Odom et al. included the biosystem and chronosystem in their research, but for the reasons stated above, these levels have been excluded from the current study. Figure 1 presents the ecological systems model of inclusion referenced in this study. The microsystem level addresses the teacher in his or her context, i.e., the classroom of students. At the mesosystem level resides the resources and ability of the physical school building to support inclusion, administrator philosophy toward inclusion, and service providers apart from the teachers. All of these aspects and people interact

with the teachers at the mesosystem level. Concurring with Odom et al. (2004), the researcher has placed social policy and law at the exosystem level because of the influence special education laws have on individuals in the school, even though there may be no direct interaction between the lawmakers and the schools that are influenced by the laws. In other words, the policies established by lawmakers who may not be familiar with Catholic schools may affect the inclusive practices in Catholic school classrooms. Finally, at the macrosystem level, the increasing incidence of childhood disorders across the United States, accompanied by the mission of Catholic education and inclusion of people with disabilities provide a context within which all of the other system levels operate.

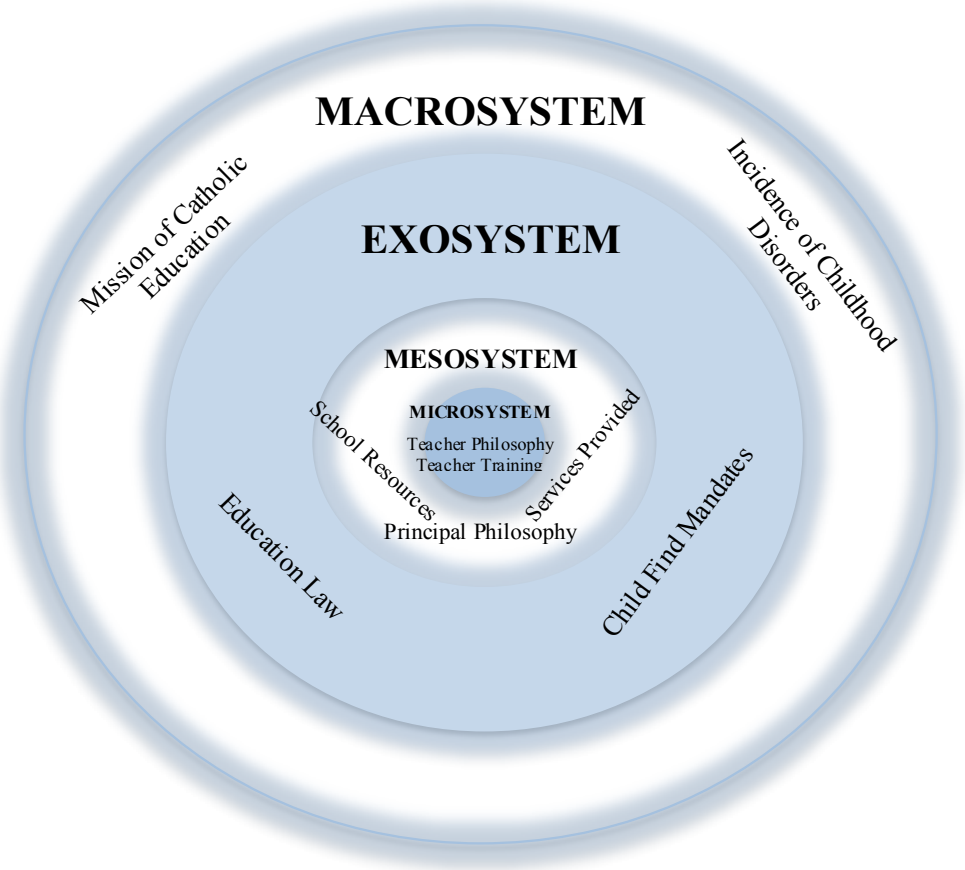

Figure 1. The Inclusion Ecological Systems Model

Given the above discussion on inclusion, an understanding of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the manner in which the different systems interact has significant impact on the success of inclusion of students with disabilities in schools (Taylor, 2005). The remainder of this chapter will discuss the different system levels as they relate to inclusion. Descriptions of different aspects within each system level is not considered exhaustive, but are presented instead in terms of the focus of the current study.

An Ecological Systems View of Inclusion in the Catholic School

The macrosystem level. Bronfenbrenner's largest system level is the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In this section, aspects of inclusion at the macrosystem level are discussed with respect to Catholic schools. Specifically, this section describes how inclusion of students with disabilities in Catholic education may be influenced by the incidence of children with disabilities in the greater community and the mission of Catholic education.

Incidence of childhood disabilities. Disabilities in children may be due, in part, to what researchers described as unresolved conflict in students' personal, social, emotional, and academic lives that negatively impact their attention to their education (Foster et al., 2005; Koller & Bertel, 2006). Koller and Bertel (2006) describe the issue as an increase in unidentified "sub-threshold mental health problems" among students. At this sub-threshold level, students experience mental health problems that negatively affect their lives, but symptoms may not be egregious enough to warrant official diagnosis of the problem. As a result, there is a demand for prevention and early intervention efforts to help remediate the problems before they necessitate a mental health diagnosis. Similarly,

the number of disabilities among students continues to place a great demand for support on teachers and administrators to provide prevention and intervention strategies for a variety of student needs (Koller & Bertel, 2006).

In a nationwide study of 83,000 public schools, Foster et al. (2005) found that nearly three quarters of the schools reported social, interpersonal, or family problems as the most frequent problems for students. In other words, the problems most often dealt with in public schools were not mental retardation or problems associated with low incidence disabilities (e.g. genetic disorders, blindness, or deafness), but were more frequently related to emotional, social, or behavioral problems. Although research on the rate of disabilities in public schools does not directly correlate to disability incidence in Catholic schools, the USCCB study (2002) maintains that Catholic school students experience the same needs as public schools. Unfortunately, there is relatively little research into the nature of how students with disabilities or other problems are served in the Catholic schools (Eigenbrood, 2004; Eigenbrood, 2005; Taylor, 2005).

The influence of Catholic mission and vision. There are many Catholic Church documents related to the mission of Catholic education and treatment of those with disabilities (Garrone, 1977; Laghi, 1997; Pope Benedict XVI, 2008; Religious Education and Pastoral Care of Developmentally Disabled Persons, n.d.; Second Vatican Council, 1965; USCCB, 1978). Through the Second Vatican Council (1965) came the renewal of many of the Church's ministries, including the ministry of education. Education was particularly addressed in the *Gravissimum Educationis,* proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965. In this proclamation, the Church was charged with developing an education system that incorporated "the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the

arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously [students'] physical, moral and intellectual endowments" (Second Vatican Council, 1965, p.2). The document denotes that along with developing the intellectual faculties of students, moral, cultural, and professional values are also a high priority for Catholic education (Second Vatican Council, 1965). Other Church documents agree: "This is the basis of a Catholic school's educational work. Education is not given for the purpose of gaining power but as an aid toward a fuller understanding of, and communion with man, events and things," (Garrone, 1977, p. 9). Even within Catholic Church documents, continuous engagement with the science of psychology and child development is necessary to the mission of Catholic education (Garrone, 1977).

Furthermore, Catholic education is "to provide *every* child with an education that respects his complete development," (Garrone, 1977, p. 14, emphasis added), and "offers itself to *all*," (p. 15, emphasis added). In 1978, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement on the Church's teaching on accepting persons with disabilities. The document supports a position of commitment to working toward deeper understanding of those with disabilities, but also to recognize their unique gifts in what they have to offer to the Church (USCCB, 1978). At local levels, there are often ministries directed specifically toward reaching this goal. For instance, in the Archdiocese of Denver, the Religious Education and Pastoral Care of Developmentally Disabled Persons (n.d.) states its mission is to ensure the full integration of persons with disabilities into the Catholic Christian faith.

Mission statements are created, in theory, to guide the everyday practice of organizations. Voors (1998, as cited in Taylor, 2005) described mission statements as the

guiding force in a school's daily functioning, policy, and procedures. Taylor (2005) described mission and vision statements as a link between Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems. Mission statements are developed at the macrosystem level, with input from overriding theory or history, affecting the exo- and mesosystem of school supported practices, and driving the microsystem aspects of beliefs among individual teachers. Adelman and Taylor (2007) suggest that looking at vision and mission statements and policies is the philosophical place to begin considering how the system will accept inclusion practices throughout the system levels. Outcomes of systems must meet the goals stated as part of the mission statements of organizations.

There are consistent elements these researchers believe must be considered when improving the outcomes of the school system (Adelman & Taylor, 2007).

1. Vision, aims, and underlying rationale for what follows: The absence of an explicitly stated mission hampers the understanding of a system. Misunderstanding of the rationale for change may lead to resistance from those within the system.
2. Resources: Ensuring adequate funding, equipment, personnel, space, and materials are available is essential to successful system implementation of ideals such as inclusion. Schools may need to redistribute resources, re-evaluate use of some resources, and creatively utilize currently available resources. Federal assistance provides funding for some aspects of systemic improvements of and support for inclusive practices (Adelman & Taylor, 2007; United States Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy, & Program Studies Service, 2007).

3. Functions, Tasks, and Activities: Through information sharing, a well-designed infrastructure backed by support, and on-going quality assurance for the functions, tasks, and activities that are part of inclusive practice, a system is able to more seamlessly deliver inclusive education. Stakeholders must feel that they have ownership over their inclusive practice so that they feel competent in its implementation.
4. Systematic Infrastructure and Strategies: "Organization Facilitators" are an individual or a group of professionals trained in systems change, who is/are able to provide expertise to implement and institutionalize system change. The Organization Facilitator is a mentor for a larger change team, who are the catalysts and managers of the change (Adelman & Taylor, 2007). For instance, school psychologists are able to lead administrators and teachers through implementation of best practices regarding inclusion.

In conclusion, the incidence of childhood disabilities and the mission of Catholic education are addressed in various secular and Catholic documents and research, and it is important to recognize the underlying influences these aspects of the macrosystem may have on study participants. For instance, teacher training for veteran teachers may have included less emphasis on special education practices than new teachers' training. Therefore, the incidence of student disabilities may require a greater paradigm shift in the practice of including students with disabilities in veteran teachers' classrooms. Similarly, although teachers and administrators may not have been overtly trained in how the mission of Catholic education interacts with their teaching or leadership, the teachers or administrators may be subtly influenced by their understanding of Catholic social

teaching and mission. For these reasons, an understanding of the potential influence macrosystem level constructs on inclusion practices of teachers and administrators is important.

The exosystem level. At the exosystem level, inclusion practices are influenced by special education law, such as the IDEA and interactions between Catholic schools and their public school counterparts. This level of Bronfenbrenner's system theory is guided by the greater societal issues (i.e. incidence of disability identification in children) and the mission of Catholic school education in the macrosystem level. The exosystem also affects the school level mesosystem.

Special education law development and pertinence to private schools. In the 1950s and 1960s, advocacy groups and family members of institutionalized individuals began to develop programs and services to help children with disabilities and their families; practices that laid the foundation for the special education services that are common in public schools today (United States Department of Education et al., 2000). Changes in special education law began in earnest in 1965 with the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ESEA, reauthorized most recently as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), and the IDEA both include procedures for and funding of services to private school students (IDEA, 2004: Section 610(a)(10)(A)). However, the IDEA mandates pertain to special education services more so than do the NCLB mandates, which are focused on increasing outcomes for all students. Because the current study is based on specific practices and philosophies congruent with inclusion and therefore a special education process, the IDEA mandates are discussed in more depth.

Ten years after the ESEA was enacted, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) was passed (PL 94-142; 1975). This Act was in response to children with disabilities who were excluded from the public school system, as well as children with disabilities who were not receiving a beneficial education (United States Department of Education et al., 2000). The four main purposes of PL 94-142 were to ensure: (a) that all children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education designed to meet their unique needs; (b) to protect the rights of students with disabilities and their families; (c) to assist states in carrying out services to students with disabilities; and (d) to ensure the effectiveness of services carried out under the law (United States Department of Education et al., 2000). PL 94-142 would later become known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This act was last reauthorized in 2004, entitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [IDEA], and Part B of the law has sections specifically related to parentally placed private school students (PL 108-446 Section 612(a)(10)(A)). The Education Department General Administrative Regulations ([EDGAR], 1995) were written to help define and explain aspects of the IDEA law (34 CFR §§300.130-300.144 of EDGAR pertain specifically to the IDEA statutes regarding parentally placed private school children).

By passing the PL 94-142, Congress intended to guarantee educational rights to *all* children and youth with disabilities. Currently, EDGAR states LEAs must provide private school students with "genuine opportunities for equitable participation in programs of benefits," (EDGAR, 1995: 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.137-300.138, United States Department of Education et al., 2000). This means private school students with disabilities, including those in religious private schools, should be provided services

comparable in quality as students with disabilities in public schools, even though participation may not necessarily be at the same level (e.g. on a daily basis) as students in public schools (Osborne, Russo, & DiMattia, 1999; United States Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Office of Non-Public Education, 2008).

Wording in the IDEA further supports the use of responsiveness to scientific, research-based interventions as part of the evaluation for disabilities (IDEA, 2004: Section 614(b)(6)(B)). As a result, numerous public school districts across the United States have adopted this method of identification of special educational needs for students. The equitable participation clause, noted above, as well as wording in Section 612(a)(10)(A)(ii)(III) state that the public school districts "shall undertake activities similar to those activities undertaken for the agency's public school children." Therefore, if the public school district performs evaluations for disabilities utilizing responsiveness to interventions for public school children, it should do so for private school children as well. In this way, at the exosystem level of interaction between private and public schools as directed by special education law, including children with disabilities in regular education classrooms in Catholic schools also requires that those children be identified using a responsiveness to interventions approach.

As was stated in the *Russman v. Board of Education of the Enlarged City School District of the City of Watervliet* (1997), the language of the IDEA is permissive and not mandatory regarding specific services to students in private schools. However, in *Peter v. Wedl* (1998), the court made clear that decisions must be applied uniformly to faith-based and nonsectarian schools alike. In other words, public schools cannot provide services to

a non-religious private school and refuse to do the same at faith-based schools. The United States government upholds the importance of an appropriate education for all children with disabilities through the IDEA, including the 185,000 Catholic school students with disabilities (USCCB, 2002).

Consultation with the Catholic school representatives and parents is a key element to the success of the Child Find process (EDGAR, 1995: 34 CFR §300.134, United States Department of Education et al., 2000) to determine which students will receive services, how the needs of students will be identified (EDGAR, 1995: 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.137-300.138), what services will be provided, how services will be delivered (EDGAR, 1995: 34 CFR §§300.132(b), 300.137(c), and 300.138(b)), and evaluation procedures (EDGAR, 1995: 34 C.F.R. § 300.134-300.135; IDEA, 2004: Section 612(a)(10)(A)(v)). According to the IDEA, consultation should occur throughout the school year and include representatives from the private school as well as the student's parent(s) (IDEA, 2004: Section 612(a)(10)(A)(iii)). Discussions during consultation should include determination of equitable participation of students with disabilities, a description of the process and the roles parents, teachers, and other school representatives play in the process, how funding is provided for services, and how, where, and by whom services will be provided (United States Department of Education et al., 2008). Inclusive practices in the Catholic school occur in relation to the services provided by Child Find personnel. Therefore, an understanding of aspects of the Child Find services and its link to special education law provides a context within which the inclusion experiences of teachers and administrators in Catholic schools occur.

The mesosystem level. Each Catholic school creates its own mesosystem, complete with numerous classroom systems, parent connections, and direction from the administrator. Teacher to teacher interactions and teacher to student interactions would also be mesosytem level interactions, each of those groups representing their own microsystem. Few researchers have studied mesosystem level constructs as they relate to providing services to Catholic school students with disabilities (Taylor, 2005). Although it is widely recognized that parents have an enormous impact on their children (Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009; Epstein, 2001; Goldstein et. al, 2007; Grinstein-Weiss, Yeo, Irish, & Zhan, 2009), due to the constraints of the current study, focus will remain on the combined teacher and administrator influences on inclusion at the mesosystem level. In this review, parental influences are presented in the context of service provision or in relation to teacher and administrator impact on the system.

The state of services in Catholic schools. When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 was reauthorized in 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, 2002) sought to present a case for more and better-coordinated services for Catholic school students. The study included information regarding over one million students attending nearly 3,000 schools and spanned 21 states. The researchers attempted to determine the state of services and the sentiment felt by Catholic school stakeholders regarding special education and inclusion services in Catholic schools. They reported that Catholic schools enrolled students with special educational needs in all disability areas as defined by the IDEA, yet respondents did not believe the students with disabilities were receiving sufficient services through the IDEA funded services to adequately address their disabilities. Although seven percent of

Catholic school students had been formally identified by either a state appointed or privately sought, qualified, licensed, and trained professional as having a disability, less than one percent of those students were receiving funded services through the IDEA. Furthermore, the numbers and percentages of students identified with disabilities in Catholic schools (185,000 and seven percent, respectively) underrepresent the true incidence of disabilities in Catholic schools due to the difficulty in procuring assessment through the LEA, cost of obtaining a private assessment, and willingness of teachers in Catholic schools to accommodate students they recognize are struggling, without having to go through an assessment process (USCCB, 2002).

Protocols are in place in public schools to ensure timely, consistent, and on-going assessment for eligibility and personalized services. However, when faith-based schools serve students with disabilities, it is usually done without any determination of eligibility or labeling (Eigenbrood, 2004). Again, this supports the hypothesis that Catholic schools are serving students with disabilities at a rate higher than data may show through inclusive practices. According to Eigenbrood (2005), Catholic schools need to develop clearer policies regarding services to students with special educational needs. The Catholic Church, reflecting on the state of Catholic education in the third millennium, recognized that changes have occurred in the educational functions of schools requiring "new contents, new capabilities and new educational models besides those followed traditionally," (Laghi, 1997, p. 1). Funding for publicly provided services through the IDEA should encourage Catholic schools to provide additional services to all of their students with disabilities in order to build a more inclusive community that is able and willing to accept children with disabilities (Eigenbrood, 2004).

Furthermore, Eigenbrood (2005) found that while public schools required official identification of a disability in order for the student to receive services, faith-based schools often did not. Similarly, the faith-based schools did not have written plans for educational objectives for those students receiving special education services. Untested students, without education plans, receiving services from untrained teachers is concerning. It is possible teachers in the faith-based schools were responding to the needs of their students through inclusive practices, although they may not have recognized the individualized services as such.

The influence of Child Find activities. One of the more fundamental aspects of the IDEA, as it pertains to private schools, is Child Find activities (IDEA, 2004: Section 612(a)(10)(A)(ii); EDGAR, 1995: 34 CFR §300.131-300.132). Child Find activities refer to "locating, identifying, evaluating, and spending a proportionate amount of the IDEA funds for equitable services for children with disabilities enrolled by their parents in private, including religious elementary and secondary schools located in that district," (United States Department of Education et al., 2008, p. 4). For instance, Catholic school personnel make referrals to the Child Find team working with the local education agency for disability assessments. The Child Find team then determines whether an assessment is warranted, evaluates the student, and, depending on the results of the assessment and the type of disability found, provides certain services to the student based on input from Catholic school representatives and the student's parents. The team, the assessments, and the services are all funded through the IDEA.

There has been a significant lack of clarity as to how the IDEA pertains to private school students with disabilities, particularly religious private school students

(Eigenbrood, 2004; Osborne et al., 1999). Aspects of the Child Find process are inconsistent in regard to Catholic schools (USCCB, 2002; Eigenbrood, 2005; United States Department of Education et al., 2000). For example, one study determined that 40% of private school personnel did not know publicly funded services for students with disabilities existed (United States Department of Education et al., 2000). While per pupil cost in Catholic schools is half of the cost to educate a student than in public schools (Boaz & Barrett, 1996; USCCB, 2008), it is more expensive to educate students with disabilities in both public and private schools. Public schools rely on the IDEA and other federal funding to offset some of their special education costs. Catholic schools, however, cover the additional costs of special education and related services such as inclusion support, when provided, for students with disabilities through tuition, grants, and special program funding through NCLB or the IDEA (USCCB, 2005).

However, it is important to note that students attending private schools do not have an individual right to funding or services (EDGAR, 1995: 34 CFR §300.137(a)). The LEA has decision-making power over the type of services it will provide. Private school students may be identified through LEA Child Find processes with any number of disabilities (e.g., reading disabilities, emotional disabilities, social disabilities, physical disabilities, etc.), but the LEA may determine to serve, with IDEA funds, a specific disability, thereby serving only a proportion of the students (Eigenbrood, 2004; USCCB, 2002; United States Department of Education et al., 2008).

The Child Find services, supports and resources available at the school level, and administrator philosophy toward inclusive education are all microsystems within their own right, along with the microsystem of the teacher's classroom. As has been stated

previously, the ability of the teacher to support inclusive practices in his or her classroom depends in some ways on the mesosystemic interactions (teacher, school, Child Find, and administrator). Next, an in-depth discussion focused on the teacher's microsystem as it relates to inclusive education is presented.

The influence of administrators. One aspect of a school's inclusion practice often stems from the administrator's philosophy of, understanding of, and support for such practices (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998). Unlike research on teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding inclusion, there are few studies focused on administrators. The lack of research in this area is concerning given the number of teacher studies suggesting the great importance of support from school administrators (Anderson et al., 2007; Buell et al., 1999; Janney et al., 1995; Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006; Mukherjee et al., 2000; Repie, 2005). The research involving administrators is focused, instead, on system change and school reform. The leadership provided by administrators affects whether children with disabilities are welcomed in Catholic schools (Taylor, 2005). For example, administrators play a critical role administrators have in policy development, teacher hiring and evaluation, and the assignment of students to specific classrooms (Good, 2008). Administrators, imbedded in the mesosystem of the inclusion model, interpret the mission and vision of the school into guidelines for inclusive practice, take into account the skill level of personnel and consultant services that would support inclusion, and allocate resources necessary for inclusive classrooms. Taylor (2005) called for an emphasis on determining administrators' knowledge of special education and its practices, as well as providing them with ongoing education and professional development regarding best practices for inclusion.

The scant research available on administrator's attitudes toward inclusion in schools reveals discrepancies between attitude and practice. Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) found that administrators' attitudes toward inclusion were tentative, though they believed inclusion could work in their schools. The researchers also presented a dichotomous relationship between administrators' attitudes or beliefs and implementation of inclusion. Only 30% of the administrators surveyed identified the visionary leadership style, in which the administrator acts as a guide toward successful full-inclusion, advocated by proponents of inclusion (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998). Further research is needed to determine whether specific leadership styles are more supportive of inclusive practices (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998) and whether a specific focus on special education and inclusion is necessary in order for administrators to become more comfortable with their role in inclusive schooling (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Taylor, 2005).

Based on their work related to integrating children with disabilities in to regular education classes, Janney et al. (1995) proposed a set of guidelines for administrators, who were seen by teacher respondents as responsible for accessing resources from the district, staffing, materials, inservice training, and handling logistics. The researchers advised that administrators maintain a positive attitude toward inclusion and the students being included by being part of a collaborative and problem-solving mindset in the school. Also, respecting teachers as professionals and respecting their autonomy led teachers to feel more confident in their abilities to include students with disabilities. The team approach to planning how and when to integrate students and maintaining good communication among all stakeholders involved (e.g. parents, teachers, related service

providers, etc.), were other guidelines set forth by the researchers. The relationship between administrators' knowledge and beliefs regarding inclusion directly affected their teachers' ability to support students with special educational needs (Janney et al., 1995).

The microsystem level. Finally, the microsystem level of Bronfenbrenner's system theory is where the individual person is effected by and affects the other system levels (1977). As discussed above administrators have a significant effect on the supportive nature of a school system. By providing teachers with adequate resources, training, and emotional support, administrators are able to assist teachers' inclusive practice (Houck & Rogers, 1994; McLeskey & Waldron, 2009; Thornton, Shepperson, & Canavero, 2007). Particularly in the case of systems change related to inclusion, teachers are intrinsically involved. Anderson et al. (2007) indicate that examining teachers' attitudes and concerns during the implementation phase of inclusion is critical to determining the amount and types of support they need to continue on the path toward inclusion. By accurately assessing the needs of teachers and administrators, change can more closely reflect their desires and professional goals and the steps needed to realize those desires and goals through shared vision (Houck & Rogers, 1994; McLeskey & Waldron, 2009; Thornton et al., 2007). Therefore, in order to examine the inclusive experiences within Catholic schools, the needs of the faculty must be assessed (Anderson et al., 2007; Buell et al., 1999; Houck & Rogers, 1994; McLeskey & Waldron, 2009; Thornton et al., 2007).

Many researchers also have studied teacher satisfaction with inclusive practices and support for those practices (Buell et al., 1999; Janney et al., 1995). For instance, Janney et al. (1995) found that teachers wanted to know they had support and resources,

yet wanted freedom to implement specific practices in their classroom without strict guidelines or protocols. In a meta-analysis of studies on teacher perceptions of inclusion practices, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found that although, on average, more than half of the teachers in inclusion research support the concept of inclusion (65%), fewer were willing to include students with disabilities in their classroom (53%). Only 54% of teachers agreed that students with and without disabilities could benefit from inclusion practices.

The amount of planning time inclusive education takes may be an issue for teachers (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Not only did a great majority of teachers in inclusive classroom research agree that inclusion of students with disabilities increased their workload, only 28% agreed they had adequate time to devote to inclusion. A root cause of this may be that only a small percentage of teachers (29.2%) believed general education teachers have sufficient expertise and training in inclusive practices, and that they have adequate resources available to them (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). The 2005 study by Eigenbrood study examined the types of services provided to students in faith-based schools and compared survey results from both public and faith-based schools. Results from the survey indicated that, although teachers at the faith-based schools were providing some special education services, they were often not trained or licensed to do so. This led to less traditional methods for assessing and providing services to students suspected of having disabilities, likely because these regular education teachers were less likely to have special education training.

Furthermore, although assessment services and some disability services were available to all the schools through the IDEA funded services, the faith-based schools

were reluctant to make use of the services (Eigenbrood, 2005). For instance, the faith-based schools were less likely to utilize psychoeducational testing for students suspected of having a disability. Catholic school personnel were more likely to utilize internal decision processes, conferencing with parents, teachers, and administrators, to determine whether or not a student exhibiting needs was best suited to remain in the Catholic school (Taylor, 2005). Therefore, Catholic schools may be less likely to refer students for Child Find assessments, and instead determine whether they will provide services in their own setting (USCCB, 2002).

In order to provide inclusive services to students with disabilities, however, teachers need proper training and support (Anderson et al., 2007; Janney et al., 1995; Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006; Mukherjee et al., 2000; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Taylor, 2005; Walter, Gouze, & Lim, 2006). Lohrmann and Bambara (2006) examined the supports teachers believed they needed in order to practice successful inclusion in their classrooms. Including students with special educational needs was found to evoke negative initial emotions from teachers such as fear, anxiety, and worry. These apprehensions were linked to lack of experience and training in inclusive practices, insecurity in working with other adults (e.g. paraprofessionals and school psychologists), and not knowing how including students with disabilities in their classroom would affect their teaching ability and the other students' rate of learning (Lohrmann & Bombara, 2006).

Lohrmann and Bombara (2006) acknowledged that inclusion does not come without challenges, and the teachers' responses confirmed some of those struggles. For instance, there were inevitable student-centered conflicts. The teachers noted disruption

of class time and distraction of classmates as the two most common challenges. Also, determining research-based best practices for strategies to use with included students was difficult for teachers to integrate into their curriculum goals, as well as time consuming. There were also parent- and professional-centered struggles. Teachers reported feeling frustrated because of a lack of communication and collaboration with parents. Although teachers were empathetic (particularly those who were parents themselves), they often felt undermined in their autonomy to make professional decisions based on the needs they recognized in their classroom. The differences of opinion occurred with other professionals as well. Personal views on inclusion and inclusive practices varied among the professionals (e.g. paraprofessionals, other teachers, and administrators), which meant the teachers needed to spend time deciding how to compromise or express the importance of consistent and research-based practice (Lohrmann & Bombara, 2006).

In this same study, several support mechanisms were reported by teachers to be beneficial to inclusion (Lohrmann & Bombara, 2006). First, at the school level (mesosystem level in Bronfenbrenner's terms), teachers appreciated a culture of support for inclusion. If teachers felt their actions were accepted and valued by the school-wide community, the teachers felt more efficacious about their efforts in inclusion. Second, if the mission of the school (at the exosystem level) was supportive of inclusive practice, and the administrator was encouraging of teachers' practice, teachers felt a level of importance in including students with special educational needs in their classroom. Third, knowledge building about research-based practices regarding inclusion and specific information about problems students with disabilities face helped empower teachers and increased their efficacy in inclusive practices. Finally, hands-on support from other

professionals and positive feedback from parents provided the support many teachers felt they needed in order to adequately address the needs of all students in their classroom (Lohrmann & Bombara, 2006).

Other studies add to the support teachers need in order to teach students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. Regarding pupils with chronic health conditions, teachers require greater awareness and understanding of the health condition in order to be able to individualize their education (Mukherjee et al., 2000). For instance, students with chronic health problems may miss school, be unable to take part in certain school activities, and experience social stigma associated with their condition. Each of these aspects of school life requires a different set of knowledge, intervention, and accommodation on the part of the teacher.

Just as recommendations were provided for administrators regarding support for inclusion, Janney et al. (1995) also presented guidelines for teachers hoping to successfully include students with disabilities in their classroom. Teachers were advised to keep an open mind to the prospect of including students with special educational needs. By keeping their attitudes and beliefs positive, teachers are able to allow the student to reveal their level of need and unique abilities. A team, problem-solving approach was suggested as a way to collaboratively determine what was best for the student, including ways to help the student integrate into the school community. Progress toward inclusion should happen in a steady but paced manner, allowing teachers time to determine their level of competence, need for support, and competence in inclusive practices (Janney et al., 1995).

The microsystem of the teacher is arguably where the majority of inclusion practice influence occurs. The literature discussed above has been presented as a way to frame or create a backdrop upon which the data collected through this study may be compared and contrasted. As with data collected from administrators, teachers' information adds to our understanding regarding personal experiences with inclusion in Catholic schools.

Summary

Inclusion, regardless of the name used to describe it or the definition, is occurring in schools across the country. Inclusion and ecological systems theory relate to each other in that inclusion is affected by school mission statements at the macrosytem level; special education law and linkage between public and private school practices at the exosystem level; school resources and administrator support for inclusion, and support from other professionals at the mesosystem level; and satisfaction with, efficacy toward, and perceptions of inclusive practices by teachers at the microsystem level. At each level, influences from other levels become evident as guidelines (e.g., mission statements, the IDEA, and leadership qualities) inform practice, and practice (e.g., student outcomes, teacher perceptions, and supportive resources) informs guidelines. There are few researchers that have studied inclusion in Catholic or other private schools, therefore a logical start is to explore the inclusive practices that are already occurring as a natural part of a Catholic school system.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study analyzed teachers' and administrators' perceptions of providing services to students with special educational needs in Catholic school regular education classrooms in a Rocky Mountain region. Current practices, descriptions of experiences, willingness to serve students with special educational needs, and preparedness for inclusive education were assessed. Descriptive survey data allowed the researcher to gather information on the general practice of inclusion. Additional data rich with the day-to-day experiences of participants was gathered through interviews, observations, and personal report.

Philosophical Assumptions

To begin a qualitative study, researchers must be aware of their understanding of how the world "works," and their beliefs about how knowledge is formed. According to Creswell (2007), Crotty (1998), and Merriam (2009), a researcher's epistemology and ontology serve as guidelines for their study. Epistemology is based on the researcher's belief of what is possible regarding human knowledge (Crotty, 1998). On the other hand, ontology describes what a researcher believes about the nature of reality (Creswell, 2007). When a researcher's epistemological and ontological viewpoints are taken together, themes may arise that lend themselves to formulating a theory of reality for participants.

The current study was based on the epistemological viewpoint that knowledge is subjective, depending on a person's experience. Philosophical and ontological underpinnings for this study lay in the constructivist model of phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the goal was to describe a phenomenon through the experiences of participants. The problem of educating students with special educational needs in Catholic schools is one in which it is important to understand the shared experiences of teachers and administrators providing inclusive education.

The research design for this emerging qualitative research was influenced by the Consensual Qualitative Research [CQR] method (Hill, Thompson, & Nutt Williams, 1997; Hill, Knox, Thompson, Nutt Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005). Hill et al. (1997) note that phenomenology was influential in developing the CQR method. Therefore, methodology for the current study is described in light of both phenomenology and the CQR method.

Phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to describe a universally experienced phenomenon among study participants. The two broad, general questions typically asked in phenomenological studies, according to Creswell (2007), relate to what participants have experienced in terms of the phenomenon, and the types of contexts or situations influence or affect their experience of the phenomenon. In this study, the experiences of Catholic school teachers and administrators regarding inclusion was of interest. Inclusion is inherent to Catholic education because many of the schools lack special education departments or personnel, yet follow the mission of Catholic education to serve those in most need. Inclusive practice in Catholic schools has been studied very little and is not often identified as "inclusion."

Creswell (2007) outlines four philosophical perspectives in phenomenology. First, phenomenology takes a traditional, philosophical approach to the search for wisdom, or in the case of the current study, and understanding from the perspective of research participants. In order to find that "wisdom," however, a suspension of all presuppositions, the second philosophical perspective, must be made until data makes certain the nature of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This has been addressed through the use of member checks, self-reflections throughout the data collection and analysis process, team members to form consensus, and assistance from dissertation committee members in order to reduce biases.

Third, there is an intentionality of consciousness in which the reality of a subject of interest is "in the eye of the beholder," so to speak (Creswell, 2007). A person's awareness of a phenomenon is what makes the phenomenon real. By examining the reality of inclusion as eight different educators experience it, a description of the phenomenon emerged to the extent that participants were conscious of their experience of inclusion. Finally, recognizing that the meaning individuals give to the reality of the phenomenon being studied based on their experiences intrinsically links the individual and the reality of that phenomenon. In other words, the reality of inclusive practices in Catholic schools was intrinsically linked to the experiences of the participants. Therefore, studying inclusion through phenomenology – through a lens of someone who has no experience with inclusion – described the phenomenon of inclusion because the data showed how participants experience their reality of inclusion (Creswell, 2007).

This study utilized open-ended questions during interviews with eight participants. The researcher and two research assistants formed a team who came to

consensus on the codes, themes, and domains of the data. Each of the team members had taken courses in qualitative research and participated in coding procedure training for use in this study. Open coding, or horizontalization, consists of analyzing small portions (sentences or parts of sentences) and using the words in the sentence or a descriptor that captures the essence of the words, also known as *in vivo* coding (Creswell, 2007). The researcher trained the two additional assistants in the method of *in vivo* coding using an unrelated text to ensure understanding of the coding procedures. Each assistant was asked to develop a short phrase or one-word depiction of discrete sections of the text. The researcher and assistants compared codes for the text, looking for comparable codes, and came to consensus on the codes before using those codes to individually come up with categories the codes would then create.

Consensual Qualitative Research. In 1997, Hill et al. introduced the Consensual Qualitative Research method (CQR), which utilizes exploratory and discovery-oriented methods to describe phenomena. The basic components of the CQR method include using open-ended questions, a team for consensus building regarding themes, and auditors to verify the themes against the raw data (Hill et al., 1997). A relatively small number of cases are intensely studied in order to gain a greater understanding of an experience. In subsequent work, Hill et al. (2005) reviewed the application of CQR in the literature and made additional recommendations and modifications for the practice of CQR such as interviewing 15 participants.

The consensus process is the most important aspect of the CQR method because it emphasizes the use of several researchers to discuss the data until a single unified version of the data is reached (Hill et al., 1997). Three or more team members capable of openly

discussing and negotiating the data reach a consensus on domains (topic areas) and abstract core ideas (the essence of the words). An outside auditor then reviews the data, providing an additional perspective into whether or not the team was able to capture the essence of the data (Hill et al., 1997). Both CQR and phenomenology, use a process of open coding which allows themes and categories to emerge (Merriam, 2009), as opposed to restricting the data to a set of constructs, looking only for specific themes.

Also consistent with both the CQR and phenomenology methods, this study utilized an open-ended line of questioning during interviews, but also obtained information from use of a survey and observations. The use of multiple sources of data is not always deemed necessary in the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997), but was deemed useful for the purposes of this study. Additionally, although an auditor was not utilized as suggested in the CQR method, a dissertation committee oversaw the methodology of the study.

Knowledge of the literature. In describing the CQR method, Hill at al. (1997) discussed the importance of reviewing literature about the area of study. They suggested using the literature to assist in developing topics of inquiry and to then build on the literature. This information is bracketed out (i.e., set aside) during data analysis in order to present an unbiased representation of the participants' perspective. The literature specifically related to the development of protocols and lines of questions are presented below to further assist in presenting the context for this study.

Interview questions were formulated based on studies of inclusion performed by Anderson et al. (2007), Houck and Rogers (1994), Bibou-Nakou, Kiosseoglou, and Stogiannidou (2000), and Booth and Ainscow (2002). In general, the questions posed

pertained to (a) demographic information; (b) personal beliefs about special educational needs and service provision; (c) experiences teaching students with special educational needs; (d) perceived ability of school personnel to serve students with special educational needs; and (e) support felt for service provision to students with special educational needs. Appendix A lists guiding principles used to formulate questions for the interviews and e-mail prompts.

The presence and degree of specific inclusion practices based on the ALEM, SIM, and co-teaching models of inclusion were examined during observations. Aspects of the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM; Wang et al., 1985) that were of interest in the qualitative observations as part of inclusive practice in the Catholic schools include:

- individualized teacher attention to all students in the classroom, not just those with special educational needs (microsystem level);
- varied modes of presenting materials, learning tasks, outcome measures, and assessments (microsystem level);
- physical arrangement of the classroom that allows for small and large group as well as individual classwork (mesosystem level);
- the ability to move from one activity to another easily in the classroom (mesosystem level); and
- data-based plans and procedures the teacher is able to utilize to support the students with special educational needs in the classroom (meso-/ exosystem level).

From the Strategies Intervention Model (SIM; Tralli et al., 1996), there were three aspects of intervention categories examined in this study:

- detailed step-by-step strategies used to complete learning tasks (e.g. explicit strategies on how to write a paragraph or complete a math problem) (mesosystem level);
- previews of learning goals for lessons (e.g. written outline of what will be covered during a class period posted in the classroom) (mesosystem level); and
- support for and evidence of positive interactions between teacher and students and between peers for work performed to the best of one's ability (microsystem level).

Although true co-teaching was not observed in the Catholic schools in this study, key aspects of the environment that are believed to be supportive of a co-teaching model were probed. For the purposes of this study, administrative support for including students with disabilities (mesosystem level), ongoing staff development regarding addressing student needs (microsystem level), balanced classroom rosters based on student needs (meso-/microsystem level), and developed individualized education plans for students with needs (exo-/mesosystem level; Walther-Thomas et al., 1996) were the aspects of the co-teaching model that were of interest. See Appendix C for operational definitions of the above-mentioned aspects of inclusion models.

Detailed narrative descriptions of the observations were written down capturing interactions between teacher and students, indicating minute-by-minute occurrences in the classroom, and included information about the environment (e.g., wall-hangings, desk

arrangement, and perceptions about the "mood" of the classroom). An example of the observation form can be found in Appendix B. Upon completion of the observations, the narrative descriptions were coded using the teacher practices listed in Section 3 in the *Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School*. These codes were then used in comparison to collected survey data as well as to the data gathered from the participants during interviews to indicate congruence between report and practice in terms of inclusion.

Creswell (2007) describes collecting textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon in question – inclusion – from the participants and using the significant statements in the data to develop clusters of meaning directly from the data. Results from this study were based on the description of the participants' experiences more than on the researcher's interpretation of those experiences. In order to accomplish this, the researcher bracketed out her experiences with inclusive education in Catholic schools to the greatest extent possible.

Reflexivity.

Qualitative research results can be impacted by the researcher's expectations and biases (Hill et al., 1997). Expectations relate to the knowledge the researcher has gained from reviewing literature on the topic of study. Biases, on the other hand, are related to a researcher's past experiences and personal issues that may impact a researcher's objectivity regarding the data (Hill et al., 1997). I describe below my own expectations and biases in order to inform the reader about the impact they may have had on the findings of this study.

My own biases resulted from a long personal history with Catholic education as a student, volunteer, and professional for various Catholic entities. I taught in one Catholic school and often felt unprepared for and unsupported in determining how to teach students who I recognized were struggling with academic, emotional, behavioral, and/or social difficulties. I entered a school psychology program with an explicit intent to serve the Catholic schools.

Recognizing there is a dearth of research regarding Catholic education practices I sought literature on Catholic school teaching practices, guiding principles, and Catholic Church documents. In general, research on Catholic education has described limitations in regards to providing services to students with special educational needs (Bello, 2006; McDonald, 2008; USCCB, 2002). It was clear to me that education law should have an impact on all Catholic schools. I believe that Catholic school administrators and teachers would benefit from understanding not only what supports and services they could receive on the basis of the law, but also what they were responsible to provide students with special educational needs. Studies on the inclusive nature of Catholic schools described personnel struggling to implement inclusive practices (McDonald, 2008) and a population of students with needs that were not being adequately served (USCCB, 2002). These were aspects I therefore wished to explore in my research.

During the course of the study, I was employed as a school psychology intern in three Catholic schools within the population under study. My experiences while on internship continued to provide insight and background information on the experiences of the Catholic schools regarding students with educational needs. Although my internship

experiences were not directly part of the data collected in this study, they likely had an impact on my understanding of the data collected.

Methods

Participants

Teachers and administrators (including assistant principals) in 33 Kindergarten through 8th grade Catholic parish-based schools in a Rocky Mountain region were invited to participate in this study. The Internal Review Board at the University of Northern Colorado approved of the study, and permission to perform the study was obtained from the Superintendent of Catholic Schools prior to soliciting volunteers for the study. Contact information for all of the schools was obtained through the website for the region's Catholic schools. Eligible schools did not employ school psychologists, though some schools received school psychological services on a case-by-case basis through Child Find. As noted above, the researcher served in three of the schools during the course of the study as a school psychologist intern. These three schools were utilized for piloting the survey to be used in the study.

Context. Thirty-six Catholic, parish-based, preschool through 8th grade ("elementary") schools operate in the area of study. Twenty-seven of these schools are located in the greater metro-area of a large city in the Rocky Mountain region, and the remaining nine schools are located in rural or small town settings. According to an annual report released by the Office of Catholic Schools (2013), the schools served nearly 10,000 students from 6,674 families during the 2011-2012 school year. Each school was independently run and operated by the local parish, and led by the parish priest and school administrator. The schools were of varying sizes, served many different

ethnicities, and many families from varying socioeconomic statuses were represented. Additionally, each school determined its own approach to education (e.g., emphasizing and utilizing technology, project-based education, and classical education), yet all schools were expected to use the same curriculum-based standards that were provided by the Office of Catholic Schools. Nearly 800 Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade teachers served in the Catholic schools in the study area. All teachers were required to hold a current and valid state license or certificate. Average tuition costs at the elementary schools was $4,155 during the 2011-12 school year, and it was projected that these Catholic schools received more than $5.3 million in grants and other monetary support (Office of Catholic Schools, 2013).

Participating schools. Per teacher and administrator interviewees' reports, schools served different populations in terms of ethnic/racial groups and socioeconomic status. The four schools in which the interviewees were employed had differing populations of students. School 1 was the most diverse in terms of ethnicity/race, in that it had the greatest number ethnicities represented in the most evenly spread ratios. The average socioeconomic status for families was middle class at School 1. School 2, by comparison was predominately one ethnic/racial group and was predominately lower class. School 3 was made up of families with upper class socioeconomic status, predominately from one ethnic/racial group. And, finally, School 4 was made up of middle class families with one predominate ethnic/racial group. The sizes of student body in the schools were generally similar, ranging from 200 to 300 students. The schools were located in both urban and suburban areas of the metropolitan area.

Survey participants. Surveys were distributed to 33 of the 36 elementary schools in the area under study. Three school administrators opted out of the study after the initial invitation to participate because of "prior commitments" and not wanting to "overextend the staff." The *Survey of Special Educational Needs in the Catholic Elementary School*, a 98-question survey broken into seven sections was completed in the Spring of 2012 by 93 Catholic school teachers and administrators. Of the 93 participants, 13% (n=12) respondents were either Principals or Assistant Principals of Catholic schools. The remaining respondents were Kindergarten through 8th grade teachers, with a relatively even distribution between the different grade levels represented (8% Kindergarten, 11% First Grade, 8% Second Grade, 10% Third Grade, 14% Fourth Grade, 8% Fifth Grade, and 22% 6th-8th grade teachers). The range of teaching/administrative experience was from 1 to 47 years with a median of 13 years and a mean of 17 years. The range of years at the respondents' current school was between 1 and 29 years, with a median of 7 years and a mean of 8 years. This level of experience is comparable to the years of experience of public school teachers who have a median of 11 years of experience (Carroll & Foster, 2010).

Interview participants. According to the CQR guidelines (Hill et al., 1997), it is suggested that between 8 and 15 participants be interviewed in order to determine whether data represents the experiences of several participants or only one or two of the sample population. Similarly, Creswell (2007) indicated phenomenological studies require between 5 and 25 participants in order to begin to see patterns and indications of representativeness in the data.

The current study included participation of four classroom teachers, one resource teacher, and three administrators. Three administrators and three teachers were paired from three schools. An additional resource teacher from one of those schools and one classroom teacher from a fourth school also participated. The participant teachers' experience varied from 7 years to 26 years, and they taught in the 2nd through 5th grades. The administrators' were either principals or assistant principals, and their experience in their position ranged from 3 to 10 years.

In sum, the participating schools, teachers, and administrators represented a range of populations, experiences, and positions within the Catholic schools. A variety of individual perceptions on including students with special educational needs was collected. Because of this, the findings from the current study are believed to represent a reasonable reflection of inclusion practices in Catholic schools within in the area of study.

Procedures

To gather information, multiple methods including interviews, writing prompts, observations, and records reviews were performed and solicited to aid in the understanding of inclusive practices in Catholic schools. Additionally, a survey was utilized to obtain information on inclusive practices from a greater number of teachers and administrators over a wider and more varied settings (i.e., urban, suburban, and rural areas). Data collected through the above methods were then triangulated to provide a stronger indication of consistency among the data.

To achieve appropriate intellectual rigor, evidentiary adequacy must be met. Merriam (2009) described evidentiary adequacy as data that feels saturated, or begins to

become repetitive with no new information coming forth. Furthermore, disconfirming or variable data to any question at hand should also be sought in order to avoid bias in data collection (Merriam, 2009). This means an extensive body of evidence should be gathered to provide enough data from which themes may emerge (Erickson, 1986), while active measures were also taken to ensure no other possible explanations of the phenomena existed. In total, 729 minutes of interviews were recorded. The edited transcribed interviews produced 11,570 lines of code-able text. Furthermore, 351 minutes of observations took place in the classrooms of participating teachers, again providing comparison data for other pieces of data. An additional 40 short-answer e-mails from the eight interviewee participants were received that helped to expand on data gathered via interviews and survey. Ninety-five surveys were returned, yielding over 9,400 pieces of statistically analyzable data.

Interviews. Interviews took place with the participating administrators and teachers beginning in November of the 2011-2012 school year, and continued through May 2012. The interviews established the administrators' and teachers' perception of their ability to include students with special educational needs, availability of resources to assist those students, and their expectations for the year regarding including students with needs. Appendix F contains a list of semi-structured questions posed to interviewees. The same set of questions was utilized for each participant, though follow-up questions were added as needed for clarification or additional information.

Each of the participants who were interviewed signed consent forms, allowing the researcher to record the interviews and use the data for research purposes. Confidentiality was ensured and maintained by coding all recordings with acronyms known only to the

researcher and stored on the researcher's personal computer in password protected files. Participants were known solely to the researcher and referred to only in terms of their position as teacher or administrator in the results and discussion of this study.

The participating teachers and administrators were asked to participate in interviews at a time convenient to and arranged in advance by the teacher or administrator and the researcher. The researcher met with the interview participants primarily during the second half of the school year, performing 24 separate interviews that lasted an average of about 30 minutes each. The researcher had the interviews transcribed by a professional transcription service that abided by non-disclosure agreements and provided encryption for all data. After receiving the transcribed interviews, the researcher edited the interviews to remove any identifying information and unnecessary verbalizations (e.g., interruptions such as "Mmhmmm" or "okay").

Interview coding procedures. All interview transcripts were verified by the researcher prior to being submitted as data. Each team member coded all transcriptions over the course of eight weeks using methods consistent with the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997, 2005) and *in vivo* coding (Creswell, 2007). After two weeks, the assistants met with the researcher to begin the consensus building process for the data. At four weeks, the team met again to discuss and further negotiate the codes and themes for the data, again coming to a consensus on the perception of "truth" in the data. Categories and themes were agreed upon at the end of the eighth week. These categories produced the basis upon which all other data sources were viewed.

Observations. Observations in the participating administrators' and teachers' schools and classrooms began in January 2012 and ended in May 2012. Observations

were conducted during an academic class taught by the participating teachers at a time convenient to the teachers and researcher. Twenty-four observations were performed in the four participating teachers' classrooms to observe accommodations that may be indicative of inclusive practice. Observations lasted one entire class period, ranging from about 30 to 60 minutes. An observation form (see Appendix B) was utilized for data collection.

Classroom observations consisted of the researcher sitting in the corner of the room, from which the room and teaching practices could be easily observed. The researcher acted only as an observer and had little to no interaction with the teacher or students during the observation. The teacher determined whether or not to introduce the researcher to the class, with a brief explanation that the researcher was there to watch and learn about what was being taught during that class period. Observation notes were made throughout the class period, tracking teacher methods, student responses, and activities, as well as general layout of the classroom and lessons taught. For instance, the overall "tone" of the classroom during the observation period was reflected upon, particularly between the teacher and students, between students, and whether or not inclusive practices were obvious during the observation.

Separate observations of the participating interviewees' schools were recorded in narrative form. A general sense of the schools' ability support special educational needs was assessed. For example, art hanging on the walls that indicated acceptance of other cultures or abilities, building accessibility to persons with physical impairments, and apparent welcoming of differences were observed as ways in which schools can indicate their inclusive practices. School observations occurred in conjunction with classroom

observations. Little change was noted in the observations throughout the course of the study and they were therefore summarized into one section across the four participating schools. The school observation summaries are further discussed in Chapter 4.

Writing prompts. Writing prompts regarding personal perspectives toward inclusion, recent practices of inclusion, and reflections on inclusion support in the school were sent to the interviewees by e-mail every week between February 2012 and May 2012. E-mail prompted questions were related to the day-to-day experiences of the participants, and were in-line with the interview questions. For example, an interview question asked about what participants do differently at their school or in their classroom to address students' special educational needs, and a follow-up e-mail question asked about specific interventions used and the types of data collected for those interventions.

These prompts allowed the teachers and administrators to complete their responses to the prompts during the week, at a time that was convenient to them. There was no specified length for responses, with the understanding that if follow-up or more information about a response were required, it would be requested in a follow-up e-mail or during interviews. If participants were unable to complete the writing prompts during any week, the researcher provided the same writing prompts the following week, along with a second, new, prompt to be addressed. This gave the respondents numerous weeks in which to respond. As noted, 40 short-answer e-mails were received from the eight interview participants in response to these prompts. All participants responded to the writing prompts either by e-mail or in subsequent interviews with the researcher.

Records reviews. Records review occurred in May 2012. The assistance of the schools' administrators and/or office staff was necessary to locate the information or files

of interest in the study. Records review occurred once during the study with the goal of collecting data from the previous three years regarding the presence of students with special educational needs at the school. These data were used to provide a context for each interview participants' school regarding the admission of students with special educational needs and the utilization of records in serving students with special educational needs. Data from the records review were kept in spreadsheet form (see Appendix E). The total numbers of students who were referred, had an individualized education plan, or were noted to have special educational needs were collected, if available. Information regarding social emotional programming such as anti-bullying curriculum, was also gathered to determine whether the program specifically included accepting student differences. This information was used to develop a contextual picture of services provided at the participants' schools for students with special educational needs; an indication of their encounters with inclusive education. Unfortunately, not all schools had records of all of the requested data for the past three years. The results are noted as such in Chapter 4.

Survey. Two previously developed and researched surveys were adapted for use with participants in this study. The two previously developed surveys were the *Primary Level (K-2) Special Education Practices in Catholic Elementary Schools* (McDonald, 2008), and a survey of the status of special education services in Catholic High Schools (Bello, 2006). The adapted survey used in this study, the *Survey of Special Educational Needs in the Catholic Elementary School*, can be found in Appendix D. Below is a description of the original surveys.

Primary Level (K-2) Special Education Practices in Catholic Elementary Schools *Survey.* McDonald's 2008 survey was designed to investigate the types of learning disabilities identified and served in primary grades (Kindergarten-2nd grade) in a Catholic school district in California (McDonald, 2008). This 90-item survey included questions designed around five categories: (a) identification of learning disabilities; (b) educational support programs; (c) academic interventions; (d) roles of teachers in relation to educational support for students with special needs; and (e) teacher preparation. Questions were written in both 4-point, Likert-type scale form and yes/no response format. Demographic questions were written using forced choice and completion format (McDonald, 2008).

McDonald (2008) utilized the assistance of a validity panel to develop the face, content, and construct validity of the survey. Survey items were adapted from other standardized and published documents. McDonald (2008) tested for reliability using the test-retest method with a small group of Catholic school teachers (n=27). Initial test and retest responses were separated by approximately two weeks. Median percentages of agreement for the test-retest participants ranged from 80.8% to 96.7% on the different sections of the survey, suggesting consistency in responses over time with this population (McDonald, 2008). Specific ranges of percentage of agreement, for each participant, by section, using test-retest reliability measures, is detailed in Table 2. The overall median percentage of agreement was 90%.

Table 2

Percentage of Agreement Per Test-Retest Results for the Primary Level (K-2) Special Education Practices in Catholic Elementary Schools

	Range of Percentage	Median Percentage
Section 1: Types of Identified Learning Disabilities	58%-97%	89%
Section 2: Educational Support Programs	79%-90%	90%
Section 3: Academic Interventions	69%-96%	81%
Section 4: Support Roles of the Teacher	79%-96%	92%
Section 5: Teacher Preparation	80%-99%	97%

Survey of the Status of Special Education Services in Catholic High Schools. The second survey was developed by Bello (2006), and was created "to investigate the issues facing Catholic high schools and their efforts to include students with disabilities," (p. 462). Bello (2006) reported "instrument validity and reliability, as well as… construction quality, organization, and readability were assessed through an expert panel review in order to minimize both random and bias measurement error," (p. 463). However, no specific data were provided.

There were three versions of this survey, Surveys A-C, that were designed to address (a) schools who reported they did not provide services for students with disabilities; (b) those who reported plans to provide inclusive services; and (c) schools that reported providing services to students with disabilities. Survey C was utilized for this study to present aspects of inclusive and special education provision to assess the types of services that teachers and administrators considered to be practiced in their schools.

Survey C was comprised 70 questions and six sections. Each section had forced choice answers as well as space for written responses. The topics of the sections included (a) demographic information of respondents; (b) the service programs that may be available at the school; (c) the student population and services for students with disabilities; (d) the planning and implementation of special education services; (e) the attributes of special services for students with disabilities; and (f) the "challenges and needs in developing and implementing services for students with disabilities."

Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School. Although both of the above mentioned surveys address inclusion in Catholic schools, neither encompassed the range of grade levels of interest in this study (Kindergarten through 8th grade), and portions of the Bello (2006) survey did not pertain to the research questions in this study. Therefore, the McDonald survey was used as the primary source for the survey used in this study, adding aspects of Bello's survey that were pertinent in answering the research questions.

Section 1 (items #1-#22) – Types of Learning Disabilities and Special Needs Identified - of the *Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School* (here after referred to as "the survey") had all components of McDonald's (2008) *Primary Level (K-2) Special Education Practices in Catholic Elementary Schools Survey* Section 1, with additional disabilities and impairments listed, as delineated by the IDEA (20 U.S.C. §1401 (Section 602(3)(A)). Section 2 (items #23-#26) of the survey was from Bello's (2006) survey regarding special education program information. This section provided a place for respondents to provide their opinions on any changes in the population of students with special needs or the number of services provided to students

over the past three years. Section 2 also utilized Bello's list of services for students with special educational needs or disabilities.

Sections 3, 5, and 6 of the survey were identical to McDonald's (2008) survey sections 3, 4, and 5, which asked about academic interventions, the roles of the teacher in relation to educational supports, and teacher preparation for students with special educational needs or disabilities. Section 4 included questions from Bello's (2006) survey regarding the extent to which administrators support inclusive education, and challenges the school may face in supporting students with special educational needs or disabilities. Section 5 contained an additional survey question from Bello's survey regarding professional development topics that respondents might find useful in their efforts to work more effectively with students who have special educational needs or disabilities. The survey ended with Section 7 regarding demographic information such as number of years teaching or in administration, number of years at the present school, and current position in the school.

***Pilot of the* Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School.** The adapted survey was piloted with faculty and administrators at three school sites prior to use in the study. Because construct, face, and content validity were reported for the original surveys, further validity measures were not performed for the pilot study. However, test-retest measures were utilized to establish reliability for a Kindergarten through Eighth Grade population of teachers and administrators. The three pilot schools were representative of a diverse cross-section of Catholic schools, both in size and in student population served.

A population of 36 teachers and administrators were asked to complete the pilot survey. Each participant received a packet containing a cover letter describing the survey and the nature of the pilot study, consent form indicating return of the survey indicated consent, a numbered copy of the survey, and a small token of appreciation. Survey packets were assigned a set of random numbers and placed in the in-boxes used by participants at their school. Although the random numbers were tracked to correspond to certain boxes, the identity of the owner of those boxes was not tracked. This allowed the same numbers to be used for both test and retest survey disbursements, but it was not evident who respondents were in reference to those numbers. Participants were asked to return the survey by a specified date, two weeks after the pilot survey was first distributed, in a designated spot where the researcher was able to pick up the survey at the schools. One week after the return deadline, respondents were given a second, but identical, reliability packet (retest) containing a cover letter and a second copy of the survey numbered with the same random number. After completing the second survey, respondents were again asked to return the packet by mail or to a place to be picked up by the researcher by a specified date. Additional questions regarding the amount of time it took to complete the surveys and requests for input on difficult or ambiguous questions were added to both the test and retest pilot surveys, but did not remain on the study survey.

With the pilot survey feedback, changes were made to the final study survey. For example, the Likert-type scales were shortened as participants suggested the scales were too restrictive. In Section 1: Types of Learning Disabilities and Special Educational Needs Identified was changed from a 4-item scale (Never, Rarely, Occasionally, Often)

to a 3-item scale (Never, Occasionally, Often) to better describe the incidences of learning disabilities in the classroom. Each scale item was overtly coded on the survey to correspond to a certain number of students: a) Never = not identified at all; b) Occasionally = 1-5 students per academic year; and c) Often = 5+ students per academic year.

Table 3

Percentage of Agreement Per Test-Retest Results for the Survey of Educational Needs in Catholic Elementary Schools

	Range of Percentage	Median Percentage
Section 1: Types of Identified Learning Disabilities and Special Education Needs Identified	72%-100%	84%
Section 2: General Program Information	65%-88%	76%
Section 3: Academic Interventions for Students with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities	64%-98%	84%
Section 4: Governance	60%-98%	74%
Section 5: Roles of the Teacher in Relation to Educational Support for Students with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities	53%-82%	69%
Section 6: Teacher Preparation	67%-100%	87%
OVERALL AGREEMENT	69%-86%	79%

To determine test-retest reliability, the returned survey number pairs were crosstabulated to calculate percentage of agreement between the test and retest paired values for each section of the survey. This method was used by McDonald (2008) on her *Primary Level (K-2) Special Education Practices in Catholic Elementary Schools* survey, upon which the survey used in this study was modeled. Initial test and retest responses were separated by up to four weeks, depending on the return of initial surveys. Based on

the returned pairs of surveys (n=11), test retest reliability was measured, median percentages of agreement for the test-retest participants ranged from 69% to 86% on the different sections of the survey. This indicates a satisfactory positive correlation of responses and is a level suitable for research purposes. Specific ranges of percentage of agreement, for each participant, by section, using test-retest reliability measures, are detailed in Table 3. Overall, the agreement of test-retest data indicated a median percentage of agreement of 79%.

Specific survey procedures. After the pilot phase, administrators of all eligible Catholic elementary schools were contacted regarding the study via e-mail. The initial contact e-mail contained information about the nature of the study, the methods to be used in the study (e.g. survey), and described the procedures listed below for dissemination of the survey. Distribution of survey packets began in January 2012. Survey packets contained copies of the finalized *Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School*, an introductory letter for all participants, introducing the researcher, explaining the study, requesting participation, and apprising potential participants of their rights as participants in research. The letter also explained that by returning the survey to the researcher, the participants were giving their consent to be included in the study. Coffee and tea packets were attached to the surveys as a token of appreciation. Additionally, the researcher offered specific prayers for all participants, and referenced the prayer offering in the survey introductory letter.

Surveys were sent in paper form to the administrators, mailed in bulk to the school based on the number of teachers and administrators in the building. Once received at the school, the administrator (or designee) was instructed to disseminate survey

packets to teachers via teachers' boxes, reserving one for themselves and any other administrators in the building. Surveys were mailed back anonymously by each respondent to the researcher in a provided postage-paid envelope. This process helped maintain anonymity of the participants. Alternatively, e-mails were sent to the administrators with links to a Survey Monkey® version of the *Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School* that was identical to the paper version. Teachers and administrators had the option of completing the survey on-line or on paper. It was made clear in the introductory letter and the initial web page that participants should only complete one form of the survey (paper or on-line).

Survey packet return was requested within two weeks. The researcher sent an additional mass mailing of surveys to administrators after four weeks, directing them to place the surveys near the teachers' mailboxes so that teachers who may not have received an initial survey packet, misplaced, or disposed of the first survey were able to access a second survey packet. An additional e-mail was also sent prompting teachers and administrators to complete either the on-line or paper version of the survey. Signage was sent along with the second survey packet mailing to be posted, encouraging teachers to return or complete and return their surveys. Again, addressed and stamped envelopes were included to maintain anonymity of willing participants. At the conclusion of the survey portion of the study, a total of 93 participants out of a potential 328 teachers and administrators returned the survey, for a return rate of 29%. Although this is much less than the return rate (53%) for the Buell et al. (1999) teacher perception and inservice needs concerning inclusion survey, it is comparable to the Anderson et al. (2007) teacher efficacy regarding inclusion survey return rate (32%). Because of the anonymity of

respondents, it was not possible to determine the degree to which each school's personnel participated.

Of the 93 participants, 13% (n=12) respondents were either Principals of Catholic schools or Assistant Principals. The remaining respondents were Kindergarten through Middle School teachers, with a relatively even distribution between the different grade levels (8% Kindergarten, 11% First Grade, 8% Second Grade, 10% Third Grade, 14% Fourth Grade, 8% Fifth Grade, and 22% Middle School teachers). The range of teaching/administrative experience was from 1 to 47 years with a median of 13 years and a mean of 17 years. The range of years at the respondents' current school was between 1 and 29 years, with a median of 7 years and a mean of 8 years. This level of experience is comparable to the years of experience of public school teachers who have a median of 11 years of experience (Carroll & Foster, 2010).

Research Questions and Statistical Analyses

The following research questions were answered using a combination of data from interviews, observations, e-mail responses, and survey responses.

Q1 What are the experiences of teachers in Catholic schools regarding students with special educational needs?

Q2 What are the experiences of administrators in Catholic schools regarding students with special educational needs?

Q3 What is the interaction of the experiences of teachers and the experiences of administrators regarding students with special educational needs?

Analysis of survey information was completed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and medians for the responses.

Dependability

Strategies used to enhance dependability were in place throughout the study. Portions of the survey used in this study had been published and were reported to be reliable with a similar population. Further piloting of the *Survey of Special Educational Needs in the Catholic Elementary School* also indicated adequate reliability in test-retest analysis, as detailed above.

Efforts to establish dependability in the qualitative data were integrated through different procedures during this study. The use of multiple forms of qualitative information gathering (interviews, personal writing, observations, and records review) served the purpose of providing evidence of dependability through data triangulation. Furthermore, interview and writing prompt responses were reviewed on a weekly basis and allowed the researcher to create a list of potential key points to observe in the following weeks.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies refer to a concept of relating the results of the research to an accurate portrayal of the reality of the phenomena in question, known as trustworthiness. As with dependability, the use of different modes of obtaining data also helped address issues of trustworthiness common in research. The Bello (2006) and McDonald (2008) surveys, upon which the *Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School* was based, had been published after undergoing an assessment of validity. The validity information has been presented above in the Instrumentation section.

Using member checks endorsed by Creswell (2007), or testimonial validity endorsed by the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997), trustworthiness was achieved by

utilizing feedback from the participants. Each week during the interview process, summarized information from their answers to the previous line of questioning was provided to the participants, giving them an opportunity to ensure the summarized information adequately and accurately reflected their assessment, understanding, and perception. Therefore, cross analysis occurred on a weekly and monthly basis using the individual summaries and comparing and contrasting the administrator and teacher data in a member check process, which provided respondent validation of the qualitative data.

Trustworthiness of the data was also determined by utilizing questions in the interviews and writing prompts that were similar to those asked in previous research (Anderson et al., 2007; Houck and Rogers, 1994; Bibou-Nakou et al., 2000; Booth & Ainscow, 2002). This allowed comparisons to previously published data. Responses were also compared to documents, such as the Mission of Catholic Education, to determine how closely the participants' responses match those guiding and published statements.

Finally, trustworthiness was achieved by clearly presenting the procedures used to provide confirmability of the data. For instance, utilizing trained and monitored team members in the coding of the data helped to ensure less bias in determining the themes and categories that emerged from the data. Also, the team members maintained a one-step-removed stance at different times throughout the coding procedures to ensure other possible explanations for the data were not overlooked.

Subjectivity

By utilizing a survey, a population baseline of data was more apparent, allowing a more objective view of inclusion from a larger sample. However, the day-to-day experience as lived within the Catholic schools by teachers and administrators was also

of great interest. Therefore, understanding the nuances of subjectivity as it pertained to qualitative data collection was equally as important in order to understand the phenomena of inclusion in Catholic schools. The importance of the objective need for subjectivity as well as personalized need for subjectivity created the balance that is important in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2007).

Ethical Considerations

There was no foreseen risk to participants for either the quantitative or qualitative portions of this study. All aspects of the research were openly discussed and/or available to participants through contact with the researcher and notifications relating to participation and the nature of the study. Furthermore, results are readily available to any participants if requested.

Individuals participating in the qualitative portion of the study were notified at the outset of the study that they had individual freedom to discontinue participation at any time during the study. An understanding of the time commitment (one writing prompt per week, observations and interviews over the course of approximately 5 months), flexibility of scheduling (writing prompts were completed at any time within the week, observations were scheduled in advance, and interviews occurred at the participants' convenience), and the fact that there were alternatives in place (e.g. the researcher placed a phone call to participants who were unable to complete the in-person interviews or writing prompts in any week) were presented to the participants at the beginning of the study to help them determine whether or not they were willing and able to participate. At all times, the researcher addressed the concerns and preferences of the participants of the qualitative portion of the study.

Summary

This study was influenced by the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997, 2005) and phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). Data included interview, writing prompts, observations, records reviews, and survey responses. Aspects from previous researchers' work on inclusion were utilized to explore the inclusive practices in Catholic school classrooms in a metropolitan Rocky Mountain region Catholic school system. All aspects of the study sought to answer research questions related to inclusion practices within an ecological perspective, and took place at various times throughout the majority of the 2011-2012 school year.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Inclusion in Catholic schools is occurring at an unknown rate and often without the guidance and expertise of a dedicated special education team. For the purposes of this study, and in order to form a more complete picture of the state of Catholic education in the Rocky Mountain region, a variety of data were collected. First, eight volunteer teachers and administrators participated in interviews and e-mail prompt responses over the course of six months. Second, observations took place in each of the teachers' classrooms and in their schools. Third, a survey was administered to teachers and administrators throughout the Catholic schools in the region. The results of these findings are detailed below and help build understanding for inclusive practices in Catholic schools.

Qualitative Data

Using the data collection and coding procedures outlined in Chapter 3, interview data were analyzed and four overarching themes emerged from the data: (a) Pride; (b) Action; (c) Willingness; and (d) Tension. Each theme has data, when available, from teacher and administrator interviews, e-mail writing prompts, and observations. Data from the survey plays a key, supporting role for the interview data, and is integrated throughout to bring further clarity or support to the corresponding theme. The themes are presented below, separated by identifying headings and further delineated subheadings.

Data from interviews are presented in the CQR terms (Hill et al., 1997) of "general," meaning all participants answered similarly, "typical," referring to one half or more of the participants, and "variant," or applying to less than half of the participants. General and typical categories within each theme are presented in table form in Appendix I.

Pride

There was a sense of pride from all of the interviewees when they discussed the education they were providing students. There seemed to be an expressed identity and satisfaction with the quality education, the sense of community, and the importance of the Catholic school system, both systematically and individually. Additionally, participants were proud of their students' academic success and reported a desire to have Catholic school students with special educational needs experience that same success within a faith-based school environment.

When asked about the mission of Catholic education, five of the eight interviewees mentioned "strong academics" or "good education" in their answers. The interviewees felt confident in their ability to provide a good education to their students. They described, for instance, how they provided a welcoming environment that created social benefits for students by supporting the "whole child" in educational, emotional, social, and spiritual ways. They served students in Catholic schools because they saw it as an aspect of their vocation as a teacher. As one administrator stated, "We're called in this vocation to teach children to the best of our ability and to nurture them."

An additional typical category emerged regarding the mission of Catholic education and was based on the sense of community formed in Catholic schools. Interviewees mentioned they believed Catholic schools had a strong community and that

this had a positive impact on students with special educational needs. An administrator and teacher from the same school mentioned the importance of being a "community-based" system that "minister[ed] to the poor."

Another typical interviewee response was that they had pride in their individual school. There were comparisons to other Catholic schools in the area made by both administrators and teachers. Administrators and teachers expressed an appreciation for being in control of how they serve their student population.

One of the general categories in this theme was the sense of pride regarding the success Catholic school students had on nationally normed academic assessments. Each interviewee described how the majority of their students ranked well above the average achievement of both public and other private school students in the United States. In fact, three of the four school administrators used overall school and grade level test results as promotional material for the school, citing most 8th grade classes graduate testing at two grade levels above the national average for that age group. These tests were also mentioned by each interviewee as a way to identify areas of student need. They stated the test was a factor in tracking individual student progress, grouping students by areas of need, and determining changes in teaching practices.

This vision for providing a quality education extended to students with special educational needs. The interviewees wanted to continue to provide a Catholic education to the students as opposed to recommending their parents send them to public schools. There was a sense of pride in their perceived ability to provide an education that was "advanced" and centered around a higher set of expectations at the Catholic schools. For instance, two interviewees spoke of developing the students' morals and decision-making

ability. One stated, “I think a Catholic education allows anyone, because the term Catholic [means] universal, it allows anyone, from any experience, from any faith, to be given an opportunity to come into my classroom and learn different perspectives.” Overall, the ideas of providing a strong education while integrating the Catholic faith into that education were generally recognized by the interviewees as the mission of Catholic education. All interviewees spoke of integrating the Catholic faith into their work and teaching the tenants of the Catholic faith. One of the administrator interviewees expressed that it was the school’s job to evangelize and instruct the students in the teachings of the church.

Action

The theme of Action encompasses what the Catholic schools in this study were doing to support the education of students with special educational needs. This overarching theme includes categories related to all aspects of meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. This includes the process for identifying students with suspected disabilities as well as the services they are provided. Additionally, interviewees described the types of special educational needs they serve at their schools. This information is presented and compared in terms of survey responses, observations, and interview data.

Because of the individuality of each school in aspects of decision-making processes regarding services for special educational needs, leadership was recognized as an important role within the schools. One of the ways that all administrators supported teachers was through their encouragement for ongoing professional development courses or training to gain skills in serving students with special educational needs. As one

administrator remarked, "if they need the time off for the training, go. Take the time off and go get trained. Whatever I can do to make them better stewards of their talents for the kids." Each administrator interviewee expressed a great level of support in terms of granting time off for teachers to gain training, hiring a substitute to cover for that teacher, and even paying some or all of the fees associated with the class or training experience. Administrators also noted that trained teachers were then expected to train other teachers at the school.

Administrators were typically recognized as involved in aspects of providing a Catholic school education to students with special educational needs. In one instance, the administrator led the identification process for students with special needs and reported being involved and invested in the intervention/accommodation planning and outcomes for the identified students. Two of the three administrators supported special educational needs services by hiring personnel to provide the services. As one interviewee stated, those staff members were the ones on the "front line," and they were trusted to do what was needed and if they found other areas of need, to bring that to the administrator. Furthermore, administrators recognized their role in fostering teachers' desire to serve students with special needs in their classroom:

> The most challenging part is to remove the teachers from that place of "I love teaching this [high-achieving] group of kids" to "you know sometimes you're going to have kids that are outside of that and you need to work with them in a different way." And it might take a little extra out of you but this kid can be in a regular classroom, he just needs a little this, that and the other. And they're not going to always look the same and sometimes their output will look the same and sometimes it won't. But maybe this kid needs to do 10 problems instead of 20 problems.

Administrators saw the need for more support and more services, as did the teachers, and all reported a by willingness to work to provide those services

On survey results, 71% of administrators and teachers agreed they were able to identify areas of concern for students with special educational needs or disabilities. Although it is possible that these results are over-reported (i.e., they were not observed and therefore cannot be verified), the data suggests that administrators and teachers perceive themselves as able to serve students with special educational needs, or as a resource for those services. However, from the teachers' point-of-view, administrator support for teaching practices reflected a removed-but-willing stance toward doing whatever was necessary to help a student with special educational needs. As one interviewee stated, "I've never had a principal that did not support me when it comes to dealing with special needs children – ever." Another interviewee agreed, stating, "I have gone to our principal, whether it was this year or before, with questions about things I'm doing or not doing with a particular child or a parent or whatever and they're very supportive."

Both teacher and administrator interviewees reported that administrators were involved when requested by teachers, but that teachers were primarily responsible for providing services or coordination of services for students with special educational needs. Each interviewee, particularly the administrators due to their jurisdiction in enrollment, mentioned the fact that only "mild" or "moderate" special educational needs could be supported at their schools. A typical response within this category was that Catholic schools can choose, based on individual cases, whether or not they are able to serve students with special educational needs, or can alternatively rely on parents to pay for the extra services their child might need in addition to the Catholic school tuition. To that regard, every participant mentioned that there were limits to the services they were able

to provide and therefore the severity of special educational needs their school could support.

Interviewees and survey respondents generally reported there were students with special educational needs enrolled in their schools. Slightly more than half (51%) of survey respondents acknowledged an increase in the number of students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities at their school. A typical indication within this category was that the number and/or severity of special educational needs were on the rise. One interviewee estimated an average of two students per class had special educational needs, whereas another interviewee acknowledged that 81% of the school population was receiving services for special educational needs. Another distinction made by one teacher interviewee was that even if the numbers of students with special educational needs has not gone up in the past few years, the severity of their needs had increased dramatically.

Participants described variable methods of identification and service provision for students with special educational needs. The majority of teachers and administrators reported the identification of students experiencing special educational needs was carried out through an informal process. In some instances, this process was very informal as one teacher explained,

> … what you are going to find, more or less, [are] talks in the lunch room. 'So and so is having a hard day.' You know, 'have fun with him next year' kind of thing. 'So and so is acting up.' 'Oh, yeah, that happened last year.' The data that I do have comes from the Title 1 teacher. That's pretty much it.

While another teacher described a more structured process for preparing for the next school year by discussing student needs and incorporating that into her planning for the next year:

> What we'll do is coming up here in May, we'll meet with the teachers in the next grade up from us, and we'll go through the kids that have any special needs and the accommodations that we made and, again, what works and what doesn't work. So we spend time doing that, which is very helpful.

Teachers and administrators stated it was the teacher's responsibility to review records before the next school year to prepare for the needs that might be present in that class. However, there was no indication that there was any formal paperwork beyond verbally sharing what worked and what didn't work, and little data beyond standardized testing, and report card grades in the students' files. No system of tracking students with special educational needs was apparent with the exception of resource teachers' records, if the school had a resource teacher on staff.

Interviewees from each school stated they used RTI to identify and serve their students, and also described how their RTI process was developed by each individual school. The desire to create an RTI process was reported to come as a response to working with Child Find, which required progress monitoring data for specific intervention attempts before they would assess a student for a learning disability. While RTI processes were occurring in these Catholic schools, it seemed as if aspects of the model were still in development, as one interviewee stated:

> We actually have our own school identification process and RTI process. Students are actually being discussed nowadays and brought to a team and...when you fill out your referral form it goes to the assistant principal, [who] sort of disseminates the information… [and] gets it all together. I believe [the assistant principal] has a meeting with the student and then a meeting with the parents and the teacher and they all discuss things. Then after that it's … I believe we do some sort of intervention or some sort of… accommodation and then it's followed up on. It's better this year. It's much more formatted and structured and followed up with.

This school in particular had very strong leadership from their administrator in developing the RTI process. This administrator reported spending a considerable amount

of time researching RTI and developing a program to address social, emotional, behavioral, and academic problems. This administrator recognized the transition period that was necessary for teachers to buy into the program, understand the need for data and tracking of that data, and assume responsibility for follow-up.

As one interviewee reported, students with special educational needs are students who "learn a different way." Learning difficulties and social or behavioral struggles were noted as common special educational needs the Catholic schools served. In general, it was recognized among interviewees that special educational needs included learning difficulties, behavioral problems, physical disabilities, and emotional struggles. All interviewees recognized that students with reading difficulties had special educational needs. However, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) was the only specific disorder mentioned by six of the eight interviewees as an example of a special educational need their school had served.

The results of the survey provide greater understanding of the types of special education needs served within these Catholic schools. Using a weighted statistical analysis, the top five learning disabilities or special educational needs reported by survey respondents (N=93) were as follows, from most often to less often identified: (1) Attention difficulties; (2) Organizational skills; (3) Other health impairment (including ADD/ADHD); (4) Reading Disability; and (5) Listening skills. A visual comparison of teacher and administrator responses indicated that both groups agreed on the need for and incidence of special educational needs within their schools. It appears that administrators are aware of the student population and their needs even though they are not directly involved in educating specific students. This level of awareness may be an essential

component in administrators giving support to teachers, families, and the students experiencing those educational struggles.

Between the five interviewed teachers there was a range of 6-26 years of experience with an average of 16 years. All respondents except one noted that experience was important because it gave their teaching methods credibility in their estimation. Many of the interventions and accommodations that were made were based on "experience" in the past with similar students who had struggled in their classrooms. It was not clear, however, if the accommodations were research- and/or data-based services.

According to survey data, 85% of teachers and administrators felt they were prepared to differentiate or suggest differentiation of instruction. The teachers interviewed provided information about how they had built up a repertoire of accommodations and interventions they used to meet the needs of struggling students. They tended to try these before referring the students to other professionals. For instance, one teacher stated about her early teaching experiences:

> I was the teacher who always recommended testing if I tried like a bunch of things and nothing was working. And most often, we found something. It might not have been something that they could qualify for special services. But, see, that helps too. Because then you can say, "Well, I can work with them on this because I know that they process slower.

On survey data, 11 interventions were identified by more than 70% of the survey respondents as strategies they used during the presentation of lessons during regular education classes. The top-ranked interventions are detailed in Table 4 and are compared to those interventions reported in interviews or through observations. Verbally-based interventions (e.g., positive verbal feedback for student successes) ranked highly on the teaching mode intervention survey section, likely because these are some of the more

easily implemented interventions. Interview data indicated the use of “hands-on” techniques of intervention, including one-to-one, small group, and computer-aided methods of instruction. These interventions allow a teacher to personally control and monitor what the student is being taught as well as, presumably, monitoring what the student understands.

During observation more involved interventions, such as multi-sensory techniques, were observed. Also, only 65% of survey respondents reported using peer-partner or study buddy instruction, yet this was one of the most observed methods of teaching mode interventions in the classroom. While it is not possible to draw conclusions based on these differences, it appears that teachers may hold different ideas about what constitutes an intervention. Alternatively, it is possible that teachers do not recognize their current teaching practices as formal interventions but instead simply view them as part of their everyday practice. This gives credence to the typical sentiment from interviewees that teachers and administrators are using experience and best practices to the best of their ability to serve the students in their classrooms.

Table 4

Highest Ranked Academic Interventions Reported by Survey Respondents, Observed in the Classroom, and Indicated in Interviews

Intervention	Survey Ranked	Most Observed	Indicated in Interviews
Teaching Mode	1. Give positive verbal reinforcement or feedback	1. Give positive verbal reinforcement or feedback	1. Use individual instruction
	2. Use short, simple instructions	2. Use multi-sensory techniques (i.e., visual, auditory, kinesthetic)	2. Use small group instruction
	3. Rephrase directions	3. Use individual instruction	3. Provide computer-aided instruction
Teaching Setting	1. Assign preferential seating	1. Allow frequent breaks or vary activities	1. Assign preferential seating
	2. Promote regular home/school communication	2. Schedule student to leave class for assistance	2. Adjust time for completion of assignments
	3. Adjust time for completion of assignments	3. Adjust time for completion of assignments	3. Schedule student to leave class for assistance
Assignments/ Materials	1. Provide opportunity for student to respond orally	1. Use computer to support instruction	1. Reduce work load
	2. Reduce work load	2. Encourage use of pictures/symbols	2. Use computer to support instruction
	3. Change format of assignments	3. Break assignments in to series of smaller tasks	3. Use audio books for reading support
Assessment	1. Avoid penalizing for minor errors (spelling, handwriting)	1. Modify written format of test	1. Modify timing of assessment
	2. Modify timing of assessment	2. Modify format – dictated test	--
	3. Offer credit for class participation	3. Modify format – oral test	--

A number of interviewees and survey respondents noted that the programs to serve students with special educational needs were increasing and therefore more students were served without the necessity of parent-funded services. One survey respondent wrote that, “The format and delivery [of services] have changed with the RTI model, but not the number of services provided.” According to survey data, respondents may perceive changes in how services are delivered to Catholic school students. They may have recognized a decrease in services from the public school systems linked to funds allocated to private schools. Another possibility is that respondents were noticing an increase in Catholic school personnel providing numerous services. For instance, perhaps a teacher has begun providing pullout or tutoring services throughout the day or after school in lieu of the school hiring an additional staff member to do so. Overall, 63% of respondents indicated their school provided educational support programs such as special education or resource classes for students with special educational needs.

Regarding services provided to students experiencing special educational needs in the Catholic schools, nearly all (93%) of survey respondents indicated school personnel provided regular classes with accommodations and adaptations. Additionally, 80% of respondents stated counseling services were available to students with special educational needs. Seventy-eight percent noted their school provided a designated resource room in which to serve students outside of their regular/general education classrooms.

Focus on the learner was generally apparent during the interviews with the teachers and administrators. There was a sense that they were developing a deeper understanding about what it meant to serve students with special educational needs, and finding greater acceptance of their role in that service. One teacher described the

understanding in terms of, “Hey, this is not necessarily negative, okay, but this is how this child learns; this is how this child performs." This understanding also seemed to extend to students who were English language learners. As the administrators developed an awareness of the need, they seemed to encourage and assist the teachers to be more understanding as well. Below, an administrator described a unique need posed by the students who spoke English as their second language:

> A lot of our native Spanish speakers, who are fairly new to English, really struggle in vocabulary, reading and spelling. It’s very challenging, but those students are still given the same work and the same elements without that… understanding about what does it really mean to be tacking on English as a second language …I think also recognizing that Spanish is their native gift, and that’s the language that they’re going to process their emotions through, it’s probably what they’ll feel most comfortable praying with and yet we’re overlaying another language on top of that.

The teachers and administrators reported learning to focus not solely on test scores or classroom behaviors, but are looking beyond to determine the mitigating factors affecting these students. They are recognizing the complex system in which their students live and the impact these areas have on education.

Willingness

Impacts of Catholic educational services are a theme that is related to many different topic areas. Interviewees acknowledged they were unable to serve all special educational needs and therefore needed to rely on the public schools or other professionals to serve those students. They also recognized the impact of family choice in respect to Catholic education. Although interviewees also discussed relying on services from Child Find or Title I resource teachers to identify and provide services for students with learning difficulties, they also discussed *not* feeling impacted by education law.

First, regarding the category of inability to serve certain special educational needs, interviewees generally recognized that there were many sources and severity of students' needs. Physical needs were recognized as overt student needs, and was also one of the areas most clearly delineated by interviewees as "not serviceable" at three of the four participating schools. These school buildings were not handicap accessible, and therefore students in wheelchairs, for instance, would not be able to access all areas of the school. One administrator elaborated by saying one of the factors in determining if or when upgrades and improvements would be made to the school included consideration that any type of "construction activity" would require the building to be brought up to code to handicap accessibility. This additional cost is one of the reasons that school administrators were unwilling or unable to enroll students with special educational needs that would require structural modification to the school environment.

On the other hand, as was presented above, the faculty and administrators at Catholic schools pride themselves on the services they are able to provide, even if those services are referring the family to other resources. Some of these services include referring students out to other services in conjunction with teaching the student within the Catholic school setting. Within the Catholic school system, the provision of services was occurring at high rates. It also appeared that administrators might be more aware of the availability of different resources more so than teachers. Judging by the responses of administrators on the survey, counseling services (83% of administrators versus only 46% of teachers), itinerant services (75% of administrators versus 22% of teachers), and services provided by the local public school (58% of administrators and 33% of teachers) were highly endorsed as services provided by the school to students with special

educational needs. Three of the interviewees mentioned utilizing outside contractors, tutors, and/or programs to enhance their school's services to students with special educational needs.

For instance, teacher and administrator interviewees recognized the needs of their students were not only related to learning goals, but also emotional health. Counseling was a service that many of the teachers and administrators felt was necessary for their students to achieve to their greatest potential. They recognized the connection between emotion and ability to focus on education. As one teacher explained:

> What's interesting and what I'm starting to notice—and I think this has more to do with split families—is that there are more kids who are more needy. I think that teachers even here in an upper middle class school, we are probably the only constant in their life that they can plan on. With that I've seen, because of the neediness, they're not as emotionally set to accept knowledge.

And another stated:

> A lot of our kids, I don't know that they actually have learning issues, that they have more environmental issues with ADD, and split families with the kids that live at [one house] one week and then the next week [another house] and leave books…. And those kind of things we hammer out at beginning conferences. Like, "What can we do to help, because this is not a good thing." "I don't have my homework because it's at my mom's. And I didn't go to my mom's house last night." And so I classify those kids as special needs too, even though they don't have learning issues. They have other kinds of issues going on.

Teacher and administrator interviewees expressed either appreciation for having a counselor on staff or a desire to know how to refer students to others for those services.

Another category within this theme is reliance on parents. The parents' role in education is paramount in Catholic schools, and was noted as such by every interviewee. Without family sponsored assistance, it is unknown whether students with special educational needs would make the same academic gains as they would with the support available in the Catholic schools alone. Interviewees from three of the four schools

reported having students who were receiving parent-funded services (e.g., tutors and paraprofessionals paid for by the parents) during the school day.

Administrators further indicated that judgments as to whether or not the school would be able to support a student's special educational need was done on a case-by-case basis and depended largely upon whether or not the parents were willing or able to provide any additional services that may be required. As an example, one administrator described how a student who had a severe reading disability was allowed to stay at the school after his parents agreed to provide two hours of tutoring at the school each day. Monetarily, this family apparently was willing and able to pay for the services. The administrator perceived that these parents highly regarded the Catholic faith aspect of Catholic education so much that they did not choose to send the student to a public school where he could receive free services. In other words, for this family it was more important for their child to receive a Catholic education than to have him switch to a public school in order to receive more formalized special education services.

School choice may be more difficult for parents when special educational needs must be considered. Monetarily, parents have to be prepared to support their students to an even greater extent than with the already high tuition rates at the Catholic schools. One administrator admitted, "Truly if there are needs beyond a half hour a week, we can't provide [services to that child] unless the parents want to bring a private tutor." However, without a system of protocols (e.g., consent forms to be signed prior to service provision, formalized meetings to discuss individualized learning plans, etc.), communication with the parents regarding those services becomes difficult. Another administrator acknowledged the difficulty, recognizing, "Formalized [communication]? No but we're

going to [develop that area]. I think it was a recommendation of strategic planning that there needs to be more formalized communication avenues for sharing information about kids." This administrator saw the need for an overt step-by-step process by which teachers could identify and begin serving students. As part of this plan, it was also recognized that parents needed to be made aware of the process and services their child would be receiving.

The state department of education provides guidelines for identification and service delivery that seemed unfamiliar to Catholic school teachers and administrators in this study. Within IDEA, there is a general process for identification of student disability, guidelines for communication with the local public schools, and descriptions of private school and parents' rights regarding children with special educational needs. However, the overwhelming consensus among interviewees was, as one interviewee stated, "these laws do not apply to us [in Catholic schools]." Another interviewee explained, "From what I have been taught we don't have to do anything [under the law]. That's simply something that is dictated from the courts and the politicians to the public schools."

The legally binding nature of IEPs and 504 plans appeared to be understood by two of the three administrators. When children who have IEPs attend Catholic schools, their parents' choice to send them to Catholic schools may mean their children will not get the full extent of services detailed in these documents, as would be required by law in the public schools. These two administrators understood that a child in a Catholic school with an IEP or 504 plan had access to limited services from the public schools. Furthermore, the administrators recognized students in Catholic schools with IEPs or 504

plans were expected by law to be monitored to ensure progress in areas of difficulty, based on recommendations within the plan.

The decision-making process for serving students with special educational needs falls to the Catholic school administrators and teachers, even though only 49% of survey respondents endorsed that they had taken courses or programs in education that prepared them to serve students with special educational needs. The teachers reported taking the lead in many important decisions regarding aspects of serving students with special educational needs in the Catholic schools, often apologetically so.

> I have recommended before, not my best work, but a kiddo was so severe that … I did recommend that they go to public school. Just because I felt it was my educational duty and responsibility to try to say…this is not the place for her. As much as I would love her to stay and be a part of the Catholic school system, we are just not effective for servicing this need.

The teachers expressed a strong desire to serve all students seeking a Catholic education, yet recognized their shortcomings and inability to serve all needs.

Identifying problem areas for students and providing services to help mitigate their struggles was one that not all respondents agreed upon. Although most of the teachers agreed they could, would, and possibly legally should provide interventions or accommodations to students with special educational needs, not all felt adequately prepared or trained to do so. Those teachers also expressed relief that their schools had access to Title I teachers who were able to identify, track, and provide interventions for students with reading difficulties.

Only one example of coordinated services between a general education teacher and a support service provider (e.g., Title 1 teacher) was observed. In one reading class, 13 out of 18 students were receiving services from the Title I teacher at the school. The

regular education teacher coordinated different learning centers during her reading class so that students had time to work with the Title 1 teacher. The centers included opportunities to participate in small groups reading, receive language-based instruction on the computer, and read and/or listen to stories on their own. This structure worked particularly well because each student was able to participate in every center, including the Title I services. In other classrooms where only one or two students were eligible to receive Title I services, the classroom teacher either made exceptions for the student by allowing him or her to opt out of the requirements or expectations of one of the centers, or the student had to find another time (e.g., recess, during homework) to complete those expected tasks. By carefully coordinating with outside services, teachers were able to provide the services struggling students needed.

Public school services, professional service providers, education law, and parents have an impact on Catholic schools. By recognizing the limitations in their ability to support special educational needs, teachers, and administrators can further support their students by referring to other professionals to provide those services. Although not often recognized, Catholic schools are impacted by education law. They have rights and responsibilities according to IDEA and ADA statutes, but it is unclear the level of understanding teachers and administrators have about the impact of education law on Catholic schools.

Tension

Interview and survey participants portrayed a dichotomous perception of many of the facets already discussed in the above themes. For instance, although they recognized the merit and assistance available from outside sources, they also expressed a great

amount of mistrust and frustration with the procurement of those resources. These dichotomous perceptions were clearly articulated by the majority of the interviewees, and are therefore presented again within the theme of Tension. The knowledge and beliefs which teachers and administrators use to determine services for those students indicated misunderstandings about education law and ideology behind specialized instruction, lack of a collaborative stance with outside entities, and mistrust of the publicly funded Child Find system.

One aspect of tension was related to the timing of assessments with regard to referrals to Child Find. One teacher remarked, "I have found through experience that if we don't submit names [to Child Find] by the end of January, they may be put off until the following year. So that's a whole year's worth of loss of academics with that child." The other major complaint was that referred students sometimes did not qualify for services. Students in Catholic schools may appear to be struggling more in comparison to their overall high achieving peers. However, when compared to a national standard, those same students may be within a typical range of performance. One teacher recognized this, however, and acknowledged the benefit of an assessment from Child Find. "So even if they don't qualify for any help, because they've [Child Find] cut back on their budget, they will give you strategies to use."

Still, nearly every teacher and administrator shared a story about how they worked to get a struggling student assessed by the public schools, an effort that was ultimately in vain. The following is a lengthy representation of such an experience by one of the teachers.

> It was after Christmas that we started our RTI process. Going to the library and, at that point and time, the librarian…I would send up his RTI folder, … and they

> would work on what he had worked on that day, and write it down in a log. So then when we actually referred him to Child Find, Child Find did not appreciate our log. There wasn't enough information. … They had an issue with the actual intervention, and they had an issue with the fact that it was different volunteers every day. … [Child Find] didn't give us any log to fill out. No paperwork as far as this is what we would like you to do. … They gave us some suggestions but it was all things that you had to pay for. … So "you can go to this website", but when we looked it up you had to pay for this one. Some of the things we were already doing were interventions but because we hadn't been putting it in the log it didn't technically count. … Then it was getting closer towards the end of the year so we sort of pushed for him to be tested because it was nearing the end of the school year. There's also an issue that they said that we hadn't turned our paperwork before spring break and if the student's paperwork wasn't turned in before spring break there was no guarantee that they would be tested before we got out. … he finally got tested, I want to say the second week in May…third week in May. Really really late. … And after all of that, the student ended up not getting any services "because he wasn't bad enough." … There should be more "hand holding," to let us know what we are doing or what needs to be done next.

This teacher reported not referring students to Child Find since this incident.

In a related category, teachers and administrators shared concern about their perceived lack of formal preparation to serve students with special educational needs. The teachers appeared to be realistic about their lack of knowledge or skill, and felt pressure in the amount or level of support and services they were providing to students in their classrooms. Many expressed concern that they either missed or unnecessarily labeled a student with a special educational need.

Anecdotally, numerous survey participants wrote in answers to a question related to teacher preparation, indicating the different ways in which they believe they were prepared to teach students with special educational needs. The responses included learning from personal or professional experience, having a nursing background, being a nanny, and foster care training. Many respondents included information on courses or professional development in which they had learned about serving students with specific special educational needs.

The tension for teachers was that they wanted to be able to provide services to the students, but felt they were not effectively able to do so for various reasons. A lack of structure became apparent regarding serving students with special educational needs. The teachers did not have specific policy or guidelines to follow for identifying students with special educational needs. Furthermore, there was no established protocol for intervening or accommodating students' needs in the regular education classroom. Teachers expressed a concern that their school was not serving students with special educational needs in ways that would most effectively benefit the student.

Sixty-six percent of survey respondents supported "learning strategies and differentiating instruction" as the most highly ranked professional development topic of interest. It is likely teachers and administrators recognized their need for greater information on ways in which to support students with special educational needs through differentiation of instruction. Other supported areas of professional development included characteristics of specific disabilities (53%), and alternative assessment and grading practices (46%). These findings indicate teachers and administrators are interested in learning more about how to support students with special educational needs, and that they would like further training in doing so.

Perceptions of feeling adequately prepared to serve students with special educational needs were more highly supported by administrators than teachers, with administrators indicating feeling more prepared than teachers. Interestingly, both administrators and teachers felt much less adequately prepared to recommend research-based interventions. In general, when administrator and teacher responses are compared,

it is fairly evident that both groups hold similar opinions regarding their interaction with students with special educational needs.

The survey also explored perceptions of the primary challenges schools faced regarding supporting students with special educational needs. Overwhelmingly, limited financial and/or professional resources were indicated as the primary challenge, with 71% of respondents indicating this response. Only 10% of survey respondents endorsed limited commitment, interest, or knowledge from administration as a challenge for their school. In light of the data regarding support and knowledge from the administrators, respondents may or may not recognize the administration has limited financial or professional resources to serve students with special educational needs. Limited resources (financial and/or professional) were the most highly rated challenge for the schools by both administrators and teachers (75% and 70%, respectively). Therefore, administrative support may be linked more to budgeting decisions made by the administrators rather than to administrators' philosophical stance on the level of support students with special educational needs should receive in Catholic schools. In other words, an administrator may be emotionally or philosophically invested in serving students with special educational needs, but unable to serve them at the school due to financial constraints.

All of the interview respondents spoke of struggles they perceived in terms of serving students with special educational needs. One of the most often mentioned struggle was a lack of services, linked with a lack of funding. Because the schools are tuition dependent, two of the three administrators explicitly mentioned the great pressure to find funding for the services they wished to provide their students. One administrator described it as, "We are limited in funds and when we are limited in funds we are also

limited in support." Paradoxically, this administrator's school had five support staff dedicated to serving the special educational needs of their students. By comparison to other Catholic schools in this area, this school was very well supported when it came to providing services to students with special educational needs. Through research and over time, another administrator was able to garner numerous federally funded and school funded services as well. This administrator was also concerned with the lack of time to do more research, not only in order to maximize the federally funded services available to the school, but also researching evidence-based interventions that would be appropriate within their RTI program.

Teachers felt there was great demand on classroom time when it came to providing services to students struggling with special educational needs. The interviewed teachers expressed they did not want to provide too many modifications or accommodations lest the students "get too used to it." They saw a need for balance between aiding a student with special educational needs in ways that would promote their success without inducing the students to expect those accommodations later in schooling and later in life. When asked what the greatest struggle was in the classroom, one teacher remarked, "Probably just making the accommodations that they need. It's so varied from each kid. And I guess making sure that you're not doing too much for them and hoping that you're doing enough. That's kind of the frustrating part." In this teacher's estimation, students would not continue to be provided the accommodations or interventions when they got into middle and high school. Therefore providing those accommodations and interventions in younger grade levels only decreased the chance the student would instead

develop compensation techniques for their special educational need that they could utilize later on in life.

It also became evident that all interviewees believed their individual school was responsible to provide services to the best of their ability and had little guidance or direction to do so. Unless, as presented above, an administrator or teacher took the steps to educate themselves or research avenues of supporting students with special educational needs, struggling students would remain as such. A typical response from interviewees was related to a frustration and desire for more guidance for serving students with special educational needs from the Archdiocesan level. As one interviewee described:

> I think because the Archdiocese has the organization where they [the superintendents] believe each school is autonomous, that each school does what they feel is best for their particular population of students, I don't think we're ever going to see a directive come down [from the Archdiocesan level]. … We have talked about how part of us would like to have more directives come from the Archdiocese that were all the same, then that takes away from our local school control, which I think we pride ourselves in being the best we can in our neighborhood, even compared to our neighborhood Catholic schools.

While the schools may desire more direction and support in service provision, they may also feel they know better the unique needs of their student population and prefer more control in servicing those needs.

Encapsulating the tension expressed by administrators, teachers, and survey respondents, the Catholic schools are currently operating without a structure for serving students with special educational needs. Personnel from every school have developed their own way of identifying and serving students. Still, they desire more guidance and support from outside entities, including other schools within the Catholic school district. It is, at this point in time, unclear what organized and collaborative service provision among the Catholic schools might do for serving students with special educational needs.

Based on the general and typical categories that emerged within the themes, the following experience description may be expected in Catholic schools in the Rocky Mountain region.

Catholic schools have great pride in their students' achievement. They base this pride on nationally normed test results that indicate their population of students achieves at a level higher than most public and private school students. They believe their schools provide strong academics and employ teachers and administrators passionate about providing that education. The integration of the Catholic faith into the teaching practices is also an area of pride, indicating it is an aspect of the mission of Catholic education that the teachers and administrators take seriously.

The Catholic schools are doing many things to provide quality education to their students, including students with special educational needs. Although they are only able to serve primarily mild or moderate special educational needs, they are doing so using best practices and information gathered from on-going training and their previous experiences. Each school has a unique approach to identifying and serving their students with special educational needs. By focusing on the learner, the schools are doing what they can to provide the best education possible to the students enrolled in their schools.

Catholic schools maintain a relationship with many entities in an effort to enhance their education for students with special educational needs. School personnel recognize they are unable to serve all student needs and have been able to supplement with outside services or hire on specialized personnel in order to serve as many and as varied a population of students with special educational needs as possible. They involve parents in

decision-making and service provision whenever a special educational need is present, yet recognize that formal channels of communication are not always present

Finally, there is a sense of frustration or tension in the Catholic school personnel's desire to serve all students seeking a Catholic education and their ability to serve students with special educational needs. Although there are supports available through the local public schools, teachers and administrators find the interactions with Child Find cumbersome and at times non-productive. The responsibility of the schools to provide services to students with special educational needs is juxtaposed with perceptions of a lack of formal training and ability to serve the students. Similarly, teachers and administrators overwhelmingly recognize they are limited in resources to address the needs of all students with special educational needs. The frustration, however, may be a motivating factor that leads administrators and teachers in Catholic schools to seek alternative methods of training and service provision, thereby allowing them to provide Catholic education to many students with special educational needs.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study focused on the perceptions of teachers and administrators in Catholic schools in a Rocky Mountain region based on phenomenology and the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997; 2005). The goal of this research was to discover the current inclusive practices in the Catholic schools. Knowledge of current practices and gaps may be used to help inform and help develop a structure and system for serving students in Catholic schools with special educational needs.

Inclusion in Catholic Schools

The definition of inclusion used for this study was based on the definitions used in the works of Smelter et al. (1994), and Brice and Miller (2000), which referred to programs and classrooms where all students with disabilities are educated full time with their non-disabled peers. Judging by this definition of inclusion, fully inclusive practices were not observed in the Catholic schools. Seventy-eight percent of survey respondents and all of the interviewee participants' schools utilized resource teachers, counseling services, and/or publicly funded services for which students with special educational needs were pulled out of the regular education classroom. This is similar to findings reported by Durow (2007) regarding Midwestern Catholic school districts' service provision for students with special educational needs. Durow reported regular education classroom teachers provided the majority of the services to the students, yet between 59%

and 79% of the elementary schools also employed or utilized alternative services (Durow, 2007). This finding suggests that Catholic schools in different areas of the country are addressing special educational needs similarly: teachers are primarily responsible, but outside sources are utilized as well.

Both survey respondents and interviewees in this study reported numerous ways in which they differentiated or accommodated students with special educational needs in the regular education classrooms. The teachers attempted to manage students' services within their classroom when the students were not with a resource teacher or other service provider. Furthermore, students in Catholic schools did not require a specific label in order to receive these teacher-initiated services, and in some cases, services from resource teachers or other service providers. Instead, if a student was struggling in any way compared to the majority of his or her peers, most teachers indicated and were observed to modify their teaching to accommodate the student's needs. In this way, inclusion is practiced within Catholic schools. Further, the practice does not appear to have changed over the last decade in that students with special educational needs continue to receive services in Catholic schools within the regular education classroom (USCCB, 2002).

It appears that the Catholic schools in this study were practicing a modified form of inclusion in a manner that was most similar to the Strategies Intervention Model of inclusion (SIM; Tralli et al., 1996). (See Appendix A for specific guiding principles related to this model.) This model describes students being explicitly taught to use strategies they can apply to their learning in the regular education classroom to mitigate the negative effects of their special educational need. Observations supported teachers'

use of routines related to recall (e.g., use of acronyms or physical movement to aid in memory), storing information (e.g., repetition and sing-song techniques), and previewing techniques. Additionally, in the SIM students are expected to advocate for themselves by recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, setting goals for themselves, and taking an active role in their educational experience. In some Catholic schools, the teachers or parents may fulfill many of these roles for the student, particularly related to advocating for the students with special educational needs. Teachers were observed empowering their students to reach a personalized standard of performance (e.g., "Try your best," and "I want to know what *you* know about the book,") and promoted student involvement in their educational experience (e.g., students were responsible to know their tasks during centers and had to be self-motivated to complete the tasks). Furthermore, the SIM model supports the interconnectedness between personal and educational lives of students and addresses the "whole-child" education and community aspect deemed so important to many Catholic schools. As was stated by teachers and administrators, the community factor of Catholic schools is one of the aspects that make the schools so unique.

Given the unique and complex elements of inclusive practices in Catholic schools, an analysis of the current strengths and barriers as related to inclusive education is presented in Table 5 using the framework of the Theory of Ecology of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Four levels of inter-related systems (macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem) are presented in terms of the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model, presented in Chapter 1.

The broadest level, the macrosystem, of the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model incorporates the mission of Catholic education and the incidence of childhood disorders.

Regarding the mission of Catholic education, nearly all interviewees reported at least a two-pronged understanding: (a) the importance of a good Catholic education that does not necessarily mean teaching students with special needs; and (b) teaching the Catholic faith and/or developing good citizens through a strong sense of community. This emulates what leaders within the National Catholic Education Association describe makes Catholic schools unique and a model in education: they focus on educating the whole child (Robey, 2011). Although there was consistency in the understanding of the mission of Catholic education among the teachers and administrators in the current study, there was no link to educating students with special educational needs, a paradigm shift that research shows may be difficult to overcome (Thornton et al., 2007).

The next system level, the exosystem, is related to the education law and Child Find mandates and their effect on Catholic education. This level of the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model was the level at which the most tension was reported by participants in this study. Very little research has been done on the interactions between Catholic schools and public entities. However, researchers such as Kallemeyn (2009) note that public policy may have an impact on Catholic education, particularly when related to assessments that are state funded. The Catholic school personnel in this study had misinterpretations of education law, the most common of which was that the laws did not apply to Catholic schools. Also, the Catholic schools used Child Find services, yet were frustrated by perceived difficulties in the identification process.

Table 5
Strengths and Barriers in Relation to the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model

	Strengths	Barriers
Macrosystem Level	A common understanding of the mission of Catholic education	Serving students with special educational needs is not viewed as part of the mission of Catholic education
	Enhanced sense of community and provision of catechetical teaching	Undetermined ability to serve and catechize students with special educational needs
	Strong academic history and use of testing results for promotional purposes	No current structure or guidelines for accommodating students with special educational needs
Exosystem Level	Child Find services are available for qualifying students	Lack of structure and support in what is expected from Child Find and negative opinion of the services overall
	Individualized decision making process for enrollment of students with special educational needs	No standardized, consistent, or structured manner in which decisions are made for enrollment
	Desire to know more about education law	Misinterpretation of federal education law
Mesosystem Level	More resources than anticipated	Little training or follow-up support for programs used; Resources not coordinated between schools
	Administrators supportive of resources and resource teachers	Lack of funding to provide full amount of services administrators would prefer; Varied levels of administrator support
	Support from administrators and superintendents if requested	Lack of policy regarding special educational needs students
Microsystem Level	Teachers learn from real-life experiences with students with special educational needs	Teachers rely less on research-based and data-driven techniques to address special educational needs
	Teachers attend numerous workshops and program information sessions	Little if any follow-up support or training occurs after the workshops or program information sessions

The mesosystem is the next level of the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model. Included at this level are school resources, administrator philosophy, and services provided. As it currently exists, each school within the Catholic education system is separated from all others. Each school and each resource teacher remained an "island" unto themselves. This phenomenon is not unique to the Catholic schools in this study. As reported in an article by Meyer (2007), Father Kevin Hanbury of Newark, New York described the Catholic school system there by saying, "We have a system of schools, not a school system." This sentiment was lamented by teachers participating in the study, yet administrators, who arguably have control over the collaborative nature of their school resources and personnel, did not overtly express the desire to collaborate with other schools. There was a competitive nature among the Catholic schools, as two teachers and one administrator interviewed reported, because of declining enrollments. Because there are relatively fewer students with special education needs, each administrator must figure out a system for identifying, providing services to, and preparing teachers to serve students with special educational needs. Further, each teacher is somewhat isolated in his or her efforts to figure out how best to meet the needs of the learner.

Administrators were open to and reported actively and continually seeking out programs to address students' needs in their schools. Research supports the utmost importance of strong leadership in efforts of systems change (Adelman & Taylor, 2007; McLeskey & Waldron, 2009; Stollar, Poth, Curtis, & Cohen, 2006; Thornton et al., 2007; and Woodside-Jiron & Gehsmann, 2009). Although individual school leaders involved in this study showed great support for service provision to students with special educational needs, their approaches varied widely (e.g., some were intrinsically involved and others

very much hands-off, allowing resource teachers to determine needs regarding service provision). However, also supported by research is the need for policy initiatives to spur and help sustain systems change (Stollar et al., 2006; Woodside-Jiron & Gehsmann, 2009). This would require leadership and support for serving students with special educational needs.

A teacher's philosophy and training are aspects of the microsystem of the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model, and constitute the practical "frontline" of service provision. Though all interviewees reported being supportive of teaching students with special educational needs, they also reported relying heavily on their real-life experiences as to how to support these students. They sought and obtained personal training through seminars or conferences, which might contribute to what Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg (1987) termed "disjointed incrementalism." This means programs are instituted one by one in the school, likely to legitimately answer a need for the students, but that eventually become tedious and unscientifically presented, thereby losing their effectiveness. Instead, schools may benefit more from obtaining focused, on-going, and system-wide training in methodologies. This may in turn increase the collaborative nature of the schools, as teachers lean on one another for support in the common service provision models.

In general, the findings in this study confirm and enrich research about Catholic education and provide insight into the day-to-day practices and perceptions of Catholic school personnel regarding serving students with special educational needs. Catholic schools do not provide a strict inclusion-based education, but instead promote staff education and acquiring skills through workshops and other trainings. Many of the schools even employ special education-related personnel to assist their students. Finally,

although there are difficulties in interactions with the public schools, the study participants reported a desire for more information and assistance from the public school entities. On a case-by-case basis, Catholic schools in the area of study appear to be putting effort into serving students with mild to moderate special educational needs.

Implications and Recommendations

In order to develop a comprehensive, collaborative, and accessible system of providing services in the Catholic schools, it is important to recognize the interplay of the different levels of the ecological systems. First and foremost, it should be recognized that a two to three year introduction period is needed for implementing complex systems change efforts such as providing more inclusive or special education resources to schools (Woodside-Jiron & Gehsmann, 2009). Second, it might be best to begin with a smaller number of schools as "pilot schools," consistent with the suggestion of Adelman and Taylor (2005). Third, Thornton et al. (2007) suggested viewing schools as "organic organizations" that can learn continuously as they implement the systems change efforts and devise effective and dynamic program evaluations to ensure the effectiveness of the changes made.

Not all Catholic schools would be able to support all types of special educational needs or disabilities. However, with a supportive and collaborative system in place, an even greater breadth and depth of students with special educational needs may be able to find success in Catholic schools today. As Kavale and Forness (2000) noted, inclusive education practices are appropriate for mild mental retardation, learning disabilities, and emotional and behavioral disabilities, but not for students with severe and profound disabilities. A modified model of inclusion would likely best suit Catholic schools

because of the financial constraints related to inability to hire special education staff such that there are not sufficient numbers to have a specialized teacher in multiple classrooms. Additionally, some students who continue to be excluded due to the cost and associated with upgrading existing facilities to meet Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

The mission of Catholic education appears to challenge all Catholic schools to do what they can to serve not only students from low socioeconomic status, as they have historically done (NCEA, 2010), but any student seeking a Catholic school education. Therefore, if Catholic school administrators and teachers are to expand their services, it may be necessary for the Superintendents and Administrators who oversee the Catholic school education system to communicate a clearer link between the mission of Catholic education and the education of students with special needs. It is possible that administrators and teachers will not see the need to change acceptance policies, the teaching styles, or service provision, to include more students or identify more students with special educational needs. Even if a school administrator wished to move toward more open enrollment practices as related to admitting more students with special needs, there would be barriers related to funding, resources, and especially preparedness.

With a more structured system in place, the Catholic school systems could both come to a clearer and consistent understanding of education law, but also interact more consistently and efficiently with Child Find. Already, there are schools and administrators who have found efficiency in their interactions with Child Find. By simply collaborating, sharing that information with other schools, and utilizing strategies already in place at some schools, it is likely that more Catholic schools would experience less frustrating interactions with Child Find and their students with special educational needs

would receive more support from the public school system. This is important to the financial sensibilities of not only the Catholic schools (less need for resource teacher staff to serve students), but also to the families they serve. Families would not feel pressured to pay for psychoeducational assessment and subsequent tutoring when those services could be provided for free by Child Find team members and their child's school.

With the guidance from a centralized and informed system for dissemination about education law and its impact on Catholic schools, there would likely be less confusion, as was expressed by interviewees, about the Catholic schools' responsibilities under the IDEA and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Catholic schools could determine on a more practical and definitive level whether or not they would be able to serve students who have Individualized Education Plans (IEP). There is the understanding that parents have the final say in whether or not their child with special educational needs attends Catholic schools. Those parents must also be made aware of what the school can and cannot do without additional financial assistance from the parents. Still, there should be a moral and legal obligation for the schools to ensure that students' needs are addressed in accordance with their IEP, even if that means the parents are held accountable to provide additional services that the school cannot provide (e.g., a paraprofessional for one-to-one attention), or the child is referred to the public school system.

Strong leadership will be an important aspect of systems change efforts (Adelman & Taylor, 2007; Stollar et al., 2006; Thornton et al., 2007; Woodside-Jiron & Gehsmann, 2009). To this end, as advocated by McLeskey and Waldron (2009), school change efforts should be managed on a per-school basis, recognizing the unique community-

based education each Catholic school provides. In other words, there needs to be a centralized and collaborative entity able to support the Catholic schools through the change, but that entity must also respect the individuality of each Catholic school.

In her study of inclusion in Catholic schools, Vrdoljak (2009) concluded ongoing training and support for implementation of inclusion practices would be necessary to produce significant change in teacher's behaviors. Again, with a structured system of standardized service provision in the Catholic schools, teachers would have to rely less on their day-to-day experiences and could focus instead on implementing research-proven strategies. Schools may benefit more from obtaining focused, on-going, and system-wide training in methodologies. This may in turn increase the collaborative nature of the schools, as teachers lean on one another for support in the common service provision models.

Overall, the knowledge base of teachers and administrators in the Catholic schools needs to be addressed in order for Catholic school services to become less frustrating and more rewarding for teachers, administrators, and students alike. Obtaining training that is supported on a continuous basis would be more likely to have an impact on the efforts to empirically and with fidelity present services to students with special educational needs. Alternatively, increased efforts on behalf of administrators to provide consultative or on-going support services through the hiring or linking with specialized personnel would also increase the support for teachers providing special educational services. For instance, utilizing school psychology services would provide on-going support, information sharing, data-based decision-making, and consultation services meant to support a greater number of students with special educational needs.

It is likely that a more streamlined, structured, and programmatic approach to service provisions in the Catholic schools would lead to a greater sense of confidence in teachers' abilities to serve their students, more research-based and data-based interventions and accommodations, increased tracking of student outcomes, and as a result greater success for students. Although teachers are participating in ongoing professional development and providing this training to their peers, it may not be enough.

Limitations of the Current Research and Indications for Future Research

As with any research, there were limitations in this study that impacted the comprehensiveness of the results. For instance, there were more resources, including dedicated school personnel, available to students with special educational needs. Their perceptions and experiences with serving students with special educational needs in the Catholic schools were not included in this study, though they undoubtedly have an impact on Catholic schools' service provision. A study looking to fully represent the ability of Catholic schools to provide services to students with special educational needs would benefit from addressing what the resource teachers in many of the schools are able to provide the students.

Another limitation was an incomplete understanding of the specific needs within the Catholic school population. Although this study sought to recognize the number of students who had received a determination of special educational needs from either public or private sources (e.g., IEP or private evaluation determining a special educational need), there was a lack of methods used to track and monitor these students. A more in-depth inquiry into the different special educational needs would be needed to

make a full determination of the true incidences of the special educational needs in the Catholic schools.

Regarding limitations in the methodology of this research, use of a survey, although providing the breadth of data sought from a greater number of respondents, did not provide greater understanding of the day-to-day experiences of teachers and administrators in individual Catholic schools. The limited ability to statistically interpret the survey information (due in part to its breadth of content and low response rate) meant it added only limited information to the results of this study. As was expressed in the interviews, each school was individually responsible for determining how and in what manner to identify students with special educational needs as well as how to provide services to students with needs. Furthermore, as suggested in the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997; 2005), additional interviewees from a greater variety of settings (e.g., rural settings) would provide a greater depth of information on the experiences of teachers and administrators in Catholic schools. Therefore, focusing on the interviews and observations as opposed to gathering anonymous and generalized information would provide greater clarity and insight into the experiences of the Catholic schools.

An increase the collaboration and scope of services on a larger scale in the Catholic schools (as opposed to the current individual-school-approach) would provide greater support to the teachers and administrators of Catholic schools who are, as this study found, already teaching students with special educational needs. Centralizing and establishing a focused method for information gathering and dissemination (for instance about changes in education law or effective and research-based interventions and accommodations) would ensure all schools had a common understanding about providing

services to students with special educational needs. In order for such a system to exist in Catholic schools, leadership and involvement from administrators and/or superintendents would be necessary to ensure staff members buy-in to the system-wide approach to services.

However, it would be beneficial for a special educator or other person trained in serving students with special educational needs to consult with the administrators so that full understanding of the needs of the student, based on their special educational need, is accomplished. A dedicated group would be required to implement the necessary aspects involved in supporting students with special educational needs in the Catholic schools. However, in order to sustain enthusiasm and buy-in by the regular education teachers, the principals, assistant principals, and even superintendents must be supportive of the service provision system. They must be willing to look at the infrastructure necessary to provide the services and to think open-mindedly about how best to serve a population of students and their families who desire Catholic education.

The teachers and administrators in Catholic schools see their work as vocation and are accordingly willing to put forth great effort in ensuring their students achieve academically. With experience, hard work and dedication, and a knowledgeable, supportive working relationships with other professionals, many teachers and administrators have made great strides in providing an excellent education to students with special educational needs. It would not be a monumental task to coordinate these efforts, collaborate with professionals already associated with the Catholic schools and other related, highly qualified individuals (e.g., speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists), and create a centralized entity from

which materials, information, and services could be exchanged. By taking into account the various ecological systems that would be affected by such a service provision system, Catholic schools could serve an even greater continuum of students with special educational needs.

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APPENDIX A

Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles

RESEARCHER(S)	PRINCIPLE
Taylor, 2005	- Students receiving additional supports necessary to learn in the general classroom setting constitute successful inclusion.
Brice & Miller, 2000	- All children learn together. - Labels or other methods to identify students as special needs learners are not utilized. - All students are taught in a manner that helps them reach their maximum potential. - Specialized curriculum is not necessary.
Wang, Rubenstein, & Reynolds, 1985 (ALEM)	- Direct instruction - Self-responsibility - Social cooperation - Supporting student inquiry - Classroom arrangement – conducive to small, large, and individual classwork - Student determined pace of progression through the curriculum - Learning goals broken down into steps - Data-based approach to supporting education of special needs - Assessing the abilities of each student before individualizing their learning experience
Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996 (SIM)	- Learning strategy interventions • Explicit lists of steps that will lead toward successful completion of tasks • Individualized feedback • Multiple opportunities to practice learning strategies - Content enhancement routines • Routines used by teacher to assist in understanding, recalling, organizing, and storing information • Predictable routines the

Tralli, Colombo, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996 (SIM) -continued-	**emphasize important content** • **Graphic organizers** • **Presentation of an overview of concepts prior to teaching** - **Empowerment interventions** • **Students are empowered to perform to the best of their ability and have positive interactions with others** • **Students inventory their learning strengths and weaknesses** • **Students set goals for themselves** • **Students are active members of the educational experience**
Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996 (Co-teaching)	- **Administrative support and leadership** - **Capable and willing participants** - **Ongoing staff development** - **Classroom rosters balanced in terms of student need** - **Provision of adequate, weekly planning time** - **Development of IEPs**
O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998	- **Ongoing inservice training** - **Effective consultation** - **Contact with and support from parents** - **Involvement of students without disabilities in learning groups and to create an atmosphere of acceptance**
Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995	- **Administrator support** - **Information, orientation, and training for teachers** - **Balance between teacher freedom and support**
Odom et al., 2004	- **Student participation** - **Environment (positive interactions, accessibility)** - **highly trained teachers** - **administrative support**

APPENDIX B

Observation Form

DATE:	TEACHER:	TIME:
SUBJECT:	LENGTH OF OBSERVATION:	

DESCRIPTIVE NOTE	REFLECTIVE NOTE

SKETCH OF CLASSROOM:

***Form based on example in Creswell, 2007**

APPENDIX C

Operational Definitions for Observations

Operational Definitions

1. Individualized Teacher Attention: The following are examples of what individualized teacher attention may look like in the classroom. Note that individualized attention should be given to all students in the classroom, not just those with special educational needs.
    a. Teacher speaks one-on-one with students
    b. Teacher modifies questions or response mode to help students accomplish learning tasks
    c. Lesson plans identify accommodations for students with needs
    d. Teacher walks around the room, scanning work and/or student attentiveness
2. Varied Modes of Presenting Materials: Learning tasks, outcome measures, and assessments can be accepted in a variety of ways to draw on the strengths of students with special educational needs.
    a. Paper and pencil/pen: worksheets, written responses, drawing pictures, reading from a book, etc.
    b. Verbal and physical: stating answers out loud, theatrical-type performances, student led discussions, physically indicating answers (e.g., using a thumbs up or a thumbs down to indicate responses), presenting materials with song and/or dancing, etc.
    c. Other: technology-based learning or responding (e.g., Smart Board exercises), etc.
3. Physical Arrangement of Classroom: The arrangement of desks and chairs and other classroom furniture should facilitate areas that would be conducive to

individual student work, small, and large group work. Additionally, students should be able to easily move from one area of the classroom to another. For instance, if a student has a physical disability, they should be able to walk to all areas of the classroom unaided.

4. Data-based Plans and Procedures: Students with special educational needs or identified disabilities may have support from a formalized plan that indicates interventions in place, procedures to assist the student succeed in the classroom, and support structures unique to the student. For instance, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) may state the students area of need or disability, strengths and areas of skill, interventions and accommodations to address and track progress toward a learning or behavior goal, and explicit statements regarding collecting data for those goals.
5. Strategies to Complete Learning Tasks: Detailed step-by-step strategies may be presented verbally or in writing to assist students to complete a learning task (e.g., the steps involved in completing a division problem may be written explicitly for students to follow while they are learning this math skill.)
6. Previews of Learning Goals: Verbally, pictorially, or in written form, previews of what students can expect to learn prepares them for learning tasks.
7. Supportive Environment: Teacher and students may encourage positive interactions between all those in the classroom, providing support for successes as well as struggles so that all students are able to experience support for performing to the best of their ability.

8. Co-teaching: Co-teaching will be observed if an additional teacher, teacher assistant, or other support personnel (e.g., a reading specialist) equally participate in lesson planning and supporting students in learning tasks. This may look like one teacher acting as the lead teacher, and another supporting struggling students, or alternatively like tag-team teaching, with one teacher always working to further support students in the background.

APPENDIX D

Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School

Survey of Special Educational Needs
In the Catholic Elementary School

Your opinions on the following sections are appreciated. Thank you for participating in this study. Your responses will be kept confidential.

SECTION 1: TYPES OF LEARNING DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IDENTIFIED

	NEVER = not identified at all **OCCASIONALLY = 1-5 students per academic year** **OFTEN = 5+ students per academic year** **The following special educational needs and/or learning disabilities have been identified in students I have taught within the last year:**	**NEVER**	**OCCASIONALLY**	**OFTEN**
1.	**Specific learning disability**			
2.	**Hearing impairment**			
3.	**Speech and/or language impairment**			
4.	**Traumatic brain injury**			
5.	**Emotional disability**			
6.	**Visual impairment**			
7.	**Moderate to severely mentally retarded**			
8.	**Mildly mentally retarded**			
9.	**Orthopedic impairment**			
10.	**Autism**			
11.	**Other health impairment (would include ADD/ADHD)**			
12.	**Organizational skills**			
13.	**Listening skills**			
14.	**Fine motor skills**			
15.	**Memory and recall**			
16.	**Attention difficulties**			
17.	**Processing difficulties**			
18.	**Behavior and socialization difficulties**			
19.	**Math disability**			
20.	**Oral language disability (receptive or expressive)**			
21.	**Reading disability**			
22.	**Written language disability**			

SECTION 2: GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION

*Compare the population of students with special educational needs and/or learning disabilities, and the availability of services over the **past three years** with the current status. Please place a check next to your selection.* *(Based on surveys related to* Bello, D.A. (2006). The status of special education services in Catholic high schools: Attributes, challenges, and needs. *Exceptional Children, 72*(4), 461-481. *Surveys obtained from author.)*	
23. Population of Students With Special Needs	**24. Services Provided to Students**
___ There has been **no change** in the number of students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities at your school.	___ There has been **no change** in the number of services provided to students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
___ There has been an **increase** in the number of students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities at your school.	___ There has been an **increase** in the number of services provided to students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
___ There has been a **decrease** in the number of students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities at your school.	___ There has been a **decrease** in the number of services provided to students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
___ Other changes (please indicate the specifics of these) _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	___ Other changes (please indicate the specifics of these) _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

25. Does your school provide special education opportunities or resource classes for students with learning disabilities?

☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

If you checked no, skip to the next section (Section 3: Academic Interventions). If you checked yes, please proceed with Section 2.

(SECTION 2: CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

26. My school has the following services for students with special educational needs or disabilities: (Please check all that apply.) *

a. ☐ Peer tutoring *specifically* designated for students with disabilities or special educational needs.

b. ☐ mentoring *specifically* for students with disabilities or special educational needs.

c. ☐ after school assistance *specifically* designated for students with disabilities or special educational needs.

d. ☐ regular classes with accommodations and adaptations

e. ☐ regular classes with consultative assistance from special education staff

f. ☐ team teaching (a regular/general and special education teacher)

g. ☐ resource room (assistance provided by designated staff outside of the regular/general classroom)

h. ☐ self-contained classes with participation in regular/general education classes

i. ☐ self-contained classes without participation in regular/general education classes

j. ☐ speech and language services

k. ☐ counseling services

l. ☐ itinerant services (services by part time professionals who are not based at your school)

m. ☐ services provided by the local public school (Please specify.)

_____

_____

n. ☐ other (Please specify.)

_____

_____

**(*Based on surveys related to* Bello, D.A. (2006). The status of special education services in Catholic high schools: Attributes, challenges, and needs. *Exceptional Children, 72*(4), 461-481. *Surveys obtained from author.*)

SECTION 3: ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OR DISABILITIES

Place a check in the right column for all academic interventions that you have provided for students with special educational needs or disabilities within the last year. (Categories are taken from McDonald, A.T. (2008). *An exploration of primary level (K-2) special education practices in the Catholic elementary school.* UMI Microform 3345280: ProQuest LLC.)		
	Teaching Mode	**√**
27.	Use multi-sensory techniques (i.e., visual, auditory, kinesthetic)	
28.	Use short, simple instructions	
29.	Rephrase directions	
30.	Provide taped and/or written directions	
31.	Provide computer-aided instruction	
32.	Pre-teach vocabulary concepts	
33.	Use study guides to review key concepts or to give instruction in study skills	
34.	Use small group instruction	
35.	Use individual instruction	
36.	Use peer-partner (study buddy) instruction	
37.	Provide think time before calling on student	
38.	Have student paraphrase information	
39.	Give positive verbal reinforcement or feedback	
40.	Prepare student for changes in routines	
41.	Promote regular home/school communication	
42.	Explicit/direct instruction	
43.	Other:_____	
	Teaching Setting	**√**
44.	Assign preferential seating	
45.	Schedule student to leave class for assistance	
46.	Adjust time for completion of assignments	
47.	Allow frequent breaks or vary activities	
48.	Promote regular home/school communication	
49.	Other: _____	

(SECTION 3: CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

	Assignments/Materials	√
50.	Reduce work load	
51.	Change format of assignments	
52.	Break assignments into series of smaller tasks	
53.	Provide copies of notes/assignments	
54.	Use alternative materials	
55.	Visually modify materials	
56.	Use highlighted texts	
57.	Provide opportunity for student to respond orally	
58.	Use calculator for problem solving and calculations	
59.	Use computer to support instruction	
60.	Use audio books for reading support	
61.	Encourage use of Post-its	
62.	Use graphic organizers (e.g., mind-maps, charts)	
63.	Encourage use of pictures/symbols	
64.	Use second set of textbooks	
65.	Provide study plan or guide	
66.	Other: _____	
	Assessment	√
67.	Modify written format of test	
68.	Modify format – dictated test	
69.	Modify format – open book test	
70.	Modify format – oral test	
71.	Modify format – project based assessment	
72.	Modify timing of assessment	
73.	Incorporate homework as an assessment	
74.	Offer credit for class participation	
75.	Avoid penalizing for minor errors (spelling, handwriting)	
76.	Other: _____	

SECTION 4: GOVERNANCE

Please check (√) one answer that most closely reflects your opinion. *(Based on surveys related to* Bello, D.A. (2006). The status of special education services in Catholic high schools: Attributes, challenges, and needs. *Exceptional Children, 72*(4), 461-481. *Surveys obtained from author.*)			
	To no extent	**To a limited extent**	**To a great extent**
77. To what extent does the administrative staff have knowledge about special education services such that they could make supportive programmatic decisions if necessary?			
78. To what extent is the administrative staff familiar with the needs of all students with disabilities?			
79. To what extent does your school implement communication systems such that all responsible decision makers have access to important student related information for your students with disabilities?			
80. To what extent are special education staff members represented on school committees and other governance related committees within the school?			

81. What would you consider to be your school's **primary** challenge in supporting students with special educational needs or disabilities?

☐ Limited interest/commitment from administration

☐ Limited resources (financial and/or professional)

☐ Limited knowledge and skill on the part of administration and/or faculty

☐ Limited interest/commitment from faculty

☐ Limited time

☐ Other (Please specify.)

_____

_____

SECTION 5: ROLES OF THE TEACHER IN RELATION TO EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OR DISABILITIES

On the right, rate your preparedness according to the scale below:
D = Disagree **A** = Agree **NA** = Not Applicable
(Items are based on McDonald, A.T. (2008). *An exploration of primary level (K-2) special education practices in the Catholic elementary school.* UMI Microform 3345280: ProQuest LLC.)

	I feel adequately prepared to:	**D**	**A**	**NA**
82.	Identify areas of concern for students with special educational needs or disabilities			
83.	Refer students with learning disabilities			
84.	Recommend research-based interventions			
85.	Implement research-based interventions			
86.	Differentiate instruction			
87.	Collaborate (co-teach) with pull-out teacher			
88.	Other: _____			

89. Which of the following professional development topics would be useful to your staff in their efforts to work more effectively with students with special educational needs or disabilities? (Please rank order the top 3, with 1 being the most useful.)

☐ Characteristics of specific disabilities

☐ Behavior management

☐ Parent communication

☐ Collaboration and team teaching

☐ Legal issues

☐ Learning strategies and differentiating instruction

☐ Alternative assessment and grading practices

☐ Curriculum development/instructional resources

☐ Other: (Please specify.)

_____

SECTION 6: TEACHER PREPARATION

On the right, rate how each form of teacher preparation has helped you to teach students with special educational needs or disabilities. Please rate your responses according to the scale:
D = Disagree **A** = Agree **NA** = Not Applicable
(Based on McDonald, A.T. (2008). *An exploration of primary level (K-2) special education practices in the Catholic elementary school.* UMI Microform 3345280: ProQuest LLC.)

	The following types of teacher preparation have prepared me to teach students with special educational needs or disabilities:	**D**	**A**	**NA**
90.	Bachelor's Degree major or minor in special education (Circle one)			
91.	Credential program: _____ (Please specify)			
92.	Master's Program (MA, MS, M Ed.) (Circle one)			
93.	Doctoral Program (PhD, PsyD, EdD) (Circle one)			
94.	A course in education of exceptional children			
95.	Other: _____ (Please specify)			

SECTION 7: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

96. Total years of teaching/administration: _____

97. Years at present school: _____

98. Current position:

- ☐ Kindergarten Teacher
- ☐ First Grade Teacher
- ☐ Second Grade Teacher
- ☐ Third Grade Teacher
- ☐ Fourth Grade Teacher
- ☐ Fifth Grade Teacher
- ☐ Sixth Grade Teacher
- ☐ Seventh Grade Teacher
- ☐ Eighth Grade Teacher
- ☐ Administrator/Assistant Administrator

THANK YOU FOR TIME AND EFFORT IN COMPLETING THIS SURVEY. COMBINED DATA FROM ALL RESPONDENTS WILL BE USEFUL IN DETERMINING NEEDS REGARDING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS.

No identifying information will be used in presenting the results of this survey. All responses will be kept in strict confidence by the researcher.

This research is being conducted with approval from the
University of Northern Colorado.

I appreciate your time and consideration. You are in my prayers.

If you have any questions or concerns related to this research, please contact me:
Jill Ann Perry Hall
(email) jill_ann78@yahoo.com

APPENDIX E

Records Review Spreadsheet

Records Review Spreadsheet

# of students referred to SEAS or Child Find for an evaluation	**’08-’09 School Year**	
	’09-‘10 School Year	
	’10-’11 School Year	
# of students with an IEP or equivalent education plan	**’08-’09 School Year**	
	’09-‘10 School Year	
	’10-’11 School Year	
# of office referrals	**’08-’09 School Year**	
	’09-‘10 School Year	
	’10-’11 School Year	
Social programs taught		
Anti-bullying curriculum utilized		
Types of special educational needs served in the school		

APPENDIX F

Questions Asked of Interviewees

Questions Asked of Interviewees

The following questions were based on the Guiding Principles listed in Appendix A and the work of the following researchers:

Anderson, Klassen, & Georgiou (2007)

Houck & Rogers (1994)

Bibou-Nakou, Kiosseglou, & Stogiannidou (2000)

Booth & Ainscow (2002)

1. Describe the school setting and population of this school.
2. How many years have you been in your position?
3. How many years have you been at this school?
4. What is your personal training and experience in your position?
5. What is your understanding of the mission of Catholic education?
6. What is your definition of special needs?
7. How and in what ways have special education needs changed in your experience throughout your career?
8. Describe your experience with students with special educational needs over the course of your career, including what you did personally in those cases.
9. What is your perception of your ability to include students with special educational needs?
10. What is the most challenging part of including students with special educational needs in the classroom?

11. What do you do differently at your school or in your classroom to address students' special educational needs?
12. What types of special educational needs being served at your school can you identify?
13. Where does your funding come from?
14. Does your school implement a response to intervention (RTI) method and what does your RTI component look like?
15. Describe the identification process for students with special educational needs.
16. How are standardized tests utilized at your school?
17. Describe the student support programs provided by your public school/Child Find.
18. What has your personal experience been with Child Find?
19. What types of training or staff development opportunities are available to the staff at your school regarding serving students with special educational needs?
20. Are there specific school-wide programming or prevention efforts that address students who may experience social, educational, emotional, or behavioral difficulties?
21. What level of support do you feel there is for "inclusive" practices at this school from the students?

22. What level of support do you feel there is for “inclusive” practices at this school from the teachers?
23. What level of support do you feel there is for “inclusive” practices at this school from the administration?
24. What level of support do you feel there is for “inclusive” practices at this school from the superintendents?
25. Are there specific guidelines or policies at your school or from the Archdiocesan offices that address students with special needs?
26. Why do parents choose to send their children to this school?
27. What do interactions with parents of students with special educational needs look like at your school and in your personal experience?
28. Do you have support staff who have been hired specifically to assist with special educational concerns of students at your school?
29. What are you doing to prepare for next school year in terms of addressing students’ special educational needs?

APPENDIX G

List of Services Provided at Catholic Schools

List of Services Provided by Catholic Schools

The following services were mentioned during the course of interviews, e-mails, and observations with the participants in the qualitative portion of the study.

One-to-one work

Special seating considerations in classroom

Modifying work (e.g., providing vocab lists for tests)

Exercise

Repetition/review of material

Time out of classroom to calm down

Specific mechanics of reading explicitly taught

Quiet atmosphere/eliminate distractions

Reader – another person to read to them

Title I

Odd/even probs only/reduced #of tasks/problems

Small group interventions/support

After school support

Computer based services (e.g., Lexia)

Various programs for reading (e.g., Fundations, LETRS, Wilson)

School programs (e.g., Tools for Teaching)

Data-based decision making

Goal oriented service provision (e.g., based on behavior goals)

Alternate assessments (e.g., leveled spelling tests)

Differentiated grading based on known ability level of students

Teacher Tutors after school

Individualized education (not otherwise specified)

Consistency in assignments so students know what to expect

Use of assistant teachers for individualized attention

Peer support (e.g., promote student acceptance)

Peer Tutors

Differentiate mode of assessment (e.g., use white boards for math)

Counseling services

Programs outside school during school year (e.g., speech language services)

Appropriately leveled readers

Parent participation (e.g., tracking homework time)

Teacher proximity to address behavioral issues

Providing additional support/time during lunch or at recess or during specials

Allowing/being understanding of need for movement about the classroom

Foster a caring school environment

Refer out to Child Find

Refer out to counselor

Summer referrals given to parents for tutoring or additional services

Early identification/intervention through data-based assessments (e.g., DIBELS)

Allow different modes of task completion (e.g., allow to use colored pencils)

Preview lessons

In-house pull-out services from resource teachers

Co-teaching

Parent provided/paid for tutoring and services

Evidence-Based Interventions (No specifics given)

APPENDIX H

Internal Review Board Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

August 24, 2011

TO: Megan Babkes Stellino
School of Sport and Exercise Science

FROM: The Office of Sponsored Programs

RE: Exempt Review of *Study of Inclusive Service Provision Regarding Special Educational Needs in Catholic Elementary Schools,* submitted by Jill Ann Perry Hall (Research Advisor: Kathrine Koehler Hak)

The above proposal is being submitted to you for exemption review. When approved, return the proposal to Sherry May in the Office of Sponsored Programs.

I recommend approval.

Megan B Stellino 9/7/11
Signature of Co-Chair Date

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines for ethical principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional Review Board is that the project is exempt from further review.

IT IS THE ADVISOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO NOTIFY THE STUDENT OF THIS STATUS.

Comments:
- minor consent changes
- email 9/7/11

25 Kepner Hall ~ Campus Box #143
Greeley, Colorado 80639
Ph: 970.351.1907 ~ Fax: 970.351.1934

APPENDIX I

Table of Themes and Categories

Theme	General Categories	Typical Categories
Pride	Success on nationally normed tests	Use of nationally normed test results for promotional purposes
	Strong academics	Vocation aspect of teaching
	Integrating Catholic faith into teaching	Sense of community in the schools
		Individual school decision making process
Action	Administrator support for teacher training	Administrators involved in providing special education services
	Mild or moderate special educational needs can be supported	Perceived ability to differentiate instruction
	Acknowledgement of serving students with special educational needs	Individual case basis for determination of need/enrollment
	Variable methods of identification and service provision	Increase in number of services being provided
	Focus on the learner	Increase in number and/or severity of needs
Reliance on Others	Catholic school are unable to serve all special educational needs	Catholic schools utilize outside services and resources to supplement and serve their students with needs
	Parent involvement is important	Misunderstandings of education law impact on Catholic schools
		Teachers felt inadequately prepared to serve students with special educational needs and thus relied on others
Frustration	Child Find interactions	Lack of formal training in serving students with special educational needs
	Individual schools responsible to determine all aspects of serving students with special educational needs	Limited resources

APPENDIX J

Article

A QUALITATIVE LOOK AT SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS' REGULAR EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Jill Ann Perry Hall

University of Northern Colorado

Kathrine Koehler-Hak, Ph.D.

University of Northern Colorado

Through a consensual qualitative research and phenomenological approach, this study explored the function of serving students in Catholic schools with special educational needs. Utilizing a survey, a breadth of data were collected from teachers and administrators on the incidence of special educational needs, services available, accommodations and interventions provided, governance of the schools, and training of staff. Interview and observation data were coded to provide additional depth of to the understanding of this unique context. Findings suggest a variety of special educational needs are addressed in Catholic schools and that these needs are increasing in both number and severity. Four overarching themes emerged from the data: (a) Pride; (b) Action; (c) Willingness; and (d) Tension. Information from this study can be used to help Catholic school districts develop a comprehensive system of service provision for their students with special educational needs.

Keywords: Catholic Education, Phenomenology, Inclusion, Special Education, Systems Change

Nationwide, there is an increase in the number of non-public schools, such as charter, private, and parochial schools (United States Department of Education, 2009). There are many reasons why parents elect to send their children to non-public schools. Non-public schools often foster a student body that values education, is dedicated to academic success, maintains religious and/or cultural traditions, and school values that align with families' beliefs and aspirations (Ascher, 1986; Martinez, Godwin, Kemerer, & Perna, 1995). Catholic schools are one of the oldest, largest, and most established private school groups in the United States (Eigenbrood, 2005, United States Department of Education, 2009). However, the enrollment in Catholic schools has steadily declined since its height of enrollment in the mid 1960's at 4.5 million, to about 2 million students currently (National Catholic Education Association, 2010; United States Department of Education, 2009).

In the general population, student problems ranging from learning disabilities to behavioral, social, and emotional problems are on the rise in the United States (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Ysseldyke et al., 1997). It stands to reason that student problems are not merely public school phenomena, but are also evident in Catholic schools (Eigenbrood, 2005). In fact, researchers have found that a growing number of Catholic schools are serving students with special educational needs (Bello, 2006; Hunt, Joseph, & Nuzzi, 2002), and that the proportion of students served with disabilities is similar to that of students served in the public schools (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2002). However, Catholic schools are much less likely to have special education resource rooms and personnel (Eigenbrood, 2005). This fact often precludes students with disabilities from attending Catholic schools.

Studies have found that some Catholic schools were making accommodations to assist students with disabilities by utilizing the skill and knowledge base of their teachers and staff (Bello, 2006; USCCB, 2002; USCCB, 2008), which is consistent with the mission of Catholic schools. Catholic schools typically educate all children within the general education classroom (USCCB, 2002). In order to continue to fulfill their mission to welcome and teach all students, regardless of their disability, Catholic schools would benefit from an in depth look at current inclusion services in order to determine how they could assist a greater number of students in need.

Using both an emerging Consensual Qualitative Research method and guided by phenomenology, this study explored the current practices of Catholic schools in the area of special educational needs from the perspective of teachers and administrators. The data provided significant perspective on the areas of need as well as areas of strength of those inclusive practices.

Method

Participants

Teachers and administrators (including assistant principals) in 33 Kindergarten through 8th grade Catholic parochial schools in a Rocky Mountain region participated in this study. The Internal Review Board at the University of Northern Colorado approved of the study, and permission to perform the study was obtained from the Superintendent of Catholic Schools prior to soliciting volunteers for the study. The researcher served in three of the schools during the course of the study as a school psychologist intern. These three schools were utilized for piloting the survey to be used in the quantitative portion of the study. The administrators and teachers were interviewed, observed, and asked to

share insight via e-mail into their experiences with students with special educational needs over the course of seven months. The volunteer teachers' experience varied from 7 years to 26 years, and they taught in the 2nd through 5th grades. The administrators' were either the principal or assistant principal at the participating school, and their experience in their position ranged from 3 to 10 years.

Data Collection

The researcher met with the interview participants primarily during the second half of the school year, performing 24 separate interviews that lasted an average of about 30 minutes each. Observations in the schools and teacher's classrooms occurred on a monthly basis. The researcher observed in the participating teachers' classrooms during an instruction period, looking for specific inclusion practices. Confidentiality was ensured and maintained by coding all data with acronyms known only to the researcher and stored on the researcher's personal computer in password protected files.

Instrumentation

Data were collected through the use of a researcher-compiled survey, called the *Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School.* The survey was based on the work by two researchers who also looked at the special educational needs service provision in Catholic schools, though at different grade levels than the current study. Bello (2006) published the *Survey of the Status of Special Education Services in Catholic High Schools,* and McDonald (2008) developed the *Primary Level (K-2) Special Education Practices in Catholic Elementary Schools.*

Section 1 of the current study's *Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School* asked participants to identify the incidence of 22 different

special educational needs in their classrooms. Section 2 contained questions regarding general special education program information. This section provided the respondent's opinion on any changes in the population of students with special needs or the number of services provided to students over the past three years. Additionally, Section 2 asked respondents to indicate whether or not their school provided certain services for students with special educational needs or disabilities.

Sections 3, 5, and 6 of the survey were used to determine the academic interventions, the roles of the teacher in relation to educational supports, and teacher preparation for students with special educational needs or disabilities. Section 4 contained questions regarding the extent to which administrators support inclusive education, and challenges the school may face in supporting students with special educational needs or disabilities. The survey ends with Section 7, which collected minimal demographic information such as number of years teaching or in administration, number of years at the present school, and current position in the school.

Test-retest reliability measures were utilized in a pilot phase of the study to indicate the survey's reliability. With the pilot survey feedback, changes were made to the final study survey. The returned survey pairs were cross-tabulated to calculate percentage of agreement between the test and retest paired values for each item of the survey. The pilot survey was tested for reliability with a small (n=11) group of participants similar to the population to be studied. Median percentages of agreement for the test-retest participants ranged from 69% to 86% on the different sections of the survey. This indicates a satisfactorily positive correlation of responses.

Guiding principles and sample questions for the interviews and writing prompts were based on different inclusion studies (for instance, Anderson, Klassen, & Georgiou, 2007; Bibou-Nakou, Kiosseglou, & Stogiannidou, 2000; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Houck & Rogers, 1994; Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995; Odom et al., 2004; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998). Data were obtained through observations, interviews, writing prompts, and records review. The participating teachers and administrators were asked individually to participate in up to four interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was audiotaped with permission of the participant. On a weekly basis, writing prompts were sent via e-mail to the teachers, administrators, and focus group members. The prompts were based on general inclusion themes, and/or need for clarification regarding previously obtained data (i.e., interviews or observations). Observations in each of the teachers' classrooms occurred the week of each teacher interview and were conducted by the researcher during an academic class taught by the participating teachers. Observations lasted one entire class period, ranging from about 30 minutes to 60 minutes. Separate observations of the target school settings were recorded in narrative form.

Analysis

In total, 729 minutes of interviews were recorded. The edited transcribed interviews produced 11,570 lines of code-able text. An additional 40 short-answer e-mails were received that helped to expand on data gathered via interviews and survey. Three hundred fifty-one minutes of observations took place in the classrooms of participating teachers, again providing comparison data for other pieces of data. Ninety-three surveys were returned, yielding over 9,400 pieces of statistically analyzable data.

By overlapping interview questions with writing prompts and looking for confirming or disconfirming evidence during observations, it was hoped that evidentiary adequacy might be achieved.

The research design for this emerging qualitative research was influenced by the Consensual Qualitative Research [CQR] method (Hill, Thompson, & Nutt Williams, 1997; Hill, Knox, Thompson, Nutt Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005). Hill et al. (1997) note that phenomenology was influential in developing the CQR method. Therefore, methodology for the current study is described in light of both phenomenology and the CQR method.

Open coding, or horizontalization, consists of analyzing small portions (sentences or parts of sentences) and using the words in the sentence or a descriptor that captures the essence of the words, also known as *in vivo* coding (Creswell, 2007). These descriptor words were then systematically compared and contrasted in order to determine a sophisticated coding structure (textural and structural descriptions) from which categories may be formed, called axial coding (Merriam, 2009). Codes and categories developed from this study's data were sorted, compared and contrasted until the data was saturated, i.e. no other new codes or categories became apparent. Core categories emerged when coded categories were found to be central to other categories, occurred frequently in the data, were inclusive of and easily related to other categories, and implied a more general theory (Creswell, 2007). Two research assistants were recruited from the researcher's graduate school program to assist in coding the transcribed interviews.

Dependability

Strategies used to enhance dependability were in place throughout the study. Portions of the survey used in this study had been published and were reported to be reliable with a similar population. Further piloting of the *Survey of Special Educational Needs in the Catholic Elementary School* also indicated adequate reliability in test-retest analysis. The use of multiple forms of qualitative information gathering (interviews, personal writing, observations, and records review) served the purpose of providing evidence of dependability through data triangulation. Furthermore, interview and writing prompt responses were reviewed on a weekly basis and allowed the researcher to create a list of potential key points to observe in the following weeks.

Trustworthiness

As with dependability, the use of different modes of obtaining data also helped address issues of trustworthiness common in research. The Bello (2006) and McDonald (2008) surveys, upon which the *Survey of Special Educational Needs In the Catholic Elementary School* was based, had been published after undergoing an assessment of validity. Furthermore, by using member checks endorsed by Creswell (2007), or testimonial validity endorsed by the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997), trustworthiness was achieved by utilizing feedback from the participants, or member checks.

Trustworthiness of the data was also determined by utilizing questions in the interviews and writing prompts that were similar to those asked in previous research (Anderson et al., 2007; Bibou-Nakou et al., 2000; Booth & Ainscow, 2002, Houck and Rogers, 1994). This allowed comparisons to previously published data. Utilizing trained and monitored team members in the coding of the data helped to ensure less bias in

determining the themes and categories that emerged from the data. The team members maintained a one-step-removed stance at different times throughout the coding procedures to ensure other possible explanations for the data were not overlooked. Finally, trustworthiness was achieved by clearly presenting the procedures used to provide confirmability of the data.

Results

Interview data were analyzed and four overarching themes emerged from the data: (a) Pride; (b) Action; (c) Willingness; and (d) Tension. Each theme has data, when available, from teacher and administrator interviews, e-mail writing prompts, and observations. Data from the survey plays a key, supporting role for the interview data, and is integrated throughout to bring further clarity or support to the corresponding theme.

Pride

There was a sense of pride from all of the interviewees when they discussed the education they were providing students. There seemed to be an expressed identity and satisfaction with the quality education, the sense of community, and the importance of the Catholic school system, both systematically and individually. Additionally, participants were proud of their students' academic success and reported a desire to have Catholic school students with special educational needs experience that same success within a faith-based school environment.

When asked about the mission of Catholic education, five of the eight interviewees mentioned "strong academics" or "good education" in their answers. One of the general categories in this theme was the sense of pride regarding the success Catholic

school students had on nationally normed academic assessments. They stated the test was a factor in tracking individual student progress, grouping students by areas of need, and determining changes in teaching practices.

An additional typical category emerged regarding the mission of Catholic education and was based on the sense of community formed in Catholic schools. Interviewees mentioned they believed Catholic schools had a strong community and that this had a positive impact on students with special educational needs.

There was a sense of pride in their perceived ability to provide an education that was "advanced" and centered around a higher set of expectations at the Catholic schools. One stated, "I think a Catholic education allows anyone, because the term Catholic [means] universal, it allows anyone, from any experience, from any faith, to be given an opportunity to come into my classroom and learn different perspectives." Overall, the ideas of providing a strong education while integrating the Catholic faith into that education were generally recognized by the interviewees as the mission of Catholic education.

Action

The theme of Action encompasses what the Catholic schools in this study were doing to support the education of students with special educational needs. This overarching theme includes categories related to all aspects of meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. This includes the process for identifying students with suspected disabilities as well as the services they are provided. Additionally, interviewees described the types of special educational needs they serve at their schools.

Leadership was recognized as an important role within the schools. One of the ways that all administrators supported teachers was through their encouragement for ongoing professional development courses or training to gain skills in serving students with special educational needs. As one administrator remarked, “if they need the time off for the training, go. Take the time off and go get trained. Whatever I can do to make them better stewards of their talents for the kids.” Administrators saw the need for more support and more services, as did the teachers, and all reported a by willingness to work to provide those services

Each interviewee, particularly the administrators due to their jurisdiction in enrollment, mentioned the fact that only “mild” or “moderate” special educational needs could be supported at their schools. Participants described variable methods of identification and service provision for students with special educational needs. The majority of teachers and administrators reported the identification of students experiencing special educational needs was carried out through an informal process. There was no indication that there was any formal paperwork beyond verbally sharing what worked and what didn’t work, and little data beyond standardized testing, and report card grades in the students’ files.

As one interviewee reported, students with special educational needs are students who “learn a different way.” In general, it was recognized among interviewees that special educational needs included learning difficulties, behavioral problems, physical disabilities, and emotional struggles. Using a weighted statistical analysis, the top five learning disabilities or special educational needs reported by survey respondents (N=93) were as follows, from most often to less often identified: (1) Attention difficulties; (2)

Organizational skills; (3) Other health impairment (including ADD/ADHD); (4) Reading Disability; and (5) Listening skills.

Many of the interventions and accommodations teachers made or administrators suggested were based on "experience" in the past with similar students who had struggled in their classrooms. It appeared that teachers may hold different ideas about what constitutes an intervention. Alternatively, it is possible that teachers do not recognize their current teaching practices as formal interventions but instead simply view them as part of their everyday practice. Focus on the learner was generally apparent during the interviews with the teachers and administrators. There was a sense that they were developing a deeper understanding about what it meant to serve students with special educational needs, and finding greater acceptance of their role in that service.

Willingness

Willingness is a theme that is related to many different topic areas. Interviewees acknowledged they were unable to serve all special educational needs and therefore needed to rely on the public schools or other professionals to serve those students. They also recognized the impact of family choice in respect to Catholic education. Although interviewees also discussed relying on services from Child Find or Title I resource teachers to identify and provide services for students with learning difficulties, they also discussed *not* feeling impacted by education law.

Additional cost is one of the reasons that school administrators were unwilling or unable to enroll students with special educational needs that would require structural modification to the school environment. On the other hand, the faculty and administrators at Catholic schools pride themselves on the services they are able to provide, even if

those services are referring the family to other resources. Teacher and administrator interviewees expressed either appreciation for having a counselor on staff or a desire to know how to refer students to others for those services.

Another category within this theme is reliance on parents. The parents' role in education is paramount in Catholic schools, and was noted as such by every interviewee. Without family sponsored assistance, it is unknown whether students with special educational needs would make the same academic gains as they would with the support available in the Catholic schools alone. Interviewees from three of the four schools reported having students who were receiving parent-funded services (e.g., tutors and paraprofessionals paid for by the parents) during the school day.

The state department of education provides guidelines for identification and service delivery that seemed unfamiliar to Catholic school teachers and administrators in this study. Within IDEA, there is a general process for identification of student disability, guidelines for communication with the local public schools, and descriptions of private school and parents' rights regarding children with special educational needs. However, the overwhelming consensus among interviewees was, as one interviewee stated, "these laws do not apply to us [in Catholic schools]." Another interviewee explained, "From what I have been taught we don't have to do anything [under the law]. That's simply something that is dictated from the courts and the politicians to the public schools."

Public school services, professional service providers, education law, and parents have an impact on Catholic schools. By recognizing the limitations in their ability to support special educational needs, teachers, and administrators can further support their students by referring to other professionals to provide those services. Although not often

recognized, Catholic schools are impacted by education law. They have rights and responsibilities according to IDEA and ADA statutes, but it is unclear the level of understanding teachers and administrators have about the impact of education law on Catholic schools.

Tension

Interview and survey participants portrayed a dichotomous perception of many of the facets already discussed in the above themes. For instance, although they recognized the merit and assistance available from outside sources, they also expressed a great amount of mistrust and frustration with the procurement of those resources. These dichotomous perceptions were clearly articulated by the majority of the interviewees, and are therefore presented again within the theme of Tension. The knowledge and beliefs which teachers and administrators use to determine services for those students indicated misunderstandings about education law and ideology behind specialized instruction, lack of a collaborative stance with outside entities, and mistrust of the publicly funded Child Find system.

One aspect of tension was related to the timing of assessments with regard to referrals to Child Find. One teacher remarked, “I have found through experience that if we don't submit names [to Child Find] by the end of January, they may be put off until the following year. So that's a whole year's worth of loss of academics with that child.” The other major complaint was that referred students sometimes did not qualify for services. Students in Catholic schools may appear to be struggling more in comparison to their overall high achieving peers. However, when compared to a national standard, those same students may be within a typical range of performance. One teacher recognized this,

however, and acknowledged the benefit of an assessment from Child Find. “So even if they don’t qualify for any help, because they’ve [Child Find] cut back on their budget, they will give you strategies to use.”

The tension for teachers was that they wanted to be able to provide services to the students, but felt they were not effectively able to do so for various reasons. A lack of structure became apparent regarding serving students with special educational needs. Teachers and administrators shared concern about their perceived lack of formal preparation to serve students with special educational needs Also, the teachers did not have specific policy or guidelines to follow for identifying students with special educational needs. Furthermore, there was no established protocol for intervening or accommodating students’ needs in the regular education classroom. Teachers expressed a concern that their school was not serving students with special educational needs in ways that would most effectively benefit the student.

Sixty-six percent of survey respondents supported “learning strategies and differentiating instruction” as the most highly ranked professional development topic of interest. It is likely teachers and administrators recognized their need for greater information on ways in which to support students with special educational needs through differentiation of instruction. Other supported areas of professional development included characteristics of specific disabilities (53%), and alternative assessment and grading practices (46%). These findings indicate teachers and administrators are interested in learning more about how to support students with special educational needs, and that they would like further training in doing so.

Perceptions of feeling adequately prepared to serve students with special educational needs were more highly supported by administrators than teachers, with administrators indicating feeling more prepared than teachers. Interestingly, both administrators and teachers felt much less adequately prepared to recommend research-based interventions. In general, when administrator and teacher responses are compared, it is fairly evident that both groups hold similar opinions regarding their interaction with students with special educational needs.

The survey also explored perceptions of the primary challenges schools faced regarding supporting students with special educational needs. Overwhelmingly, limited financial and/or professional resources were indicated as the primary challenge, with 71% of respondents indicating this response. Only 10% of survey respondents endorsed limited commitment, interest, or knowledge from administration as a challenge for their school. In light of the data regarding support and knowledge from the administrators, respondents may or may not recognize the administration has limited financial or professional resources to serve students with special educational needs. Limited resources (financial and/or professional) were the most highly rated challenge for the schools by both administrators and teachers (75% and 70%, respectively). Therefore, administrative support may be linked more to budgeting decisions made by the administrators rather than to administrators' philosophical stance on the level of support students with special educational needs should receive in Catholic schools. In other words, an administrator may be emotionally or philosophically invested in serving students with special educational needs, but unable to serve them at the school due to financial constraints.

All of the interview respondents spoke of struggles they perceived in terms of serving students with special educational needs. One of the most often mentioned struggle was a lack of services, linked with a lack of funding. Because the schools are tuition dependent, two of the three administrators explicitly mentioned the great pressure to find funding for the services they wished to provide their students. One administrator described it as, “We are limited in funds and when we are limited in funds we are also limited in support.” Paradoxically, this administrator’s school had five support staff dedicated to serving the special educational needs of their students. By comparison to other Catholic schools in this area, this school was very well supported when it came to providing services to students with special educational needs. Through research and over time, another administrator was able to garner numerous federally funded and school funded services as well. This administrator was also concerned with the lack of time to do more research, not only in order to maximize the federally funded services available to the school, but also researching evidence-based interventions that would be appropriate within their RTI program.

Teachers felt there was great demand on classroom time when it came to providing services to students struggling with special educational needs. The interviewed teachers expressed they did not want to provide too many modifications or accommodations lest the students “get too used to it.” They saw a need for balance between aiding a student with special educational needs in ways that would promote their success without inducing the students to expect those accommodations later in schooling and later in life. When asked what the greatest struggle was in the classroom, one teacher remarked, “Probably just making the accommodations that they need. It's so varied from

each kid. And I guess making sure that you're not doing too much for them and hoping that you're doing enough. That's kind of the frustrating part." In this teacher's estimation, students would not continue to be provided the accommodations or interventions when they got into middle and high school. Therefore providing those accommodations and interventions in younger grade levels only decreased the chance the student would instead develop compensation techniques for their special educational need that they could utilize later on in life.

It also became evident that all interviewees believed their individual school was responsible to provide services to the best of their ability and had little guidance or direction to do so. Unless, as presented above, an administrator or teacher took the steps to educate themselves or research avenues of supporting students with special educational needs, struggling students would remain as such. A typical response from interviewees was related to a frustration and desire for more guidance for serving students with special educational needs from the Archdiocesan level. As one interviewee described:

> I think because the Archdiocese has the organization where they [the superintendents] believe each school is autonomous, that each school does what they feel is best for their particular population of students, I don't think we're ever going to see a directive come down [from the Archdiocesan level]. … We have talked about how part of us would like to have more directives come from the Archdiocese that were all the same, then that takes away from our local school control, which I think we pride ourselves in being the best we can in our neighborhood, even compared to our neighborhood Catholic schools.

While the schools may desire more direction and support in service provision, they may also feel they know better the unique needs of their student population and prefer more control in servicing those needs.

Encapsulating the tension expressed by administrators, teachers, and survey respondents, the Catholic schools are currently operating without a structure for serving

students with special educational needs. Personnel from every school have developed their own way of identifying and serving students. Still, they desire more guidance and support from outside entities, including other schools within the Catholic school district. It is, at this point in time, unclear what organized and collaborative service provision among the Catholic schools might do for serving students with special educational needs.

Based on the general and typical categories that emerged within the themes, the following experience description may be expected in Catholic schools in the Rocky Mountain region:

Catholic schools have great pride in their students' achievement. They base this pride on nationally normed test results that indicate their population of students achieves at a level higher than most public and private school students. They believe their schools provide strong academics and employ teachers and administrators passionate about providing that education. The integration of the Catholic faith into the teaching practices is also an area of pride, indicating it is an aspect of the mission of Catholic education that the teachers and administrators take seriously.

The Catholic schools are doing many things to provide quality education to their students, including students with special educational needs. Although they are only able to serve primarily mild or moderate special educational needs, they are doing so using best practices and information gathered from on-going training and their previous experiences. Each school has a unique approach to identifying and serving their students with special educational needs. By focusing on the learner, the schools are doing what they can to provide the best education possible to the students enrolled in their schools.

Catholic schools maintain a relationship with many entities in an effort to enhance their education for students with special educational needs. School personnel recognize they are unable to serve all student needs and have been able to supplement with outside services or hire on specialized personnel in order to serve as many and as varied a population of students with special educational needs as possible. They involve parents in decision-making and service provision whenever a special educational need is present, yet recognize that formal channels of communication are not always present

Finally, there is a sense of frustration or tension in the Catholic school personnel's desire to serve all students seeking a Catholic education and their ability to serve students with special educational needs. Although there are supports available through the local public schools, teachers and administrators find the interactions with Child Find cumbersome and at times non-productive. The responsibility of the schools to provide services to students with special educational needs is juxtaposed with perceptions of a lack of formal training and ability to serve the students. Similarly, teachers and administrators overwhelmingly recognize they are limited in resources to address the needs of all students with special educational needs. The frustration, however, may be a motivating factor that leads administrators and teachers in Catholic schools to seek alternative methods of training and service provision, thereby allowing them to provide Catholic education to many students with special educational needs.

Discussion

Given the unique and complex elements of inclusive practices in Catholic schools, an analysis of the current strengths and barriers as related to inclusive education is presented in Table 1 using the framework of the Theory of Ecology of Human

Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Four levels of inter-related systems (macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem) are presented in terms of the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model, presented in Chapter 1.

The broadest level, the macrosystem, of the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model incorporates the mission of Catholic education and the incidence of childhood disorders. Regarding the mission of Catholic education, nearly all interviewees reported at least a two-pronged understanding: (a) the importance of a good Catholic education that does not necessarily mean teaching students with special needs; and (b) teaching the Catholic faith and/or developing good citizens through a strong sense of community. This emulates what leaders within the National Catholic Education Association describe makes Catholic schools unique and a model in education: they focus on educating the whole child (Robey, 2011). Although there was consistency in the understanding of the mission of Catholic education among the teachers and administrators in the current study, there was no link to educating students with special educational needs, a paradigm shift that research shows may be difficult to overcome (Thornton, Shepperson, & Canavero, 2007).

Table 1

Barriers and Strengths in Relation to the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model

	Strengths	Barriers
Macrosystem Level	A common understanding of the mission of Catholic education	Serving students with special educational needs is not viewed as part of the mission of Catholic education
	Enhanced sense of community and provision of catechetical teaching	Undetermined ability to serve and catechize students with special educational needs
	Strong academic history and use of testing results for promotional purposes	No current structure or guidelines for accommodating students with special educational needs
Exosystem Level	Child Find services are available for qualifying students	Lack of structure and support in what is expected from Child Find and negative opinion of the services overall
	Individualized decision making process for enrollment of students with special educational needs	No standardized, consistent, or structured manner in which decisions are made for enrollment
	Desire to know more about education law	Misinterpretation of federal education law
Mesosystem Level	More resources than anticipated	Little training or follow-up support for programs used; Resources not coordinated between schools
	Administrators supportive of resources and resource teachers	Lack of funding to provide full amount of services administrators would prefer; Varied levels of administrator support
	Support from administrators and superintendents if requested	Lack of policy regarding special educational needs students
Microsystem Level	Teachers learn from real-life experiences with students with special educational needs	Teachers rely less on research-based and data-driven techniques to address special educational needs
	Teachers attend numerous workshops and program information sessions	Little if any follow-up support or training occurs after the workshops or program information sessions

The next related system level, the exosystem, is related to the education law and Child Find mandates and their effect on Catholic education. The Catholic school personnel had misinterpretations of education law, the most common of which was that the laws did not apply to Catholic schools. Also, the Catholic schools used Child Find services, yet were frustrated by perceived difficulties in the identification process. This level of the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model was the level at which the most tension was reported by participants in this study. Very little research has been done on the interactions between Catholic schools and public entities. However, researchers such as Kallemeyn (2009) note that public policy may have an impact on Catholic education, particularly when related to assessments that are state funded.

The mesosystem is the next level of the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model. Included at this level are school resources, administrator philosophy, and services provided. As it currently exists, each school within the Catholic education system is separated from all others. Each school and each resource teacher remained an "island" unto themselves. This phenomenon is not unique to the Catholic schools in this study. As reported in an article by Meyer (2007), Father Kevin Hanbury of Newark, New York described the Catholic school system there by saying, "We have a system of schools, not a school system." This sentiment was lamented by teachers participating in the study, yet administrators, who arguably have control over the collaborative nature of their school resources and personnel, did not overtly express the desire to collaborate with other schools. There was a competitive nature among the Catholic schools, as two teachers and one administrator interviewed reported, because of declining enrollments. Further, each

teacher is somewhat isolated in his or her efforts to figure out how best to meet the needs of the learner.

A teacher's philosophy and training are aspects of the microsystem of the Inclusion Ecological Systems Model, and constitute the practical "frontline" of service provision. Though all interviewees reported being supportive of teaching students with special educational needs, they also reported relying heavily on their real-life experiences as to how to support these students. They sought and obtained personal training through seminars or conferences, which might contribute to what Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg (1987) termed "disjointed incrementalism." This means programs are instituted one by one in the school, likely to legitimately answer a need for the students, but that eventually become tedious and unscientifically presented, thereby losing their effectiveness. Instead, schools may benefit more from obtaining focused, on-going, and system-wide training in methodologies. This may in turn increase the collaborative nature of the schools, as teachers lean on one another for support in the common service provision models.

In general, the findings in this study confirm and enrich research about Catholic education and provide insight into the day-to-day practices and perceptions of Catholic school personnel regarding serving students with special educational needs. Catholic schools do not provide a strict inclusion-based education, but instead promote staff education and acquiring skills through workshops and other trainings. Many of the schools even employ special education-related personnel to assist their students. Finally, although there are difficulties in interactions with the public schools, the study participants reported a desire for more information and assistance from the public school

entities. On a case-by-case basis, Catholic schools in the area of study appear to be putting effort into serving students with mild to moderate special educational needs.

The teachers and administrators in Catholic schools see their work as vocation and are accordingly willing to put forth great effort in ensuring their students achieve academically. With experience, hard work and dedication, and a knowledgeable, supportive working relationships with other professionals, many teachers and administrators have made great strides in providing an excellent education to students with special educational needs. It would not be a monumental task to coordinate these efforts, collaborate with professionals already associated with the Catholic schools and other related, highly qualified individuals (e.g., speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists), and create a centralized entity from which materials, information, and services could be exchanged. By taking into account the various ecological systems that would be affected by such a service provision system, Catholic schools could serve an even greater continuum of students with special educational needs.

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APPENDIX K

Permission to Utilize Surveys

Print - Close Window

Subject: Re: Special Education Practices in Catholic Schools
From: Anna McDonald (McDonald@nativityschool.com)
To: jill_ann78@yahoo.com;
Date: Tue, 24 May 2011 15:39:21

Ms. Hall,

An electronic copy of the survey / dissertation is on file with Proquest. I don't have their contact info with me, but, you can go to usfca.edu - and get in touch with the ICEL department and they can surely point you in the right direction. I am happy to give you permission to include my survey / dissertation so long as you cite it in your references. But, I can't send you my electronic copy. Upon graduation, I filed with Proquest and (signed my rights away ;)) it is now their intellectual property. You have to buy a copy from them, but I don't think it's very expensive.

Hope that helps.

Anna McDonald, Ed.D
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Subject:Re: Special Education Services in Catholic Schools
From: Denise Bello (denisebello2@gmail.com)
To: jill_ann78@yahoo.com;
Date: Thu, 26 May 2011 07:54:48
Hi Jill,
Thank you for your interest in my research. I would be happy to have you use my surveys...I am currently
out of town on vacation, but will be back on Friday and can send you electronic copies of these...upon
receiving them, you may have some questions...and I would be happy to chat with you regarding any you
might have. Since I developed the surveys myself, there is probably some tweaking that needs to be done
for your needs...as well as some in general, based on my own experience with the data...
in the meantime, good luck with your work...I would certainly be interested in hearing more about it at some
point...
d
On Thu, May 26, 2011 at 2:27 AM, Jill Hall <jill_ann78@yahoo.com> wrote:
Dear Dr. Bello,
My name is Jill Hall, and I am a PhD student in school psychology at the University of Northern
Colorado.
While researching for my dissertation, I have come across your 2006 article in the Council for
Exceptional Children describing your study on the status of special education services in Catholic high
schools. I will be studying Catholic elementary school teacher and principal perceptions of inclusion
and service provision to students with special needs. Your surveys, I believe, may be beneficial to the
analysis. Is there a way that I may access the surveys online, or obtain an electronic or hard copy?
Would you be able to give me permission to use the surveys for my dissertation?
Thank you for your time, as well as for your research!
Sincerely,
Jill Ann Perry Hall