# CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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## ABSTRACT

There has been much research regarding the effectiveness of special education and much written regarding the philosophy of various educational placements for exceptional students, yet the viewpoints and experiences of the students have not received the same attention. The goal of this study was to gain insight into the perspectives, beliefs, and experiences of children with exceptional learning needs about receiving special education support and to develop a theory which would link these experiences and perceptions to the students' educational, cognitive, and social-emotional development. Using a clinical child interviewing format and nonverbal techniques, fourteen Grade 4, 5, and 6 students with learning disabilities were interviewed about their attitudes toward their special education programs. Through a qualitative analysis of the interview data, eight themes emerged, the most salient of which showed that the participants had an inadequate understanding of special education policies and procedures and perceived that they were excluded and victimized for receiving special education support. The stigmatizing experiences triggered sad and angry feelings and many of the students longed to be more included and integrated. In addition to the eight themes, a core category emerged which was developed into the theory *Self-Protective Manoeuvring*. This theory characterizes the need these students had to protect themselves in light of circumstances which suggested that they were inferior and which reduced their perceptions of control regarding their school lives. The theory comprises four self-protective manoeuvres which include using self-protective attributions to

deal with negative situations, attempting to acquire autonomy and control, expressing hostility and resistance, and passively forfeiting control. Most of these manoeuvres have consequences and if they fail, this may result in reduced motivation, disengagement from school, leaving school prematurely, and depression. These possible consequences and the dissatisfaction expressed by many of the participants in this study implicate a need to continually assess exceptional students' knowledge of, perceptions of, and experiences with their educational placements, both in terms of research and actual practise. In turn, this greater consideration of their viewpoints may have a positive influence on the success of their educational programs and on their social-emotional development.

*The child is curious. He wants to make sense out of things, find out how things work, gain competence and control over himself and his environment, do what he can see other people doing. He is open, receptive, and perceptive.*

(Holt, 1983, p. 287)

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

### Purpose

In North American schools, the education of children with special learning needs has become increasingly prominent as the number of these children remains high and as their needs appear to intensify. This education has occurred in a number of settings and through a number of methods, including segregated schools, self-contained classes in "regular" schools, and withdrawal (pull-out) systems. More and more, the delivery of services to students with exceptional needs is actually taking place in the regular classroom among their peers without disabilities. In the United States, this practice is referred to as the Regular Education Initiative (REI), but it may also be termed inclusion, integration or mainstreaming, depending on the actual practice. The philosophy and rationale behind inclusion are that all students, regardless of their disability or need, deserve to be accepted, included, and educated in regular classrooms among their peers without disabilities. Through this inclusive education, students with disabilities are assumed to have the opportunity to prepare for life in the broader community and society is thought to benefit from the premise of equality for all of its citizens (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). Parents and some educators have been supportive of the Regular Education Initiative and have been asking for more inclusive school programs for students with special needs across Canada (Porter & Richler, 1991). Many studies have shown the support that teachers and parents hold for integration (e.g., Jory, 1991; Ryndak, Downing, Jacqueline, & Morrison, 1995; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) as service delivery for exceptional children moves to this model. However, what remains in many boards of education, at this point in time, is still a cascading system of special education service delivery, with the amount of support provided to each child increasing with the needs of the individual student. Children with mild disabilities, therefore, may be educated in the general education classroom with in-class resource help or some withdrawal help. Children with more severe difficulties (e.g., extreme adjustment difficulties, severe language disabilities) are more likely to receive their education in a segregated, special education class, and perhaps in one that is not situated in their neighbourhood school.

There has been much research into the efficacy, or lack thereof, of special education and into the presumed negative or positive effects of various placement options (e.g., special education, integration). For example, Carlberg and Kavale's (1980) meta-analysis of special education efficacy studies showed that, when compared to regular education, special education was overall inferior in educating special needs pupils as well as in improving their social functioning. Wang and Baker (1985-86) analysed later studies and found that mainstreamed disabled pupils consistently outperformed those who were not mainstreamed in terms of their academic performance and attitude toward learning. There has also been a fair amount of research into the attitudes and perceptions of parents, teachers, and educators regarding special education and integration, with varying results (Green & Shinn, 1994; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Vaughn et al., 1996).

One key area that remains largely unstudied is how children feel about their special education. Only a handful of research studies has looked into the attitudes and understanding that students with special needs have about special education procedures, programs, and placements (Vaughn & Klinger, 1998; Wiener & Manuel, 1994). Thus, there appears to be a paucity of information as to the feelings, opinions, and understanding that the actual consumers of special or mainstreamed education have about their own schooling. This information would be useful for those who are involved in making program and class placement decisions about these children because of the impact that their attitudes may have on their satisfaction with their program and on their academic progress. As the actual consumers of special education, these children should have the right to have their opinions heard and considered. Furthermore, this information may assist those who design and implement educational programs for children with special needs in terms of knowing which aspects are helpful for these children and which aspects need to be modified. By researching their perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with special education and examining the issues which may concern them, we can begin to address these issues. Accordingly, given the shortage of information in the area, its potential usefulness, and the relevance of this topic to current education practices, the purpose and need for this study has developed. The focus of this study has been on exceptional pupils' perceptions and attitudes about special education issues. This included how they felt about receiving help, why they believed they were receiving extra support, what their preference was for service

delivery, and what they understood about identification procedures and the special education process. Special needs children have much to contribute about their concerns, feelings, preferences, and experiences regarding service delivery, but for the most part, have not been given an opportunity to do so. This being so, a major piece of the special education puzzle remains missing - that of the influence of children's perceptions and experiences on the efficacy and process of special education. This study, therefore, has implications for what educators think is best for exceptional children's education as well as for the children's involvement in their own education.

## Review of the Literature

This introduction will review the literature on the theory, delivery, and efficacy of special education as well as more inclusive services, the presumed impact on children, parent and teacher perceptions of both types of provisions, and, finally, the actual research to date regarding pupils' attitudes.

### Theory and Background on Service Delivery for Exceptional Pupils

Children require specialized education and instruction for various reasons. The primary reason tends to be that they are having difficulty with academic aspects of school, including oral language (listening and speaking), written language (reading and writing), or mathematical expectations. Academic difficulties might stem from a learning disability in which there is a delay in one or more basic psychological processes such as perception, attention, memory, thinking, language (Wong, 1991). Alternatively, the children's educational performances may be adversely affected by identified behavioural problems which necessitate some individualized attention and instruction or by a general delay in intellectual development (Day, 1985). More extreme difficulties occur in cases of children with debilitating medical problems, severe communication problems (e.g., autism), or multiple conditions, such as intellectual and medical, compromising their learning (Day, 1985). Special education is set up to attempt to meet the needs of exceptional children who may have any of the above disabling conditions.

In general, placement procedures in special education have used a categorical model whereby students are classified into "distinct" groups such as learning disabled, behavioural, or developmentally delayed (Epps & Tindal, 1987). Following this categorization, they are often placed in settings other than the regular classroom, such as resource rooms or self-contained classrooms. Epps and Tindal (1987) have called into question the effectiveness of instruction through these withdrawal methods as well as the concept of differential programming for different categories of exceptionalities, advocating for inclusive programs for these children. Other writers (Bryan, Bay, & Donahue, 1988) state that inclusion or the regular education initiative may not be enough to meet the needs of, in particular, students with learning disabilities. These professionals believe that, given the specific, neurological differences of students with learning disabilities, classroom modifications alone will probably not adequately meet the needs of these students and classroom teachers may not be able to individualize instruction sufficiently for them. Hence, there is a need for the specialized attention from a special education or resource teacher.

The most common model for organizing special education is the cascade model in which a continuum of instructional arrangements is provided depending on the individual child's needs (Epps & Tindal, 1987). The base of the model is placement in the regular education classroom, which is the least restrictive alternative. Students with exceptional learning needs sometimes function best when they remain in their regular grade classroom and their own teacher is helped in providing special instruction to them (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982). In such placements, consultation help from special education teachers or other professionals may enable the regular education teacher to provide appropriate instruction. Students might also receive direct instruction from a specialist in their general education classroom. On the next levels of the cascade, students may receive up to one half of their education from special education teachers in resource rooms or in other part-time special class placements. They would attend the special education class for specific academic instruction in order to remediate areas of weakness or difficulty and to learn academic skills, but they would also participate in general education activities and receive instruction in a general education class. The other end of the continuum, and a much more restrictive arrangement, is placement in a self-contained setting with no integration into the

regular classroom. In this case, students would usually travel out of their neighbourhood to attend these classes. The most restrictive options are self-contained classes in separate day or residential schools. For many years, most students with disabilities were educated in highly segregated programs and schools or they were excluded from school completely. Gradually, in the 1960s and 70s, the children who were prohibited from attending school were provided with some form of education; however, their classes were still separate from regular classes. This separation formed "Special Education." Children with more severe disabilities, however, continued to be placed in segregated institutions and were viewed as fortunate to receive any education or treatment at all at this time.

In 1975, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which legislated certain educational rights for all children, was passed in the United States. These rights included free and appropriate education for all children (no exclusion for any child), due process rights for children and parents, education in the least restrictive environment, individualized educational programming, and parental involvement in decision making (Epps & Tindal, 1987). This act is now referred to as IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). Recent (1995) amendments to IDEA were intended to improve results for students with disabilities by means of higher expectations and greater access to the general curriculum. In addition, parental involvement in decision-making about their children's educational placement was another key proposal under the recent amendments.

In Canada, legislation in many provinces states that school boards must provide educational services to students with disabilities (e.g., Bill 82 in Ontario, 1980). Yet, how the service is delivered is left up to the local school boards. According to Porter and Richler (1991), most school boards in Canada offer "pull-out" resource room programs for students with mild disabilities, special education classes with some integration for students with moderate disabilities, and segregated classes in regular schools for students with more severe disabilities.

In Ontario, school boards are required to provide special education services and have been since the existence of the Education Amendment Act (Bill 82) in 1980. Essentially, all exceptional children (so identified) in Ontario are eligible to receive special education services and programs. The Report on Special Education (1993) estimated that at least 8% of pupils in Ontario have exceptional needs (excluding visually- or hearing-impaired

children). Given this, it should not be surprising that special education in Ontario is a costly endeavour, representing approximately 10% in total expenditures for education (i.e., $1.3 billion in 1993). In order to be entitled to special education services, children are deemed exceptional through each board's Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), which is a requirement of each board in Ontario. The IPRC examines the information on students referred to the committee, determines whether each child can be identified as having exceptional needs, and recommends a placement should the child be judged as exceptional. Exceptional students in Ontario are those whose behaviour, communication, intellectual, or physical abilities are such that she or he requires special education support. The actual wording of each exceptionality may differ from board to board. Most boards have behavioural, learning disability, mild intellectual disability, developmentally delayed, and multiple disability, among others. See Appendix A for a description of various placement options offered, depending on the needs of the student, at the time this study was carried out. The identification and placement decisions from the original IPRC are reviewed annually through IPRC review meetings. It should be noted that currently, Ontario boards are eligible for additional special education funds for their most needy pupils through a system termed Intensive Support Amount (ISA).

Under Bill 82, each board is also legally required to establish a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), consisting of up to 12 representatives from local parent associations and 3 members from the board. The SEAC may make recommendations to the board regarding special education programs and services in respect of exceptional pupils in the board. Thus, input from specialized parent groups (e.g., Autism association) is sought, but the level of involvement may vary from board to board. Furthermore, parents of exceptional children are invited and encouraged to take part in the IPRC, to help with decision-making, and to be involved in developing an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for their children. Recommendations from the Report on Special Education in Ontario (1993) further encouraged this input, hoping to improve the communication between parents and the IPR committee, by recommending that parents be informed that they have certain rights. These rights include having an advocate present at an IPRC, being provided with an interpreter if necessary, and receiving a parent's guide to the IPRC process. Thus, more and more, boards are recognizing, and hopefully considering, the value of gaining input from

parents. However, in examining legal cases across various provinces, Baldwin (1991) concluded that parents really do not meaningfully direct their exceptional children's education and, instead, have no choice but to rely on the education system's competence in making decisions. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that nowhere in the recommendations of the Report on Special Education (1993) is there reference to students' rights or to involving them more in the process which so affects them.

Even with legislation such as IDEA in the U.S. and Bill 82 in Ontario, special education is still perceived by many to be failing the children it aims to serve and help. Support for this belief comes from factors such as the high drop-out rate and criminal activity, as well as the low independent living skills and employment rate, of special education students (NASBE report, 1982). There are also people who believe that the development of a special education system has been harmful because it excludes exceptional students, prevents their social contact with non-exceptional peers, and undermines the capability of regular education to service all students effectively (Porter & Richler, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1996). In terms of identifying children as having special needs, Gartner and Lipsky (1987) believe that labelling will adversely affect the expectations held for disabled students in that it leads to receiving a less enriched curriculum, to being excused from standards and tests given to other students, and to receiving grades that they have not truly earned. Despite the fact that IDEA has advocated for educating special needs children as much as possible with children who are not handicapped, the special education system has remained isolated and separate from general education (separate staff, separate funding, separate training, and classification). Yet, there are hindering factors to the joining of regular and special education such as the reluctance of the regular education system to accommodate special students as well as the fact that many special educators believe that general education cannot be trusted to meet the needs of exceptional pupils (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

What has developed out of this discontent with special education is the Regular Education Initiative (REI) which involves placing exceptional children in the least restrictive alternative possible. This initiative is adhered to by two groups of people, one wanting mild to moderately disabled students (learning disabilities, behaviour disorders) to be mainstreamed (e.g., Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1990) and the other advocating for

severely intellectually disabled children to be taken out of separate schools and placed into their neighbourhood schools (Stainback & Stainback, 1984; 1996). Most REI proponents do not advocate an end to special education, but they want to have teachers take on a more cooperative role in terms of involving regular classroom teachers in planning for and educating exceptional children. The primary focus of the REI movement is to strengthen the academic performance of students with disabilities and those at risk for school failure.

The Inclusive Schools Movement (Stainback & Stainback, 1984; 1996) is an offshoot of the REI movement. It advocates for the elimination of the entire continuum of services and focuses on people with severe intellectual disabilities. The message tends to be a more radical one of wanting all people with special needs normalized. In contrast to the REI, the Inclusive Schools movement focuses more on the social benefits thought to occur through inclusion than on any academic gains. Full inclusion in regular education is thought to avoid the harmful effects of exclusion from regular classrooms. Such exclusion is assumed to be damaging to students because they feel inferior from spending no time with "regular students" (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). In addition, the dual system is thought to be an unnecessary and costly way to classify and label students, especially because classification can be unreliable, and of little value (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). There is some research to support a lowered self-concept in children attending special classes compared to low-achieving children in regular classrooms (Leondari, 1993), but there is no evidence that exclusion from associating with regular students has caused this lower self-concept.

In summary, there are recent movements that are advocating for changes to the education of exceptional students. However, these are theoretical and philosophical viewpoints which need to be examined in terms of the research literature. The following is a review of the research on service delivery for pupils with exceptional learning needs.

## Research on Service Delivery for Exceptional Pupils

The overall effectiveness of a separate education system for pupils with exceptional needs has not proven to be resounding. Remaining in special education does not necessarily result in academic or social gains (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980). In addition, Gartner and Lipsky (1987) reported that fewer than 5% of students who have been designated as requiring special education ever leave that system and return to mainstream, general

education classrooms. If and when these students are actually mainstreamed (usually for part or all of the school day), they may become confused about where they belong and may not necessarily develop a healthy self-concept. They may not be accepted by other students as part of a regular class if they only come in for certain subjects (Gartner and Lipsky, 1987). Furthermore, the desired result of developing adaptive social skills through associating with regular education peers may not be achieved if these students are not integrated during free play times (e.g., gym, play activities).

It appears, then, that there is much to consider when determining the most suitable placements for exceptional children in general and on an individual basis. The following sections will touch upon the large body of special education research to date. This research includes studies regarding the self-concept, peer relations, and acceptance by teachers and non-exceptional peers of children with learning disabilities. The focus will be on the relationship between these variables and special education identification and placement. The outcome research on the effectiveness of service delivery models will also be reviewed. I have chosen to focus on children with learning disabilities, both in this review and in my study, because they make up a large proportion of students in special education (Halgren & Clarizio, 1993; Walker et al., 1988) and because there is a considerable amount of research in the aforementioned areas which has focussed on this group of children.

Special education and self-perceptions.

Given the large role that school plays in the lives of children, it certainly influences their perceptions of self-efficacy and self-worth. Following this, because children with special learning needs are, by definition, not attaining the academic levels of their peers, this would be expected to impact on their self-perceptions. Feelings of inadequacy, sadness, embarrassment, and a lack of pride may be common in these vulnerable children due to repeated failures, criticisms, and stigmatization from others because of their difficulties. Research has shown, for example, that children with learning disabilities (LD) have rated themselves as having more negative global self-concepts than their peers without disabilities (e.g., Rogers & Saklofske, 1985). In turn, children's perceptions of themselves might influence their achievement and behaviour (Dweck & Reppucci, 1973). Even though some studies do not find differences between children with LD and average-achieving peers

in terms of global self-concept or self-esteem (Butler & Marinov-Glassman, 1994; Silverman & Zigmond, 1983), studies which specifically compare the academic self-concepts of children with and without LD consistently find differences (Kistner & Osborne, 1987).

The main issue to be considered in this section is the role played by being identified as exceptional and being placed in a particular setting (special versus regular education) in the development of children's self-concepts. Some educators and researchers assert that children with learning difficulties have at-risk self-concepts partly due to their identification as having special needs and their separation from the larger school population (Leondari, 1993). This may be particularly so with regard to their academic self-concepts. Accordingly, pupils who had academic difficulties but were not categorized as having these problems have been found to have significantly higher academic self-concepts than students who were identified as exceptional or at-risk (Stanovich, 1994). In addition, children in special classes have been found to have significantly lower perceptions of their academic competence than low-achieving children in regular classrooms and children without academic difficulties (Leondari, 1993). Official identification as having learning difficulties and placement in segregated classes may have contributed to the lower feelings of competence in the children from special classes compared to the low-achieving children. It might be assumed that full-time placement in regular education classrooms, without being labelled but with adequate support, would lessen the likelihood of children with special learning needs developing negative self-perceptions of their academic abilities. Alternatively, fully integrated children with learning disabilities may have lower self-perceptions of academic competence, but not have significantly lower global self-worth compared to children without learning disabilities (Clever, Bear, & Juvonen, 1992).

The above studies suggest that placement in special education classes and being labelled as having special learning needs relates to lower academic self-concepts. The process by which this occurs is not clear, but is possibly mediated by teacher and peer influences (i.e., teachers and peers reacting to labels or assignment to special education classes). Peers have been found to view students with special needs in special education classes as being significantly less capable than similar students placed in regular classrooms (Bak, Cooper, Debroth, & Siperstein, 1987). Yet, the results of other studies are difficult to reconcile with the above findings. These studies, described below, focussed on

the overall self-competence or self-worth of children with learning difficulties. Butler and Marinov-Glassman (1994) found that children with LD in special schools had higher perceptions of (overall) competence than children with LD in special education placements or at-risk children in regular classrooms. In this study, children with LD and non-identified low achieving students were followed in grades 3, 5, and 7; some children with LD attended special schools and some attended special classes in regular schools (Butler & Marinov-Glassman, 1994). Although there were no differences between the groups in terms of their perceived competence in grade 3, this changed in grades 5 and 7. In these later grades, children with LD in special schools were found to have the most positive views of their competence and low-achieving children in regular classes had the least positive views of their competence. Those children with LD attending special classes in regular schools also had low self-perceptions, perhaps due to being partially mainstreamed and making comparisons with children who do not have academic difficulties. Children who are in self-contained classes may not make the same social comparisons. A study by Morvitz and Motta (1992) of junior age children found that students with LD in self-contained classes did not differ significantly from regular education students with regard to their self-esteem. However, students from resource rooms were found to have significantly lower self-esteem than the regular education (non-remedial) students. Again, this difference may have been due to the social comparisons these groups of children made when determining their competence and self-esteem (the resource room students were exposed to children without achievement difficulties, but the children in the self-contained class were not).

Social comparisons involve the belief that how we view ourselves is based on how we think others view us and how we see ourselves as functioning in comparison to others (i.e., social comparison theory; Festinger, 1954). According to this theory, children attending special education classes may feel more positive about themselves because they are among other low-achieving pupils like themselves. On the other hand, children in regular classrooms have mostly normally-achieving peers, who are typically more successful and competent, with whom to compare themselves. In support of this, Renick and Harter (1989) found that, in judging themselves, children with LD who were mainstreamed were more likely to compare themselves with their peers without disabilities than with their peers who have LD. Perhaps as a result, mildly handicapped children who spent part or half of their

day in a regular classroom have reported lower academic and social self-efficacy than their non-handicapped and gifted peers (Bear, Clever, & Proctor, 1991; Gresham, Evans, & Elliot, 1988). In addition, Clever, Bear, and Juvonen (1992) found that children with learning disabilities and low-achieving children, who were fully integrated, reported lower perceptions of academic self-competence than children without learning difficulties. This is in contrast to the results discussed earlier which found that children who were placed in special classes had lower perceptions of their academic competence than low achieving children in regular classrooms (Leondari, 1993). Whether children with LD in integrated classes have more positive self-perceptions (either overall or with respect to academics) or have less positive perceptions due to making social comparisons may differ depending on the types of programs being used in the studies, the school climate, and child factors (e.g., social-emotional factors, age). In addition, it is possible that placements prior to data collection in these studies influenced the results. For example, if many of the children who were currently being integrated full-time had previously been in special education programs, this might have had a lasting effect on their self-perceptions. Similarly, prior negative experiences in a regular class setting may have affected the self-perceptions of children with special needs even prior to their placement in a special class, either in a positive or negative manner.

The above-described research showed that students with learning disabilities typically have lower academic self-concepts than their peers without learning disabilities. Whether this is contributed to more by being placed in a fully-integrated program or in a special education program is difficult to conclude because both views have received support. Either way, these lowered academic self-concepts may actually reflect realistic self-appraisals of their academic achievement relative to peers. Unfortunately, despite the fact that these students' perceptions of their academic competence may be realistic, having these views may relate to depression and poor academic achievement (Cosden et al., 1998; Heath, 1995). These possible effects make it important to continue to examine how these children form their self-perceptions, what impacts on these perceptions, what potentially protects their self-image, and who they compare themselves with in forming their views of themselves. It was hoped that the participants in the present study might be able to provide information which clarified these issues.

Special education and peer relations.

It is important to look at how exceptional pupils relate to their peers as well as how they are viewed by their peers who do not have exceptional needs. In the last section, I discussed the fact that the benefits of special education or integration in terms of the self-concept of exceptional children are not clear cut, but that these children do have at-risk self-concepts. A similar situation emerges in the area of peer relations. It does not seem surprising that social skills would be affected when children have special learning needs given the academic differences between these children and their peers and the stigmatization that this may lead to. In addition, how children view themselves has an impact on how they behave in social relationships. If they do not have adaptive or positive self-perceptions, they may manifest this image in social situations and may not be accepted by their peers. Accordingly, Wiener, Harris, and Duval (1993) found that, of children with LD in general, approximately one half are accepted, one third are neglected, and the remainder are rejected by their peers. Meta-analytic studies regarding the social skills of children with learning disabilities have also shown that many of these children have clear social skills problems and are not well-accepted by their peers (Kavale & Forness, 1996; Swanson & Malone, 1992). A meta-analysis of 152 studies found that, on average, about 75% of these students have social skills deficits in comparison to students without learning disabilities (Kavale & Forness, 1996). Similarly, Swanson and Malone's (1992) meta-analysis of 39 studies found that children with learning disabilities were less liked, more likely to be rejected, and more likely to be rated as aggressive and immature than children without learning disabilities.

Through a review of studies regarding the peer status of children with learning disabilities, Wiener (1987) found that there may be many factors related to their peer acceptance or lack thereof. For the purposes of this paper, however, it is important to consider whether identification and special education affects their peer status. Using a sociometric method, Wiener, Harris, and Shirer (1990) compared two groups of children with LD with children who did not have LD. One of the groups with LD was educated in self-contained classes, but received at least one hour of integration per day, and the other group spent most of their day in regular education classes with some withdrawal help. Sociometric methods of assessing children's social status involve having peers rate, rank, or

nominate one another with regard to who they like most and least (Juvonen & Bear, 1992; Wiener, Harris, & Duval, 1993). This may involve having all of the students in a particular classroom rate/nominate their classmates. Children's average rating/ranking or their number of nominations can be used to determine whether they are accepted (popular or average), neglected, or rejected by their peers. The pertinent findings of the Wiener et al. (1990) study were that, even though children with LD proved less popular and accepted than children without LD, overall, there was no difference in the peer status of the two groups with LD. The only difference in this regard was that children with LD in self-contained settings were more likely to be neglected by their peers than children with LD who spent most of their time in regular classrooms. It seemed that other children did not consider them as a part of their class, but as part of a "special class". Furthermore, children who were not school identified as LD but who did, actually, meet the actual criteria for LD were more preferred by their peers than identified children and misidentified children (children who were school identified, but who did not actually meet the criteria). Similarly, Stanovich (1994) found that pupils who were not categorized as having learning problems, but had academic difficulties, were more accepted by their peers than categorized children.

The question which follows from the above findings is whether school identification leads to lower peer status or whether poor social skills lead to an identification as learning disabled. Identification as having a learning disability and rendering special education services could have a negative impact on peer status. Being educated in a segregated setting may lead to peers viewing children with LD as "different", even if these children are partially integrated into regular education classrooms, as shown in the Wiener, Harris, and Shirer (1990) study and a study by Roberts and Zubrick (1992). Peers may equate special education placement with being less capable (Bak et al., 1987). A study by Bak et al. (1987) found that, when presented with vignettes of students with special needs in special education or regular classroom settings, children without disabilities rated those in regular classrooms as significantly more capable. The assumption is that peers equate special education placement as a label and that label is seen as indicating less capability. Noland, McLaughlin, Howard, and Sweeney (1993) also found that students from a school with an in-class model of service delivery expressed significantly more positive attitudes toward their peers with disabilities than did students from a school using a pull-out model. The

more positive views may have been influenced by the teachers from the integrated school expressing more positive attitudes toward the children with disabilities. However, the items on the scale used in this study seemed to simply ask respondents where they thought peers with disabilities should work or receive help, which may not actually equate to more positive views in general.

Being fully-integrated and perceived as more capable by peers may also relate to higher social status. Full-time integration of students with learning disabilities into a team-teaching classroom (a class of students with and without learning disabilities) has been associated with acceptance by classmates, the perception of having friends, and the perception of being socially accepted (Juvonen & Bear, 1992). Sale and Carey (1995), however, found that full integration of students with disabilities (perceptional, emotional, physical) with other students was not associated with positive social status. Even children who were not identified as requiring assistance, but did need this support, were found to have lower social status than their peers without disabilities, being more rejected, nominated as most liked significantly less, and nominated as least liked significantly more than their peers (Sale & Carey, 1995). Roberts and Zubrick (1992) hypothesized that the poor social status of children with learning problems in integrated classes may occur because they are being rejected for their disruptive behaviour. In support of this hypothesis, Safran (1995), in reviewing studies looking at peers' perceptions of emotional and behavioural disorders, found that peers do hold negative views of externalizing behaviour problems. This is particularly so when younger children are aggressive and older children are socially withdrawn. These students believed that the behaviour problems have a negative impact on peer relationships. In addition, peers may pick up on labels which have been officially assigned, for funding purposes, to children with special needs in integrated settings (Klassen, 1994). These peers may respond to this information by rejecting or neglecting the students with learning difficulties.

The above review found that children with LD have more social skills deficits and poorer social status' than children without learning problems. Both special education placements and integrated placements appear to be related to difficulties in peer relations. Identification as having special needs seems to be associated with being less accepted by peers; yet, mainstreaming exceptional pupils does not necessarily raise their peer status.

Thus, the issue of how identification and placement of pupils with special learning needs relates to their social status and peer acceptance is not easily reconciled. These students seem to be at-risk in most circumstances, for reasons which may relate to the actual nature of their learning disability.

Effectiveness of special education and integration.

In the two previous sections, I presented research data that showed that students with learning disabilities are vulnerable to lowered self-concepts and to lowered acceptance by their peers. There is no clear answer, however, as to the role that identification and class placement plays in these poor outcomes. Yet, it is also important to consider the efficacy of service delivery options given the significant role that special education plays in most school boards in terms of time, energy, and cost and given the popularity of inclusion. The research in this area has examined class placement effectiveness for a range of exceptionalities and using a range of outcomes - academic progress, social functioning, and self-esteem among these outcomes. The following is a summary of this research.

There have been many studies examining the effectiveness of special education and mainstreaming/inclusion, with some being better designed than others. Carlberg and Kavale (1980) noted that the (pre-1980) studies which have supported or refuted mainstreaming have serious methodological flaws, leading to inconclusive results. In order to deal with this, they conducted a meta-analysis, using 50 studies with multiple outcome measures (i.e., achievement, behaviour, social), to examine the effectiveness of special versus regular class placement. The results of their analysis showed that, overall, special class placement for exceptional children (LD, Slow Learners, Educable Mentally Retarded, Behavioural Disordered/Emotionally Disordered) showed a one tenth standard deviation inferiority to regular class placement; this inferiority emerged on all outcome measures. However, on closer examination, they found differing patterns for the different exceptionalities. In essence, for EMR and Slow Learners, special class placement proved to be the most disadvantageous compared to the other groups. On the other hand, special class placement showed an improvement in terms of outcome measures for students with LD or BD/ED. More specifically, the average student with LD receiving their education in special

classes was better off than 61% of students with LD in regular classes. The differences in the results between students who were EMR/SL and students with LD/BD were significant.

Wang and Baker (1985-86) advanced the Carlberg and Kavale meta-analysis by using 11 studies from 1975-1984 which had examined student outcomes in mainstreaming programs. On average, mainstreamed disabled students made greater gains on the outcome measures (e.g., achievement, self-concept) than did their counterparts in segregated settings. This finding did not differ for grade level or for exceptionality and was consistent across subject matter. The fact that there was no difference for exceptionality contradicts some earlier studies that find differential effects depending on the disability (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; Leinhardt & Palley, 1982). Yet, because most of the sample were MR (53%) and few were LD (3%), it is difficult to make true comparisons and valid conclusions in terms of the efficacy for different disabilities.

For at least some types of disabilities, therefore, mainstreaming is more effective than special class placement (Wang & Baker, 1985-86). Gartner and Lipsky (1987) claim that the success of mainstreaming is due, partially, to the extent to which teachers make adaptations which accommodate the needs of special education students. General education teachers, however, may not be equipped to deal with mainstreamed students with special needs and may not have a smaller class size to help them deal with these needs (Vaughn et al., 1996). McIntosh et al. (1994) made observations of elementary students with learning disabilities and their teachers in regular education classrooms and found that the teachers did make more instructional modifications for elementary students with learning disabilities than for other students. Yet, the students with LD asked for help less, volunteered to answer questions less often, and engaged in class discussions less than other students. In addition, students with learning disabilities interacted less with students and teachers than did other students. Thus, they did not participate and engage in the learning process as much as other students and appeared to be passive learners. This is clearly a fruitful avenue for future research in terms of how mainstreamed exceptional students respond to the regular classroom setting.

In examining the research on class placement efficacy for exceptional learners, Epps and Tindal (1987) noted that, overall, the findings of efficacy studies are inconsistent, with some favouring regular classes, others favouring special classes, and some finding no

differences between placements. They concluded that resource rooms appear to be superior to regular classes in educating special needs pupils. Epps and Tindal (1987), however, noted that there are serious methodological flaws in the efficacy research which place doubts on the findings. These flaws include using heterogeneous samples, non-random assignment to treatment, and independent variables confounding the outcomes. Epps and Tindal (1987) also indicate that simply looking at the placement setting (special education, mainstreaming) may not be the only appropriate variable for determining effectiveness. There are other issues to consider, including whether different categories of exceptionalities benefit from different programs and whether there are instructional styles or materials that are commonly effective to many categories of exceptional children. In this vein, Klinger et al. (1998a) studied the academic progress of students with and without LD who were fully included in general education classrooms. In these classrooms, special education teachers were assigned to provide co-teaching, small group instruction, and one-on-one instruction to the students with LD. These inclusive classrooms also had adequate resources (additional materials and paraprofessionals) and used supplementary instructional practises to improve the reading of students with LD. Over the school year, some students with LD made considerable progress in their reading skills and many made modest progress. However, 20% of the students with LD did not improve their scores on a standardized reading test over the course of the year. The researchers concluded that students with severe reading disabilities may require specific, intensive reading instruction in at least a small group format and that a combined services model which includes in-class support as well as daily intensive instruction is necessary for these students. It might be possible that such a model will prove to be more effective than inclusion only or pull-out only models. In support of this, Marston (1996) showed the superiority of a combined services model in improving the reading performances of students with learning disabilities. Therefore, there may be positive aspects to both pull-out programs and inclusion programs, and when combined, this may prove to be more beneficial for those students with special learning needs. Combining these models may be associated with more collaboration between teachers among other benefits. There are other issues to consider, however, such as how students view their educational placements and how teachers and parents view service delivery for exceptional pupils.

Teachers' and parents' perceptions about service delivery.

There is a significant amount of research that has examined the views and perceptions of teachers regarding service delivery options for children with special learning needs. There is also a fair amount of research which has studied the attitudes of parents regarding the education of their exceptional children. Examining the research in this area provides insight into what adults think about various special education issues. In turn, this affords a base with which to compare children's views to determine whether they are consistent with those of adults or whether children have distinctive viewpoints. It should be kept in mind, however, that attitude research, in general, has many limitations, including the measurements that are used (Klassen, 1994). A large issue seems to be the fact that how the items on various questionnaires are worded can have a great influence on the subjects' responses. Thus, it may be hard to gain accurate measurements regarding people's views on mainstreaming and other placement options. Nonetheless, the following is a brief review of the research literature on teachers' and parents' perceptions regarding the education of students with exceptional learning needs.

Most of the recent research regarding teachers' attitudes about service delivery has looked at their views about integration or inclusion. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) reviewed 28 studies on teachers' perceptions of mainstreaming and found that 65% of the teachers surveyed in the various studies supported the concept of mainstreaming. In general, there was more support for mainstreaming students with LD and other mild disabilities and much less support for integrating children with emotional disturbances, EMR, or more severe disabilities. The majority of the teachers were willing to teach students with disabilities, but this willingness dissipated when the severity of the disability and the amount of additional teacher responsibility that would be required increased. Most of the teachers who were sampled did agree that students with and without disabilities would benefit from mainstreaming experiences. However, each study's findings regarding the benefits of mainstreaming depended on how the items were worded in the various questionnaires (i.e., items which represented definitive support for mainstreaming received less support). The authors concluded that there is not an overwhelming support for inclusion among general education teachers, especially as it applies in actual practice. In a study using a focus group method with general education teachers as well as those teaching

gifted and special education children, strong negative feelings about inclusion were expressed (Vaughn et al., 1996). The participants identified class size, additional resources, not wanting to teach students with disabilities, parental involvement, funding, accountability, grades, and the special children being singled out as barriers to the success of inclusion. Communication and cooperative learning, on the other hand, were thought to be key ingredients for the success of the practice.

In Canada, Frost and Common (1989) found that Ontario and Manitoba teachers were more supportive of integrating students with emotional disturbances than they were of integrating students with LD. These teachers were the least supportive of integrating students with mental handicaps. This is not entirely consistent with the findings of Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996). However, the teachers in Frost and Common's (1989) sample were also less supportive as the severity of the handicap increased, possibly due to concerns about an expanding workload and needing special skills to support these students. This finding does concur with Scruggs and Mastropieri's (1996) results. Abergel (1995) also assessed teachers attitudes about integration, finding poor teacher support for the practice of inclusion. Thus, even though teachers may believe in the philosophy of integration, they may not feel confident that they can cope with the demands it entails of their knowledge and skills, and therefore, do not support it in actual practise. Another Canadian study by Goupil and Brunet (1984) also found that both teachers and principals believed that more severely disabled children, such as those with moderate handicaps, multiple handicaps, and serious learning disabilities, should be educated in segregated settings. It seems that teachers may not be confident that they have enough time to support students with more severe learning needs and, therefore, do not think it will then be valuable for the students (Lombardi et al., 1994).

Other studies have found that factors such as teachers' experiences with special needs students (Abergel, 1995; Gans, 1987), their previous success in working with them (Hummel, Dworet, & Walsh, 1985), and the number of special education courses they have taken (Hummel, Dworet, & Walsh, 1985) are associated with positive attitudes towards mainstreaming. Perhaps teachers with more advanced training feel more capable in dealing with exceptional students and this translates into positive attitudes toward integrating these students. This also seems to be true, however, for attitudes about the

effectiveness of self-contained programs in that more experience with such programs seems to lead to feeling more effective, and feeling the program one is involved in is more effective in teaching children with special needs (Harvey, 1996).

Parental views about integration and inclusion have received less study than those of teachers, but some research has tackled this area. In one study, parents of pupils with special needs appeared to be happy with integrated placements, feeling that it would lead to individualized attention for all students (Lombardi et al., 1994); however, the results of this study must be applied with caution because the questionnaire used by the researchers did not seem to sample any possible negative thoughts about the integrated program. In another study, parents of 13 children with moderate or severe handicaps also reported very positive perceptions of inclusion after their children had been placed in inclusive programs (Ryndak, Downing, Jacqueline, & Morrison, 1995). These parents described positive changes in their children in terms of academic skills, behaviour, communication skills, and social skills. However, the parents were not as positive about other factors such as working with school personnel and obtaining appropriate educational services for their children. Hanline and Halvorsen (1989) also found positive parental opinions about integration in terms of the benefits it would give their children. However, in another study by Anderson and Bachor (1990) in which parents of both children with and without disabilities were randomly surveyed, mixed attitudes were expressed regarding integration. While integration was thought to result in positive academic gains, segregated settings were seen as leading to better social and emotional adjustment. Half of the parents surveyed did not believe that integration would be beneficial to children with severe behavioural problems.

Guralnick (1994) also found mixed attitudes towards mainstreaming when both the benefits and drawbacks of such placements were sought from parents. In this study, questionnaires were given to 250 families (mothers) of pre-school children with special needs and to 31 parents of typically developing children. In general, there seemed to be generalized positive opinions regarding the benefits of mainstreamed programs; yet, nearly half of the mothers expressed serious concerns regarding the drawbacks of mainstreaming. The main concerns surrounded the quality of special help, special services, and qualified personnel and the possible rejection of children with special needs by their peers. Some literature confirms the concern about peer rejection to some degree (Sale & Carey, 1995;

Wiener, Harris, & Shirer, 1990). Parents' perceptions and attitudes about friendships and peer relations in mainstreamed programs needs much more probing, however.

In general, there seems to be much parental support for the principles behind integration and inclusion. For example, Jory (1991) argues against the cascade model of special education claiming that it is unreasonable to expect that students will move from a segregated setting to coping in a regular classroom setting, especially if they have been out of the regular classroom for most of their educational careers. In a study of parental attitudes toward special education, Khamis (1993) found that the higher level of education and knowledge of the parents, the less they were satisfied with their children's special education. These parents may have different goals for their children than other parents or may be more aware of their legal rights concerning their child's education. However, in a qualitative study designed to examine parental attitudes about the special education services that their children receive as well as the reasons to support these attitudes, all but two of the parents in the sample reported positive changes in their children since being placed in a resource room (Green & Shinn, 1994). Most of the parents noted increased self-esteem or an improvement in the children's attitude toward schoolwork since their placement in a segregated setting. There was a general lack of support for reintegration into the regular classroom, with most fearing their children would develop a lower self-esteem and become more negative about school. The parents only wanted their children reintegrated when they achieved a certain standard. The differences between the above two studies might be explained by the size of the sample, because Green and Shinn (1994) interviewed a small sample (n=21), limiting the generalizability of the results.

In summary, the results of studies on teachers' and parents' perceptions regarding service delivery appears to vary both among and within the two groups. Both parents and teachers seem to be concerned with different issues when considering the education of children with exceptional needs. Teachers appear much more reticent towards integrating these children, especially if they have not had experience with them, if they do not feel prepared, and if the children are perceived to have severe needs. Most regular education teachers believe that some degree of separate, special education is beneficial and necessary for these children, especially if their intellectual or physical needs are extreme. Parents, on the other hand, seem to be more positive about mainstreaming, but are often concerned with

the social consequences for their children. In general, however, parents seem satisfied with whatever placement their child is currently in, perhaps due to their lack of involvement in decision-making and lack of adequate knowledge about special education procedures. Most of the parents in the study by Khamis (1993) lacked adequate knowledge of their legal rights regarding special education programming. Additionally or alternatively, parents may not have been encouraged to involve themselves in educational decision-making (Baldwin, 1991).

## Research on Students' Perceptions about Special Education

As noted at the beginning of this paper, there are only a scattering of published studies, most of which are recent, that have examined the views and perceptions of pupils receiving special education services. These studies have investigated exceptional children's attitudes and preferences for placements, the reasons for their preferences, their understanding of their weaknesses, and their concerns about special education and integration. The following is a review of this research.

### Attitudes and preferences regarding educational placement.

This section will discuss the research pertaining to the attitudes students hold toward special education and integrated settings, their preferences for placement, and their reasons for these preferences. The earliest study that could be located found negative attitudes toward special education. Jones (1972) reported that many of his small sample of students (n = 23), who were developmentally delayed, stated that they disliked special education because they were teased and made to feel different. In order to avoid ridicule, the majority of these students lied when they were asked about their school work, stating that they were in regular classes. Concerns were also expressed about the effect that their special class placement would have on later job opportunities (Jones, 1972). None of these students wanted to be in the special class, a desire which was no doubt impacted by the stigma and negative expectations that they reported were associated with special class placement.

Positive support, on the other hand, has been found regarding pupils' attitudes toward integrated class placements (Dyches et al., 1996; Lombardi et al., 1994). Although

these studies yielded positive student attitudes about inclusion programs, they are limited in the richness of data obtained about children's feelings and perceptions. Many of the interview and questionnaire items were closed-ended, yes/no questions which seemed to be seeking positive, affirmation responses regarding the inclusion program (e.g., "Do you have more friends this year?). There may not have been, therefore, a complete representation of the possible perceptions of the students about integration. Accordingly, other research has found that children with special needs do have concerns about their integrated placements (Lewis, 1995; Tymitz-Wolf, 1984). Tymitz-Wolf (1984) found that children who are EMR have definite and prevalent worries, primarily of a social nature, about their mainstreamed settings. Similarly, in another study, students with moderate learning difficulties, both in special and mainstreamed schools, expressed concern about liking their teacher and about problems dealing with playground relationships (Lewis, 1995). The research regarding limited peer group acceptance of special needs pupils by students without learning problems supports the concerns expressed by the participants in the preceding studies. Mainstreaming may be difficult for these children due to differing group dynamics and disruptions in friendships.

Other research has examined the views of students toward different placement options by ascertaining their preferences. Recently, Vaughn and Klinger (1998) reviewed eight of these studies and concluded that the majority of students with disabilities prefer resource room support to in-class (inclusion) support. It should be noted, however, that younger primary-grade students with disabilities more frequently preferred in-class support than did intermediate-grade students (Vaughn & Klinger, 1998). For example, when asked to choose which room, among four choices outside of their regular classroom, they would most like to spend time in, Vaughn and Bos (1987) found that older students with LD were more positive about their resource room than were younger students with LD. Yet, this does not mean that the older students preferred the resource room to their regular education classroom because the latter was not offered as a choice. In addition, the students were not asked whether they would prefer resource room assistance to receiving help from their special education teacher in their regular classroom setting. Jenkins and Heinen (1989) did examine whether students prefer resource room support to in-class support, finding that the current service that their participants were receiving significantly

influenced their preferences. Children receiving pull-out withdrawal support preferred that to in-class help and children currently receiving in-class help preferred that *or* withdrawal help. In addition, those students in integrated classrooms tended to prefer in-class help (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989). However, the results are complicated by the fact that the vast majority of students preferred to receive help from their classroom teacher rather than from a specialist, even those who were receiving pull-out support. Thus, there must have been students who claimed a preference for pull-out support, yet also preferred to receive help from their classroom teacher. This is a confusing picture that needs clarification because it would not be very likely that their classroom teacher would provide them with pull-out support. In addition, this study used a forced choice format preceded by "If you were having a lot of problems....", a format which may not have completely tapped the views, perceptions, and preferences of students receiving special support.

Jenkins and Heinen (1989) believed that their findings were influenced by the students' current placements. Other studies, however, have not found that the students' current placement influenced the results (Klinger et al., 1998b; Wiener & Manuel, 1994). In the Klinger et al. (1998b) study, all of the 32 students (half with LD, half without LD) had at one time been part of a classroom participating in pull-out and inclusion models, but were currently part of an inclusion program. The students with LD were evenly split in terms of their preferences, with ten preferring pull-out and six preferring inclusion. Most of the participants, however, expressed satisfaction with their current placement in the inclusion program (Klinger et al., 1998b). Wiener and Manuel (1994) also did not find that the current service their participants were receiving significantly influenced their service delivery preferences. The majority of the students in their sample of elementary students with learning difficulties preferred to receive assistance in the resource room rather than in their regular classroom. These preferences may have been influenced by their teachers' attitudes toward integration because less than one-third of the teachers believed that full integration was appropriate for children with learning difficulties. The students of the teachers who supported integration expressed a preference for help within their regular classroom setting significantly more often than did the students of the remainder of the teachers (Wiener & Manuel, 1994).

In addition to resource room and in-class support, Abergel (1995) included a collaborative, consultative model among the placement options. Yet, consistent with other studies, the majority of the students who were interviewed preferred pull-out withdrawal methods of receiving help. Not only was the in-class resource model the least preferred method, most of the students who were currently receiving help through an in-class model preferred other methods of service delivery (Abergel, 1995).

Some of the preceding studies also investigated the reasons behind students' placement preferences. The most popular reasons included the desire to avoid embarrassment/stigma, quality/quantity of the help, quality of learning, convenience, having a quiet place to work, receiving more attention, having easier work, liking the teacher, having fun activities, and preferring to stay with classmates (Abergel, 1995; Jenkins & Heinen, 1989; Wiener & Manuel, 1994; Vaughn & Klinger, 1998). Although avoiding embarrassment was a popular reason chosen by the participants in Jenkin and Heinen's (1989) study, this was chosen by only 15% of Wiener and Manuel's (1994) participants and only a few of Abergel's (1995) participants. When embarrassment was mentioned in Abergel's (1995) study, it was in reference to not wanting in-class help. In Vaughn and Klinger's (1998) review of these and other studies, they found that the most frequently cited reason for preferring pull-out support was that these students felt they learned more in that setting, particularly if they were in the intermediate grades. On the other hand, when inclusion settings were preferred, the reasons typically involved social benefits such as making friends and feeling less stigmatized.

To summarize, the studies to date do not support the belief that children with special learning needs prefer to remain in their regular classroom for all subjects and for specialized instruction. Older children, in particular, see the benefits in being withdrawn from their general education classroom for support. Many of the students who were interviewed presented very thoughtful reasons for their preferences such as that they recognized the better attention and learning opportunities afforded through a small-class setting. Children with special needs, therefore, are quite able to express their preferences for service delivery and the rationale for these preferences.

Attitudes toward instructional adaptations.

In order for children with exceptional learning needs to function in regular, mainstreamed education (whether it be part-time or full-time), modifications and adaptations to their program often need to be made. There is some research which has begun to examine how the children feel about these adaptations (e.g., using different textbooks, having different tests). Vaughn, Schumm, and Kouzekanani (1993) ascertained that mainstreamed students with LD, who spent at least half of their time in a regular education classroom, preferred a teacher who made adaptations in order to accommodate diverse student needs to a teacher who did not make adaptations. In particular, they liked teachers who would make adaptations when they experience difficulty learning. Furthermore, in comparison to low-achieving and average or high-achieving students, pupils with LD exhibited a stronger preference for opportunities to work in groups with different students, perhaps recognizing their need for peer assistance. It seems clear from this study that children with learning disabilities understand that some accommodations are needed for them to experience success in their integrated settings and that they prefer a teacher who can provide these adaptations.

Understanding of learning difficulties.

Some research has shown that children with special needs are quite capable of articulating their own weaknesses (Cohen, 1983; Levine, Clarke, & Ferb, 1981). For example, Cohen (1983) showed that reading disabled children have an accurate awareness of their own difficulties. He had them rate their own performance on a battery of tests and these ratings strongly agreed with their actual test performances. Levine, Clarke, and Ferb (1981) also demonstrated that children with learning difficulties can accurately rate their own difficulties because their ratings closely agreed with teacher, parent, and clinic assessment reports in most areas (e.g., memory, attention). A potential problem with this study is that the parents of many of the children helped them read the questionnaire and it is unclear whether measures were taken to avoid the parents helping with the ratings. Hence, these results need further verification.

It should not be surprising that students with learning problems understand their difficulties because they are confronted with them on a daily basis. However, this

understanding does not necessarily translate into being able to accurately describe and define what a learning disability is. Cosden et al. (1998) found that most elementary children in their sample were not able to explain LD, but almost one third of the intermediate age children were able to define it correctly as a specific academic problem. In assessing how these students found out about their learning disability, Cosden et al. (1998) ascertained that most of the children received this information from school personnel. Many, however, reported that they found out from "no one". More striking is the fact that the children who found out about their LD from school personnel had more negative perceptions of their learning disability than children who found out from their parents or from "no one". It is possible that the information received from school personnel was accurate and that these children viewed it negatively. This raises the question of whether having a false understanding of one's disability serves as a protective factor in terms of one's self-perceptions. Associations have been found between having an accurate understanding of a learning disability and lower self-esteem or depression (Bear & Minke, 1996; Heath, 1995). The issue of how children learn about their LD and what they understand of this information clearly needs further study.

Understanding of special education.

Research regarding students' understanding of special education has found mixed results. In the 1987 investigation by Vaughn and Bos discussed previously, most of their sample of students were not able to explain the meaning of "special education", in spite of probing. However, more older students were able to define it and the "resource room" than were younger students. On the other hand, almost 80% of the students with learning disabilities in Padeliadu and Zigmond's (1996) study, which was based on Vaughn and Bos', had a fairly accurate perception of what a special education placement was (e.g., that not everybody went and that academic or learning problems were the reasons). Twenty percent of the students had a *very* accurate perception of special education. The dissimilar findings from these two studies may have been due to the different format of interviewing or the different operational definitions used for special education. Yet, both studies were consistent in finding that older and more intelligent students tended to have more accurate perceptions of special education than did the younger and less intelligent students. In

addition, the more time students spent in the mainstream, the more likely they were to have a valid perception of special education, perhaps because they have had the opportunity to experience the distinctions between the two models more clearly. This brings up the issue of whether children with special needs can understand shifts between special and mainstreamed education. In a study of exceptional (low functioning) children, Lewis (1995) found that two-thirds of the participants were able to provide one or more reasons for their transfer from a mainstream school to a special school (e.g., poor work, adults decided, being a victim of bullying). Many children, however, had no, or an inaccurate, understanding of the transfer.

In order for these students to acquire a correct perception of special education, it may be helpful for them to be involved in the assessment and placement process. Armstrong, Galloway, and Tomlinson (1993) , however, found that this involvement seldom happens. When children of various ages with emotional or behavioural problems were interviewed about their perceptions of the assessment process, they generally did not believe that attempts were made to involve them or to have them contribute. Furthermore, the children reported that they received inadequate information as to the purpose and outcome of psychological or medical interviews. Observations that the researchers made of the assessment process confirmed these children's perceptions in that they saw little emphasis on gaining access to the child's perspective. Although these results are significant and helpful, they may be limited by the accuracy of the children's memories (they were asked about events in the past). Further evidence that children may not be involved in their educational planning comes from Dyches (1996) in which only two students with LD knew what an Individual Education Plan was. It should be noted, however, that these two studies were qualitative, and while the results lead to important hypotheses about the practice of assessment and about special education procedures, the themes identified (e.g., that children are not involved) need to be examined and confirmed by future studies.

Experiences of children in special education.

Studies examining the experiences of students in special education, many of which used qualitative methods, can identify themes and issues pertinent to these students' educational lives. Themes of feeling different from others, stigmatized, isolated, victimized,

and devalued because of their learning problems or special class placement have been identified (Albinger, 1995; Guterman, 1995; Kos, 1991; Reid & Button, 1995). Children with persistent reading difficulties expressed concern about their future, a strong motivation to read, and frustration related to years of failure (Kos, 1991). High school students with learning disabilities receiving learning centre support reported that mainstream peers thought they were less capable, even though they themselves knew that LD had more to do with academic achievement than intelligence (Guterman, 1995). Furthermore, the majority of these participants did not believe that special education placements had been academically beneficial because they were not given challenging work (Guterman, 1995).

The loneliness, victimization, and lack of respect reportedly felt by these students (Reid & Button, 1995) might necessitate being selective in sharing information with peers. Accordingly, most of the students in Guterman's (1995) study reported that they were careful about revealing their placement in a special class to peers. Similarly, four of Albinger's (1995) 11 participants, who attended another school four mornings a week for their resource help, reported that they fabricated stories to tell their peers regarding where they were during these mornings. It is doubtful that this fabricated story strategy would be as common with other children receiving resource room support because their peers would be able to see these children leaving the classroom for periods of time. However, it speaks to the lengths some children will go, if able, to protect themselves from stigma.

The results described in this section speak to the importance of considering the actual experiences and views of students in special education programs when making decisions about the efficacy of special or general education placements. These students have preferences for service delivery, have concerns about their education, and have felt stigmatized and victimized due to their placement in special education, factors which can influence their satisfaction with their educational program and, in turn, their academic progress. The potential influence of these factors makes it important to continue to explore their attitudes, perceptions, and experiences, which has been the goal of the present study. The next section will discuss the rationale, goal, and research questions which were addressed in this study.

## Summary and Research Questions

The above review suggests that exceptional children are quite capable of expressing their opinions, preferences, and attitudes about their own education, no matter what the placement. These opinions may not always be what we would expect (e.g., that they may prefer pull-out support to in-class support) and may be quite distinct from adults' opinions. These children are able to make choices, have some (albeit an inconsistent) knowledge of special education, and may be able to understand their own learning weaknesses. For the most part, however, they report not being involved in the assessment or decision-making process (Armstrong et al., 1993). What remains from examining the literature on the attitudes and perceptions of special education students is still a great deal to learn regarding their role in their education.

In deciding to conduct this study, I believed that there was much to be learned by consulting with the children who are the actual "consumers" of special education. It is they who are most affected by our decisions and theories about special education. As the "consumers", they have the right to be respected, to have their views heard, and to have some meaningful role in the processes that affect them. Yet, in research and in schools, a consistent and meaningful effort to seek students' input has not been made. Obtaining information about their perceptions and attitudes can change this and can assist us in making their involvement a reality. In addition, because their perceptions about their learning difficulties and class placement may be associated with negative outcomes, this implicates a need to learn more about their attitudes and perceptions so that we may prevent or manage these negative factors. Finally, considering the thoughts and views that students have about special education procedures and programs may improve the effectiveness of these programs. That is, students may report negative experiences with certain aspects of their program, suggesting a need to improve or alter these features. If their insights are taken into consideration, this might lead to better programs, procedures, resources, and curriculum.

My goal, therefore, was to examine the perspectives of children with special learning needs in terms of their knowledge and perceptions of special education, their involvement in the special education process, and their experiences of this system. I had hoped to gain, and

believe I did, richer and more detailed information about these students' experiences and perceptions than have studies solely examining their preferences for service delivery. I also hoped to add to the few qualitative studies which have been conducted regarding the experiences of children in special education. Although these studies identified and discussed themes which arose in their data, they did not attempt to link these themes together or with other concepts related to special education. In this study, I intended to develop salient themes from my data and to closely analyse the data within the themes for possible connections and causes. In so doing, the information was to be used to develop a theory which represents the experiences of these children and which is based on what they have shared. The existing research in this area has not developed, followed, or seemingly been guided by any theory which would explain the role that students' perceptions and experiences may play in the efficacy of the programs used to educate them. Essentially, there has not been a broader consideration of the role that the students' perceptions of their educational experiences may play in the academic and psycho-social outcomes of their educational programs. In this vein, taking their perspectives into account during the identification and placement process may, actually, lead to more successful outcomes in that they may "buy into" the placement better, see it as more positive, and suggest ways of adapting it to better suit their needs and wishes. In addition, asking them questions about their understanding and perceptions provides an opportunity to clear up any misconceptions they may have about their program or placement. Unfortunately, little thought has been given to how children feel and think about being placed in special education programs. This is particularly true of children in self-contained learning disability programs, who have not been the focus of most of the research in this area and who may have different experiences and perceptions than children receiving resource room (withdrawal) or in-class support. Accordingly, I have included children from a self-contained class in my study.

Acquiring information and developing a theory on children's attitudes might turn out to be invaluable to those of us involved in educational assessment and decision-making. It might conceivably lead us to consider truly consulting with these children when we make critical decisions about their education. The next section will discuss the method which was used in order to meet the goal of this study, which was to develop an inductively derived theory that best represents the educational lives of a group of children with learning

disabilities. Using qualitative methodology, I had hoped to gain a more holistic view of the experiences and views of children receiving special education support.

# CHAPTER II

## Methodology

I have used qualitative methodology as a framework for collecting and analysing my data. In this chapter, I will briefly review the theory and methods of qualitative research and discuss why this methodology was chosen for this study and how it was adapted to interview exceptional children. More specifically, I have followed a grounded theory approach and this will be described in reporting the design for collecting and analysing the data.

### Overview of Qualitative Methodology

"Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Following a "constructivist" perspective, these researchers see their goal as coming to understand and interpret how the various people in a particular social setting construct the world around them (Crowley, 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). As a psychoeducational consultant in a school board, collecting and making sense of personal stories, in terms of assessing children, is what I do on a daily basis. In this study, I examined the stories of exceptional children with regard to their education and, in particular, with regard to the special education system which has a major impact on them. The research in the area of exceptional children's attitudes is relatively sparse, particularly when compared to the literature on teachers' and parents' perceptions. Thus, the opinions of special education children remain largely undeveloped. It is partly for this reason that I adopted a qualitative methodology for this study. Qualitative research methodologists have advocated for the usefulness of these methods in areas in which there is little prior research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Qualitative studies typically generate and investigate new hypotheses and potentially discover new variables (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). New hypotheses and ideas can originate directly from the people to which they would apply; in this case, children with exceptional learning needs will be the people of interest. Another strength of qualitative inquiry is that the data are collected in or close to the actual situation of interest, making it more naturalistic than experimental methods. In addition, such data tend to be rich and potentially quite complex,

with a focus on studying processes and actual causality as it manifests itself in actual situations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is also for these latter reasons that I chose to use qualitative methods in conducting my study. A qualitative methodology was hoped to permit me to gain rich, insightful information that reflects the perspectives of children with special needs.

Much of the research in special education has used quantitative methods to examine the effectiveness of mainstreaming and other service delivery models. Crowley (1994), however, noted that qualitative methods can be useful in looking at the contexts of teaching and learning which can help us more thoroughly understand the process of effectively educating special needs students. Qualitative methods are suitable for dealing with questions about individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and the interpretations that define their experience, whether the individuals are students, teachers, administrators, or parents (Crowley, 1994). Qualitative methodology is then fitting for a study examining the experiences and meaning of special education and special help for children with exceptional learning needs. Miles and Huberman (1994) reported that "a main task [of qualitative research] is to explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations" (p. 7). In this study, the goal was to describe how exceptional pupils in various special education settings perceive, make sense of, and respond to their own educational circumstances. This was accomplished by gaining insight into the perceptions of the players from the "inside" - by asking them directly.

There are a range of qualitative research traditions, including ecological psychology which studies the relationship between human behaviour and its environment, holistic ethnography which attempts to describe and analyse a culture or community, and symbolic interactionism whose proponents are interested in understanding how individuals' interpretations are developed and used in specific situations of interaction (Jacob, 1987). The traditions of qualitative inquiry may vary in their assumptions about human nature and society, in their foci of interest, and in the methodology used in their studies. However, there are some common features of qualitative research including that it is conducted through an intense or prolonged contact with a life situation and that the role of the

researcher is to gain information as to the perceptions of the people under study from the inside (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Another feature of qualitative inquiry, and in particular the symbolic interactionism tradition, is that it is evolutionary; designs, questions, and interpretations develop and change along the way (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe this as "flexibility" and suggest that it makes the sampling more relevant to the evolving theory because new areas can be pursued that might provide insight or a new perspective to the area of study. Flexibility is particularly important in new areas of study. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend having initial questions or areas for observation, based on past research or experience, in order to provide a beginning focus. However, these guides should not be adhered to rigidly because this may limit the discovery of more relevant data and prevent the true development of a rich theory, which is the goal (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative researchers typically do not search out data or evidence to prove hypotheses they hold at the commencement of a study - they build abstractions as the incoming information is grouped together (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). As opposed to beginning with a theory and hypotheses, the "grounded theory" is generated through discovery in the study of the phenomenon of interest. Because the theory is derived, supported, and exemplified by the acquired information, this makes it grounded in the genuine data - the subjective experiences (perceptions and beliefs) of the people of interest (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The grounded theory model falls under the symbolic interactionism tradition which focuses on covert behaviour; that is, the point of view of the participants as well as the processes by which these viewpoints develop are the data of interest (Jacob, 1987). A well-constructed grounded theory should meet four key criteria to be sound: fit, understanding, generality, and control (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It should fit the area of interest by being true to everyday reality and induced from varied data. Similarly, it should also be comprehensible to the persons under study as well as to other similar people. With broad and conceptually-based interpretations, the theory should then be sufficiently abstract and variable to be appropriate to diverse contexts related to the phenomenon of interest. Lastly, with regard to control, the conditions and concepts related to the phenomenon should be

clearly and extensively explicated in order to guide action (i.e., prediction) toward the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In analysing data under a grounded theory format, Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocate for an inductive strategy in which the researcher discovers concepts and hypotheses through constant comparative analysis. In this process, evidence which is collected from later participants or observations is used to investigate whether the initial evidence is correct. The researcher continually checks out his or her theory as the data continue to emerge. As well, the theory is verified by the information gained in the study. In using the grounded theory approach, I intended for my theory to accurately reflect the beliefs and experiences of children with special learning needs. I will now, in more detail, describe the process of my study.

## Components of a Qualitative Study

There are some important components and steps that should be followed when designing a qualitative study. These components include: developing research questions, insuring rigour in the study, choosing participants, sampling, deciding on data collection methods, and managing as well as analysing the data competently (Crowley, 1994). The following subsections will describe each of these components/steps and explain how I handled them in this project.

### Research Question(s)

The research questions one posits are said to represent the aspects of a domain that the researcher most wants to examine (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The questions can be general or much more specific. The general research question driving my study was: What is the experience of exceptional children in special education? I wanted to gather information on these children's perceptions, attitudes, understanding, and beliefs about receiving special education support. Furthermore, I was also interested in how these perceptions may be driving them to interact with their school environment. More specifically, I explored issues and questions such as whether these children understand why they receive help, how they feel about receiving special help, how they perceive and judge

themselves in light of receiving assistance, and what they understand of the process that has placed them in their educational situation.

Defining the Case

In qualitative research, the "case" is the unit of analysis and is a phenomenon on which to be focused (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Cases can be individuals, roles, small groups, organizations, or even nations. In this study, the unit of analysis was each individual child in the sample. Sampling decisions will define the case(s) in more detail (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Participant Selection

Sampling, or selecting participants, is a crucial feature of qualitative methods. It is important not to select participants objectively and at random, but to identify people who can provide rich information that will address and hopefully answer the research question. Therefore, sampling is not random, but is purposive (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Choices of informants and observation situations, for example, need to be influenced by a conceptual question rather than by a need to obtain a representative sample or sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In addition, decisions have to be made regarding sample size, selecting extreme or typical cases, and the general criterion for selection.

In this study, participants were selected partly based on availability. The students were from Grades 4 to 6 ("Junior" grades) from 4 different schools in one particular school district in the Greater Toronto Area. Students were selected for possible inclusion in the study who were of the appropriate age, had been identified as exceptional learners by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), had a "Learning Disability" exceptionality, and were receiving special education support through either a Resource Room or a Self-Contained class (Levels 5 and 6 on the Special Education Cascade; see Appendix A). I chose to use children with LD because of the prevalence of students with this exceptionality in special education. For example, in an urban sample of special education students (range of SES and ethnicities) in a study by Walker et al. (1988), 22% of the total children with handicaps were initially identified as LD. In a rural sample, the percentage of LD students was 32% of all children with handicaps (Halgren & Clarizio,

1993). Thus, by using an LD sample in my study, the data would be potentially applicable to many students receiving special education support. In the school district that participated in my study, children were eligible for a Learning Disability exceptionality if they were found to have average intellectual ability (full scale, verbal, or performance IQ ≥ 90 on a test of intelligence), reading, writing, or mathematics skills significantly lower than would be predicted from their overall intelligence, and a weakness in one or more basic cognitive process (e.g., memory, language). This exceptionality could include children with language learning disabilities (weak/delayed oral language) and nonverbal learning disabilities. I focussed on Grade 4-6 students because they made up the largest portion of exceptional children in the schools who agreed to participate in this study. In addition, most of these children would have been identified as exceptional at least 1-2 years prior and, therefore, would have already had some previous experience with special education. I had hoped that they would be able to reflect on these experiences in their interviews.

Initially, 20 children were selected for possible inclusion in the study: 11 from a Self-Contained class in one school (Concord P.S.) and 9 from Resource Room programs at the three other schools (Edith P.S., Princeton P.S., and Rappert P.S.). It should be noted that these school names are fictitious. The schools with the Resource Room programs were situated within largely lower-SES neighbourhoods and Concord P.S. was located within a more middle-class neighbourhood. All 20 children were identified as Learning Disabled through the Board's IPRC process and the 11 children from the Self-Contained Class had been placed in this class due to having secondary behavioural problems. I initially hoped to have from 16 to 20 participants in my study, which is relatively large for a qualitative study, so that I might sample various placement options and develop hypotheses from this information. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that multiple cases afford a deeper understanding of processes and the opportunity to develop and test hypotheses. Multiple-case sampling helps to add confidence to findings. In addition, children typically do not verbalize as much in interviews as adults do. Thus, in order to get enough data to analyse, the size of the sample would need to be relatively large for a qualitative study.

After identifying a possible sample for my study, the next step was to obtain the consent of the teachers, parents, and children involved. All of the special education teachers who were working with the selected children in each of the four schools were supportive to

this study and agreed to provide the assistance that was necessary. This assistance included filling out a form regarding the type of support each child was receiving and allowing me to observe their classrooms and ask questions about the program. In addition, these teachers offered their assistance in obtaining parental consent. In some cases, the study was explained individually to the parents by these teachers and then the consent letter was presented. In other cases, the teacher explained the study and its purpose during a parent-teacher interview; if the parent expressed interest, I promptly sent home the consent form with the child. The study was explained to each child when they were given the consent letter; they were informed at this point that they had every right to choose not to participate. The consent letter (see Appendix B) followed Koocher and Keith-Spiegel's (1990) recommendations regarding the key aspects to include in such letters.

Eighteen consent letters were returned, 9 from the Self-Contained Class and 9 from the Resource Room programs. I followed up with the two children who did not return the consents, but was unable to successfully receive back their consent forms. Of the 18 consents which were returned, 15 parents gave their permission to participate: 8 from the Self-Contained Class and 7 from the Resource Rooms. I then spoke individually to each child regarding the study, its topic, and when I expected to conduct the interviews. I also spoke with the Self-Contained class as a group. The children understood that I was conducting research and were able to tell me what this meant ("finding out about things"). They understood approximately how much time it would take and what we would be doing. They also understood that this research would not directly affect their education in terms of their report cards or class placements, but that it was hoped to improve the lives and education of future children in similar circumstances. During these individual meetings, I sought the verbal assent of each child to participate in the study. Most of the children felt quite proud of having the opportunity to participate in this study. Upon speaking with one of these students, however, I thought that he might not be keen to participate. When he confirmed that this was true, I encouraged him to withdraw from the study. Thus, my final sample consisted of 14 students, which included both sexes (10 boys, 4 girls), a range of ethnicities (7 African-Canadian students, 6 Caucasian students, 1 East Asian student), and a select range of grades (4 Grade 4s, 7 Grade 5s, 3 Grade 6s). Please refer to Table 1 where this information is presented. It should be noted that more detailed information as to the

Table 1

**Participant Information**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Jeremy*** | Male | 5 | Yes | SCC | Concord |
| ***Larry*** | Male | 5 | No | SCC | Concord |
| ***Nick*** | Male | 5 | No | SCC | Concord |
| ***Bill*** | Male | 4 | No | SCC | Concord |
| ***Sarah*** | Female | 6 | No | SCC | Concord |
| ***Bob*** | Male | 4 | No | SCC | Concord |
| ***John*** | Male | 5 | No | SCC | Concord |
| ***Jack*** | Male | 5 | Yes | SCC | Concord |
| ***Tim*** | Male | 5 | Yes | RR | Edith |
| ***Helen*** | Female | 5 | Yes | RR | Edith |
| ***Tom*** | Male | 6 | Yes | RR | Edith |
| ***Ali*** | Female | 4 | Yes | RR | Rappert |
| ***Eric*** | Male | 6 | Yes | RR | Rappert |
| ***Mary*** | Female | 4 | Yes | RR | Princeton |

10 Males = 71%
4 Females = 29 %

4 Gr. 4 = 29% 6 Caucasian = 43%
7 Gr. 5 = 50% 8 Minority = 57%
3 Gr. 6 = 21%

8 in their home school = 57%
6 not in home school = 43%

Placement:
RR = Resource Room (50% or > integration) = 43% of sample
SCC = Self-Contained Class (LD/Behavioural) = 57% of sample

**Note: the names of the participants and the schools have been changed to maintain anonymity

socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the participants' families was not available. Eight of the participants had been placed in a Self-Contained class for students with learning and behavioural needs. Most of these pupils had to travel to a school (Concord P.S.) outside of their neighbourhood by bus each day. The remainder of the participants received support through special education programs in their home schools (Resource Room programs). It should be emphasized that these children had various learning disabilities, some of which included limited expressive language skills. Other children were quite talkative and articulate in their own way. I felt that all of these children, even those with limited verbal skills, had something important to say and should be included in the study.

The specific type of service delivery provided to each child was determined through a checklist given to the teachers involved with the child (see Appendix C). It was at this point that I found out that one of the children from the Resource Rooms (Tom), who had not yet been interviewed, had been fully integrated at some point earlier in the year. Nevertheless, I decided to include him, believing that he would be able to provide helpful information regarding his past experiences in special education and his present experience of being fully integrated. This did, indeed, turn out to be the case. In addition, during the course of the interviews (between the first and second interviews), a student from another Resource Room (Ali) became fully integrated into her regular education class.

Data Collection Methods and Instrumentation

"Knowing what you want to find out...leads inexorably to the question of how you will get at that information" (Miles & Huberman, 1994; p.34). The data used in qualitative research are typically words. Choosing the method of obtaining these "words" is another key area to consider when implementing such research. Qualitative methods range from ethnography, case studies, participant observation, cross-case analysis, and evaluation (e.g., of programs). The most common methods, however, are interviews and observation techniques. In order to select the most appropriate methodology to use, the research question has to be clarified first (what one wants to find out in their study). I was confronted with the task of how best to tap into the perceptions and beliefs of children with learning disabilities in special education programs. The following is a description of the methods I chose to adopt to gain this information.

Child interviewing.

Interviews can be done face-to-face, in groups, or through questionnaires. Furthermore, they can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. Whatever the specific method, interviews are specially suited to acquiring information on covert processes and events; in essence, one's subjective experience. These covert processes include how individuals perceive and respond to their experiences, interpret experiences, formulate expectations, and select and plan goals (Hughes & Baker, 1990).

The main data collection method which was used in this research study is the clinical child interview. Children can provide accurate and meaningful information concerning themselves, often more so than can their parents and teachers. (e.g., Edelbrock, Costello, Dulcan, Kalas, & Conover, 1985). Hence, if the goal is to understand children's perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes, especially those that may impact on their functioning and difficulties, it is reasonable to ask them to report these convictions (Hughes & Baker, 1990). Given the fact that children's cognitive and verbal capabilities are different from adults, specialized interview techniques are required to enable children to describe their thoughts, feelings, and rich subjective experiences. An adult interviewer has to be competent, sensitive, and knowledgable about children and their way of thinking and communicating (McNamee, 1989).

In developing my interview protocol, I adopted suggestions and guidance from Hughes and Baker (1990). In describing child interviewing, Hughes and Baker (1990) noted that it is different from adult interviewing in that it may be more non-verbal than verbal. Furthermore, the child may be given a fair amount of freedom to initiate topics and choose the format for the interaction (e.g., through drawings or words). The reliability and validity of child interview data depends on factors including rapport, phrasing of questions, and the interviewee's language competence and age. Yet, even if children's reports are factually inaccurate, their self-perceptions and perceptions of their environment are still important and valid. Should adult perceptions be used as the criteria with which to compare children's, the assumption is then made that adult perceptions are more valuable and correct. As children's ability to recall events accurately depends on their developmental stage as well as the type of event, their interest level, and the questioning strategy used by the interviewer, special interviewing procedures are needed to gain rich, yet accurate,

information from them (Hughes & Baker, 1990). With regard to the reliability of child interview data, it is more difficult to ascertain this with unstructured interviewing approaches, but some studies have shown good agreement from one session to another in what the child has reported (e.g., Hay, Hay, Angle, & Nelson, 1979; Rutter & Graham, 1968).

Children's communicative competence, an important issue to consider, generally increases with age, but also depends on their familiarity with the interview situation, the questioning strategies used by the interviewer, as well as the interview relationship. Special questioning methods are sometimes needed so that they are able to respond, including modifying questions and providing concrete referents such as pictures. It is also important to get the children's definitions of key concepts/terms (e.g., "special education", "resource room") as they arise. Finally, asking the questions in a familiar setting and relating them to activities (e.g., drawing) will more likely elicit responses. I tried to follow all of these recommendations when interviewing the participants in my study. For instance, I interviewed all of the participants in their own schools (a familiar setting) about school topics (something very familiar to them). To further set the foundation for thinking about the subject and to encourage thoughtful responses, I presented brief stories about children in similar circumstances (see Appendix D), showed relevant pictures (see Appendix E), and had the participants draw their own pictures (see Appendix D). This provided the base with which the children were able to access their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes about the subject matter. Hughes and Baker (1990) noted that drawings are familiar to 6-12 year old children and allow them to avoid extensive eye contact and to rely less on their language skills. Thus, having them draw a picture and discuss it can be quite effective, perhaps particularly with children who have learning disabilities. In many cases, the pictures I presented to the children along with the stories about the pictures helped them to visualize and think about the information I was seeking. In addition, having them draw their own pictures was something that most of the participants were happy and excited to do and this provided a starting point for our discussions.

As noted at the beginning of this section, interviews can be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured. In qualitative studies, there are arguments for either preplanning and structuring the instrumentation or for using very little preplanning. Most interviews have a

certain amount of structure (Hughes & Baker, 1990) and this study was no different. Although my study was largely exploratory, I knew the issues which I wanted to address (from prior research and experience) and the potential methods of so doing. In addition, because I had multiple cases and some comparability as well as generalizability was important in my study, some preplanning was felt to be necessary and helpful (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, my interviews were structured in the sense that I selected topics to cover in the interview, had a protocol for the direction of the interview, and had developed key questions as well as possible probes (see Appendix D for the interview schedule). However, the interviews were also unstructured in the sense that there was flexibility in responding to topics or ideas introduced by the children. For example, I often pursued a topic introduced by the child, only limiting it if it was tangential to the subject. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) advise that qualitative researchers be flexible in terms of each participant and where they go in the discussion. Interviews can also differ in their breadth of coverage; they can have a narrow focus or cover broader areas of interest. My interviews entailed more in-depth probing of the children's views on issues related to special education.

I knew that it would be challenging to interview children identified as having a learning disability because many do find it difficult to express themselves. As noted earlier, I decided to incorporate "picture-showing" and "story-telling" procedures in my interviews. I enlisted and paid an artist, who was also a Grade 5 teacher, to draw five school scenes: a school; five "character" children in a regular education class; the same five children walking towards another class (the special education class); the five children working in a special education class; and the five children back in their regular class with their regular education teacher as well as their special education teacher assisting in this class. I asked this artist to draw children of a range of ethnicities, looking approximately of Grade 5 age, and to include simple details in the drawings (e.g., to have no obvious emotion on people's faces, to include typical classroom materials and activities). As can be seen by examining the pictures in Appendix E, this artist did an excellent job of meeting these requirements. I created very brief and basic stories about these children and incorporated these stories as part of the interview protocol.

The format and questions of my protocol were piloted on two non-exceptional children in order to revise interview questions and techniques (and to determine the

possible length of time for the interview). I also tried some of the questions on children with academic difficulties whom I was assessing at the time to determine whether they could be understood or whether they needed to be altered. It became apparent that I needed to provide some foundation for the children in terms of the information I was seeking; this was then done through using drawings and initial discussion about school. In addition, I needed to change some of the phrasing of my questions. I also changed some of the questions or added others on the advice of Committee members.

The format was altered slightly for each participant depending on their actual situation. For example, the order of the questions in the interview protocol was altered depending on the children's class placement; the children from the Self-Contained class were asked questions about their special education class before their integrated class and the children from Resource Room programs were asked questions about their "integrated class" first because it was assumed that this was where they spent most of their time. In addition, the children from the Resource Rooms were not asked questions about changing schools or taking the bus. During the actual data collection interviews, I occasionally had to change the interview questions and initial format in order to maintain the flow of the interview or to ensure that the students understood what I was asking. For example, if a participant began talking about taking the bus to school before I intended to raise this topic, I simply began questioning them about taking the bus at that point. In addition, some of the participants raised some topics that I had not thought of and I wanted to pursue these topics with the latter participants who had yet to be interviewed or during the follow-up interviews. For example, their desk placement in various classes came up during early interviews so I decided to question other participants about this, usually while they were drawing a picture of their classes. My questions were limited by the fact that I was not given Board permission to ask evaluative questions of their teachers; therefore, I tried to limit my questions to basic questions regarding what the teacher does (e.g., how often does Mrs. H come into your class to help you?). Another limitation is the fact that because the interviews were semi-structured and we sometimes got sidetracked on a topic (often an important topic), I missed asking some of the participants some of the questions. For example, I missed asking a few of the children some of the definitions, such as "integration". Other definitions were not felt to be appropriate to the situation or did not prove to be

fruitful in early interviews. For example, asking the children what "labelling" meant did not result in anything useful; they appeared to have no awareness of this issue related to special education. Admittedly, at times my questioning fell short of the ideal, usually with children who were not very open or verbal. At those times, I resorted to using forced choice questions (questions in which they were asked to pick one of two or three choices), which was not my initial intention. Although I believe most of my questions were not overly complex, it was obviously challenging for some of these children to conceptualize and formulate responses to some of my questions (e.g., Why do you feel you belong in ___ class?).

The interview sessions were audiotaped, with the consent of the parents and children involved. All interviews took place in a private, quiet room in the children's schools at a time which was convenient to the teachers and the children. As noted earlier, I visited all of the children about one week prior to beginning the interviews in order to again explain the nature of the study. In this way, they were somewhat familiar with me when it came time for the interviews. At the beginning of the interview, I asked them if they could tell me what they remembered about what we would be doing. I was then able to clarify any misunderstandings and add information as necessary. The children were again reminded that they were free to withdraw at any time. The initial interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 1 1/2 hours, with the average time being about 1 hour. They took place from February to March, 1998. When they were completed, I began transcribing these interviews so that I could produce summaries of the information and develop follow-up questions. These follow-up questions included questions which arose when I examined the interview data and realized I needed to know more about a particular issue as well as topics which may have arisen in another participant's interview. I also wanted to ask them more questions about their drawings which I thought of when I had time to examine the drawings further. The summaries were typically about two pages in length.

Approximately 1 1/2 to 2 months after the initial interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews with each subject (mid- April to early May). The purpose of these follow-up interviews was to present the participants with my summary of what they had told me in the first interview, clarify any ambiguities, allow them to correct/change anything, address any further questions/issues that may have come from later subjects, and ask them questions which came to mind when I was reading and summarizing their transcripts. I

read the summaries, statement by statement, to the participants directly from my portable computer, with them looking on if they so wished. These statements were fairly simple. The children were often asked "Is that right?" and I sought verbal or nonverbal confirmation that what I was summarizing was correct. They were allowed and encouraged to jump in at any time to correct a statement. The follow-up questions I wanted to ask were usually embedded in the particular statement/topic being covered in the summary. Also, other questions often arose spontaneously during these follow-up interviews and we were free to pursue any topic or issue that seemed important. The second interviews ranged in time from 1/2 hour to 1 hour, with most taking about 40 minutes. These interviews were extremely useful in clarifying and elaborating information. After these interviews were completed, they were also transcribed for later analysis. Both interviews were conducted over a 4 month period from February to May.

It should be noted that during the interviews I took brief notes regarding the environment, participants, their drawings, and the time of the interviews. I also took note of anything else that seemed important. Soon after the interviews were conducted (usually later that day), I typed these notes into a computer file, adding further comments about the interviews. These notes were typically 1-2 pages in length and contained the information noted earlier, as well as concluding comments and observations about the participants, their behaviour, my behaviour and questions, and possible follow-up issues and questions. These notes also helped when forming the summaries of each initial interview.

Drawings.

Children's drawings have been used in some previous research studies to look at a variety of concepts and knowledge. Studies have used artwork to examine issues such as children's knowledge of social distance (Holmes, 1992), their attitudes toward the elderly (Weber et al., 1996), their expressions of emotion (Winston et al., 1995), their understanding of technology (Rennie & Jarvis, 1995), their conceptions of death (Tamm & Granqvist, 1995), and their attitudes about taking care of themselves (Van Tilburg, 1987). Children's drawings have been used in research both to differentiate low from average achieving students and to ascertain the attitudes of gifted students (Armstrong, 1995; Prout & Celmer, 1984).

In this study, each child was asked to provide a series of three drawings during the course of their interview (of their school, their special education class, and their regular education class). These drawings were used as a non-verbal technique to develop rapport and to elicit verbal information from the participants. In addition, some of the drawings that the participants provided were used to support the theory that I developed.

Non-participant classroom observation.

The third data collection method used was classroom observation. I observed most of the children in their actual classroom setting(s), in both their special education and general education classes. I was a non-participant observer (not taking part in the classroom activities). Participant observation is a method often undertaken by ethnographers and involves participating in the culture being studied and observing patterns (Jacob, 1987). This methodology, however, is quite time-consuming because many days or weeks are required before the researcher becomes more of a "normal" participant of the situation. This was not feasible in the present study. I observed all of the children in their special education classes, except for two children from the Resource Room classes who had been fully integrated at the time the observations were conducted and two children from the Self-Contained class who were absent when I observed this class. In the Resource Rooms, I spent from one hour to just over 2 hours observing these classes. I spent just under three hours on a single morning observing the Self-Contained class. I observed five of the children from the Self-Contained class in their integrated math classes (approximately 30 minutes); the other three children were not integrated for math and, actually, spent little time in integrated settings. Among the children from Resource Room programs, I was given teacher permission to observe half of them in their regular education class settings. I spent from 40 to 80 minutes in their integrated classes. Thus, I observed some of the participants in both settings, some in only one setting. All of the observations took place after the interviews had been completed, later in the school year (May to June). Therefore, I was unfortunately unable to ask the students about anything I had observed while in their class.

The observations I conducted were narrative descriptions of the behaviour of the children and teachers, observations of the environment, as well as my "subjective interpretations" (inferences of the observer about the behaviour of the participants). These

observations were intended to provide information about context; that is, information about the physical and social context in which the children's perceptions may take place. For example, I observed the desk grouping/room arrangement, the subject/activity the students were working on, the level of the participants' involvement in class activities, their behaviour, their understanding and response to instructions/questions, and their interactions with other students and with the teachers. I was careful not to make any evaluative observations of the teachers as I was not given permission to do so. See Appendix F for a copy of the general observation schedule which I followed. The observations were documented by taking notes which were later transcribed into a computer file.

Ethical Issues

There are many ethical issues to consider when conducting research with human participants (particularly with children), including confidentiality and informed consent. Informed consent was provided by the participants' parents (see Appendix B). Verbal consent was obtained from any teacher in whose classroom the observations took place. The child participants were told, at the outset of the study and the beginning of the interviews, that they could ask to stop at any time or change their mind regarding participation in the study. In addition, implicit signs of wanting out (i.e., off-task behaviour or verbal responses, excessive yawning, inattentiveness, muteness or inappropriate responses) were heeded (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1990). The children were given breaks during the interviews as needed. The children were also informed as to how the data would be handled in that their school, teachers, or parents would not be told any individual information regarding what they had said (to ensure confidentiality). There were a few occasions in which I advised the participants to share their feelings with their parents or a teacher. As suggested by Koocher and Keith-Spiegel (1990), parents were informed at the outset that they would not receive any individual information about what their child has shared (see Appendix B). Furthermore, in the transcription process, identifying information (names, teachers' names, schools) were changed to protect the confidentiality of the research participants and their schools. All of the parents indicated that they wished to have a summary of the overall

findings when they were available and this will be provided to them. Participating schools will be given a presentation, if desired, of the overall study findings or a written summary.

Verification and Rigour

This section will discuss the key problems and issues related to qualitative methodology which threaten the reliability of the results. Verification (confirming findings) is a key problem with qualitative research. Miles and Huberman (1994) provide a list of safeguards to deal with this issue, such as having a colleague or another researcher to review one's data and analysis, increasing the number of cases, looking purposively for contrasting cases, and avoiding being too influenced by articulate and insightful informants. Further, in order for the data and findings to be confirmable, Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend strategies such as describing the procedures in detail, displaying the data clearly, being forthright about any assumptions and biases which may have influenced the analysis, and retaining the data for reanalysis by others. As indicated below, I followed these suggestions as much as possible in order to strengthen my results.

Triangulation is a technique whereby different kinds of measurements provide repeated verification. One can triangulate by data source (e.g., multiple persons), method, or by researcher (Mathison, 1988). In this study, I used multiple data sources by involving 14 participants from two different types of special education programs and from four different schools. In addition, two of the participants had been fully integrated, which provided a different perspective to the topic. Even if the different sources are inconsistent or conflicting, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that this is not necessarily adverse, but that it pushes us to a more complex set of explanations. I initially intended to triangulate by method as well and that is why I included an observation portion and the participants' drawings. This was partly done to ensure sufficient data. As I acquired enough data from the interviews, I decided not to include the observations and drawings in the formal analysis. Instead, this information was examined in order to explain or, at times, support the themes which arose from the analysis of the interview data. It should be noted that the fact that I interviewed the participants a second time also provides further validation to the findings because their viewpoints could then be seen as somewhat stable.

It is crucial, albeit challenging, to ensure rigour in a qualitative study and to ensure quality in the conclusions (Crowley, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). One must try to eliminate bias and ensure that the data are trustworthy in terms of being credible, transferable, and confirmable. I believe that my study met these demands because I did not have any pre-conceived notions of what I expected to hear from the children (e.g., whether they were satisfied with their special education placements or not). I began the project without any specific hypotheses, as advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). I had some ideas about what the children might say, based on the previous studies, but I did not have any concrete suppositions. Although I work in the special education system, I did not have strong beliefs for or against segregated special education when I collected the data and analysed the results. I believe this allowed me to be open to what the children had to say. I am greatly interested in the topic and, of course, in the research question, but I have no investment in what the results are, only that they be true and insightful.

There are other potential sources of bias to deal with when conducting qualitative studies including the effects that the researcher will inevitably have on the situation and on the informants; that is, people may switch to an on-stage role when they are being observed or interviewed. To protect against these potential problems, I spent some time with the students prior to interviewing them so that they were familiar with me. In addition, I made my intentions clear to all of the participants regarding why I was there, what I was going to be doing, and what my purpose was. Nevertheless, I cannot deny the effect that my presence may have had on the students' willingness to share their true thoughts and feelings. All of the students knew that I worked in the education system assessing children with learning difficulties. Although I believe that I related well to most of the students and that most of them were quite open with me, some of them may have viewed me as an authority figure with whom they had to be cautious in sharing information. Many times I reminded them that what they shared during the interviews was confidential and that it would not affect their grades in any way; however, it is quite possible that some participants were reluctant to share certain information, believing that it would have a negative impact on my perceptions of them and on their education. There is no way to know for certain. I

can only be satisfied with and accept the information that they did share which, in some cases, was quite intense, personal, and insightful.

Another issue to consider is whether the process of the study is consistent and stable. Reliability and consistency can be provided by having clear research questions, showing that the data are parallel across data sources (informants, methods, times), conducting coding checks and quality checks, and instituting colleague reviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I did not have colleagues review my coding and analysis. However, I carefully checked my coding, which will be discussed in the next section. Credibility and authenticity of the findings are other critical considerations in terms of whether the findings make sense, are credible to the people studied, and provide an accurate picture of the phenomenon. This internal validity can be strived for by providing context-rich and meaningful descriptions, an account that makes sense to the reader and is comprehensive, having converging conclusions from triangulation procedures, seeking negative evidence, and considering alternate explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I have attempted to present findings which are consistent across data sources (participants). As noted earlier, triangulation is a strategy which is used to improve the validity of the findings by showing that independent measures (other data sources, other data methods) support the same finding and do not contradict one another; in this manner, bias is believed to be eliminated or at least reduced (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Mathison (1988), however, argues that it is unreasonable to expect that the data acquired will all support the same proposition. Furthermore, if different methods result in different findings, this might be due to bias or it might be that the methods tap or measure different "domains of knowing" (Mathison, 1988). There is no proof that bias will be eliminated when multiple methods are used in a study; all methods are believed to be subjective and biased and there is no reason to believe that this will be cancelled out by combining methods. In addition, one cannot be sure that when the bias is cancelled out, what is left is the "truth" in the sense of convergence on a single finding or theme (Mathison, 1988). Instead, Mathison (1988) points out that it is quite possible that data will be inconsistent or even contradictory, but that this provides better insight into the social phenomena that we are studying. Reasonable explanations should be developed for the inconsistent or contradictory findings. This provides an opportunity to better understand what is happening and to make sense of what we find by "embedding the

empirical data at hand with a holistic understanding of the specific situation and general background knowledge about this class of social phenomena" (Mathison, 1988, p. 17).

In analysing and presenting my results, I have attempted to present findings which are consistent across many of the participants, but also to examine and present findings which are inconsistent (e.g., where there seem to be groups of participants expressing different views). Taking Mathison's (1988) advice, I have used my understanding of what is happening as well as my knowledge of special education children and prior research to explain the discrepant views. It should be noted that there are many different reasons why children may have different views and insights on these issues, but it is helpful to ascertain what their individual viewpoints are and not assume that they all think the same.

External validity, which is also referred to as transferability or fittingness, is also important in terms of whether and how far the findings can be generalized to other contexts. This can be attempted by describing the sample, settings, and processes clearly to allow comparisons with other samples. In addition, possible threats to generalizability should be explained, theoretically diverse sampling should be used, and the conclusions should be described in a common enough manner so that they are applicable in other settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I have tried to describe my sample and procedures in detail and am aware that generalizability to other children in special education may be limited, particularly those with different exceptionalities and those in different types of programs.

I have attempted to have my findings and study procedures be valid, reliable, and confirmable as outlined in this section. In addition, in order for a study to be rigorous and useful, it should be accessible to the people for whom it will be of use. In so doing, it will hopefully lead to consciousness-raising and action-taking on the part of these people to solve relevant problems (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To this end, I intended for my results and conclusions to be useful in advancing our understanding of the perspectives of exceptional children in education. This understanding will then hopefully assist us in making more enlightened decisions about these children which have considered their viewpoints.

## Data Management and Analysis

The final areas to consider when implementing a qualitative study are data management and analysis which are the central foci of qualitative research. In qualitative

projects, large amounts of data are usually acquired making it necessary to find ways to manage, reduce, display, and interpret the data. Data reduction is initially important in terms of selecting and focusing the's topic and research question. Later, reducing the data is critical for the task of analysis in terms of selecting what to examine and code as well as what to ignore.

Analysis in qualitative research should be iterative in terms of moving back and forth throughout the study. Miles and Huberman (1994) discuss this as a cyclical process in which one moves among data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. This section will discuss some recommended methods for analysing qualitative data which were used in this study.

Memos and notes.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) advise that by writing memos to oneself or keeping a log, thoughts are developed and the analysis process begins. Memos are reflections on analysis (emerging themes, connections, patterns), reflections on the interview method (procedures and design of the study, problems), reflections on ethical dilemmas and conflicts, and reflections on the researcher's frame of mind (preconceptions, own beliefs and opinions, points of clarification). They are specialized written records. There are several types of memos and diagrams, including code notes, theoretical notes, and operational notes; code notes are memos regarding the coding process (e.g., conceptual labels), theoretical notes contain the results of inductive and deductive thinking about categories, dimensions, properties, and relationships; and operational notes are memos to oneself about sampling, questions, and leads to follow up. Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommend maintaining distinctions among these types of notes as well as in any diagrams that are developed. They further recommend that memoing and diagramming should not be omitted because they help to move away from the data towards more abstract thinking. One can then return to the data to ground the abstractions and hypotheses in the actual data.

I used memos, notes, and diagrams during my data collection and during the data analysis. I organized notes and memos under my codes or categories, either attaching them to the "nodes" in the computer program or, more frequently, attaching them to the printouts of each category. Files were maintained on each of the primary categories and themes (e.g.,

Exclusion) containing the printouts and my notes regarding any analyses of this information. In addition, I kept a general notebook which contained my thoughts, ideas, and developing theories. For example, in this notebook, I drew an early diagram at the beginning of the data analysis to incorporate beginning ideas and connections. This gave me a starting point for later themes and connections; however, I continued to remain open to new findings and links in the data, documenting these changes as I proceeded.

Data organization.

"Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). By examining the data, explanations and hypotheses are created and theories are developed. In order to do this, the data must be categorized and synthesized, and patterns must be looked for and interpreted. In the past, a key problem in conducting qualitative research had to do with the fact that the analysis methods were not clear or well-delineated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). More recently, however, guidelines for conducting analyses in the qualitative domain have become more concrete and systematic (e.g., Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In addition, there are now many computer programs available to help with systematically analysing qualitative data. I used the computer program NUD*IST 4: (Non-numerical Unstructured Data: Indexing, Searching and Theorizing) and guidelines from Strauss and Corbin (1990) to organize and analyse my results.

The information acquired in my study were taped interviews, field notes of my observation sessions, notes from the interviews, and the drawings provided by the participants. I transcribed all of the interviews from audio-tape into computer files. These files were given code names depending on the participant and interview (e.g., S2-1 is Participant #2, interview #1). All of the interview files were transferred to the NUD*IST program for coding. All of the students' names were changed and any references to schools or teachers were also altered to protect anonymity. I did not formally code the observation notes or notes from the interviews, believing that it was best to focus on the verbal information from the children and to refer to the other notes as necessary.

Initial data analysis.

Coding is a gradual process of sorting and defining the collected data - putting like-minded pieces altogether into data piles. Each section is assigned one or more code names and numbers, with the code names identifying a concept or central idea. There are different types of coding that can be used to build a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These types are open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open coding essentially consists of breaking down and conceptualizing the data; each discrete event or idea should be given a name as to what it is (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These conceptual labels then have to be grouped into categories, which have more abstract names. The category names can come from professional literature, technical literature, or from the words used by the informants themselves. For example, I had labelled some sections "kicked out" (students saying they were kicked out of a class), "left out", and "not allowed"; these and other similar labels were subsumed under the category name of "exclusion." I went through four of the interview transcripts, coded them, and developed an initial coding system and "tree"; these four children all came from different schools and appeared to have slightly different perspectives, so it seemed appropriate to use these to make sure I was sampling a range of views. It should be noted that NUD*IST allows one to code individual lines or statements or multiple lines and statements (e.g., many lines of dialogue between the participant and me) to be placed in a category; one highlights the lines that are desired and "selects" them. NUD*IST also has a feature which lets one organize codes and categories hierarchically depending on how they are thought to be related to each other (a "tree"). From these four transcripts, I developed an initial tree with various codes such as "Attitudes regarding Reasons for Special Education" (the actual code name was "Reasons for"), "Belonging", "Wishes", and "Feelings- worrying". Thus, all of the actual categories came from the what the children said and were then "grounded" in the data. The way I had initially organized my various categories, however, was difficult to follow and conceptualize. I then sought advice on how to develop a coding system from Bogdan and Biklen (1992). Their system involves dividing codes in the following manner:

1. Setting/Context
2. Definition of the Situation
3. Perspectives
4. Ways of thinking about people and objects

5. Process
6. Activities
7. Events
8. Strategies
9. Relationships and social structure
10. Methods

I essentially organized my codes in this manner, substituting "Self" for "Definition of the Situation" and deleting the "Methods" section. I used a two-level scheme: I had my specific "emic" codes, which were developed from the participants, organized under the "etic", general codes (Perspectives, Strategies, etc.). For example, codes such as "Peer Relations" and "Exclusion" were placed under the "Relationships" section, whereas attitudes about special education, expectations, knowledge, and feelings were placed under the "Perspectives" section. The Perspectives section had the greatest number of codes which is reasonable considering the focus of my study is on the viewpoints of children in special education. I placed all of the emic codes I had developed from the initial coding into this arrangement, combining codes which seemed to tap similar concepts. Some codes were deleted, others were added.

Once this system was organized, I then coded all of the initial interviews, adding new codes to the system as appropriate. For example, I added a code "Perception of Work" that could be distinguished from information regarding their "Perception of school/class". I also collapsed a few categories in order to keep the number manageable. I ensured that each code/category had a "definition" regarding what was to placed in there that was clear and easy to follow. The second interviews were then coded, with only one code being added at that time. Once I had coded 24 of the interviews (all 14 initial interviews, and 10 second interviews), and no new categories had emerged, I decided to stop coding so that I could examine and refine the coding system a final time. I examined what was in each category in terms of content and participant. I refined the definition of what was to be placed in each category and the kinds of information that were contained in that category. For example, "Perception-work" contained information regarding the child's views of schoolwork, such as what they find easy or difficult, what they like or do not like, their perceptions of their grades, and how they believe they are handling their work. Some categories were also deleted or combined if it did not seem that they were adding anything new or different. I

also took note of which participants and interviews were excerpted under each category. This gave me a sense of whether I seemed to have a complete category (containing excerpts from most or all participants) or an incomplete one. A category may have been incomplete because there was simply not as much information as other categories or because I had added the category later (after already coding some of the interviews) or because perhaps I had not attended well to this category when coding. After I had coded the remaining 4 interviews, I made lists of what information I may have missed coding for each participant/interview. Also, because I had added some new categories and decided to place already coded information under that new category, I had to re-examine some of the interviews because of this. For example, while coding, I decided to add the "Perception of Work" category instead of putting that information under "Perception of Class/School"; therefore, I had to re-code some of the early interviews to reflect this change. When these lists were complete, I then went through each interview specifically examining them for the "missing" categories. In some cases, I had missed properly coding information, in other cases, the participant had not provided any information that would be classified under some codes. I wanted to carefully re-check the interviews to make sure that this was the case and that I had not missed some key information.

In the end, I had 53 working codes/categories which contained data; this did not include general category names (e.g., "Setting"), because these categories did not contain any data. Not all of these categories had data from every participant or interview. In many cases, a particular excerpt (sentence, short paragraph, dialogue) was selected to be placed under more than one category. In some cases, a certain meaningful passage was placed in quite a few categories. I must admit that I was probably overzealous in coding, sometimes placing a passage in a category when it may not have belonged there. However, I erred on the side of caution, knowing that I would be carefully examining the categories later and that I could ignore excerpts that did not provide any helpful information at that time.

Subsequent analyses.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommend that categories be developed in terms of their properties (characteristics/attributes) and dimensions (locations of a property along a continuum); this is another aspect of open coding. Properties include frequency, extent,

intensity, and duration. The dimensions are the location of a property along a continuum such as "often" to "never" for frequency. I examined all of my categories, deciding to print out approximately 22 of them for more detailed analyses. I then began to inspect these categories for information regarding their properties and dimensions. For example, the category "Rewards" contained information about the types of rewards, frequency, and rules for giving among other properties; other properties such as duration were not available in the data. Due to the broad nature of my study and the fact that I was not able to analyse data and then re-interview participants based on needing more information in a particular area ("theoretical saturation"), many of my categories do not contain complete information regarding properties and dimensions. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define theoretical saturation as occurring when no new or relevant data seem to emerge with respect to a category, the category development is dense, and the relationships between categories are well-established and validated. I tried to apply this as well as I could to each category.

Axial coding entails making connections between a category and its subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher goes beyond the properties and dimensions of the categories by determining various other features: the conditions that give rise to a category; the context in which it is embedded; the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled, managed, and carried out; and the consequences of those strategies. By specifying these features, they are also related to the category. As these features are discovered, one also attempts to verify the deductions from the actual data (thus, grounding the hypotheses in the data). The focus in axial coding is working intensively with one category. It should be noted that open and axial coding are not necessarily conducted sequentially - the researcher can and should continually switch among the two. As I examined each category for its properties and dimensions, I also examined the possible causes and consequences of what was being said. Repeatedly, I went back and forth between hypotheses regarding the category and the actual data, listing the amount and type of data which supported the hypotheses. I constantly updated and changed my hypotheses, depending on what was in the data. Frequently, the causes and consequences of a particular category were other categories. For example, exclusion and victimization experiences often led to sad or angry feelings. The information in both of these categories supported this contention.

The final type of coding, selective coding, is the most abstract level of analysis and typically occurs in the later stage of data analysis. It involves committing oneself to a "story line" (what seems to be the one most important phenomenon from the data) and explicating this story. The researcher does this by developing the core category in term of its properties and by relating other categories to it (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In essence, deductions are being integrated into a theory and the patterns and relationships that form the theory are being validated. This is one of the last procedures that I incorporated in analysing my data. I had written up many of my results and themes before I realized what my core category was. This core category was the last category that I analysed in detail, yet it was an issue that arose repeatedly in the other categories.

In analysing my results, I often summarized and displayed the information contained in a category in table form. Some of these tables are included in the Results section for presentation purposes. I found it much easier to conceptualize the data when it was summarized, broken down, and displayed in table form. I could then attempt to ascertain the common viewpoints of the children, as well as those which were inconsistent or contradictory. I often alternated between displaying the data and analysing the data. I also used NUD*IST to conduct many searches of words or phrases that seemed to arise repeatedly. For example, I searched for phrases such as "don't know", which resulted in many examples, as well as for the phrase "kicked out" which actually resulted in few examples. I then analysed the sentences around these phrases to provide context for analysing their meaning. These search techniques were extremely valuable in conducting "micro-level" analyses of the information contained in a particular category. They often led to hypotheses regarding what was happening. I also used these searches to re-check some of my categories. For example, I searched for words such as "happy" and "good" to ensure that I had obtained all appropriate incidents of "Positive feelings" in the interviews.

The categories were then developed into themes and hypotheses about these themes. Eight major themes will be presented in the Results section and discussed in terms of how they relate to one another and relate to the experiences of children in special education. The fourth chapter presents the theory of how these themes are linked and how they relate to the core category.

## CHAPTER III

## Results and Initial Discussion

This chapter will delineate the major themes which arose in the data and discuss the associations among these themes. The next chapter will focus on the development of a theory which attempts to represent the predominant educational issue for these children with special learning needs. That chapter will further explore the hypothesized relationship among the themes identified in Chapter III and the core category around which the other themes are integrated. It should be noted that this theory was developed from what the children told me and my abstractions of this information. The classroom observations and the children's drawings will be used to help support this theory and the themes described in this chapter, but the main information has come from the words of the children themselves. I believe that I am representing what has been their prevalent experience with and perceptions of special education. It is important to emphasize that this theory represents the story of the 14 children whom I interviewed. Whether it represents other children in special education programs has yet to be determined. The goal was to present the overriding message that came from interviewing these children. Although I coded all of the interview data, I only analysed and will only discuss the information that they shared that is relevant to the purpose of this study.

The intended goal of this study was to gain information regarding the educational perceptions and experiences of children with identified specific learning difficulties in special education programs. As will be shown below, for many of these children, their experience has been one of exclusion, confusion, changes and transitions, uncertainty, lack of control over changes, unmet goals and wishes, and related negative feelings. Many of these children shared information which suggested unhappiness with their educational situation. In addition, many of the students discussed strategies which they have used or could use to attempt to change their situation for the better. These experiences and concepts comprise the themes which will be presented in this chapter. The first theme, "In the Dark", discusses the knowledge and understanding that the students had about special education procedures and their reasons for receiving support. As the title suggests, many of the children professed a weak understanding and incomplete memory regarding this

information. "The Power of Perks" examines the salience of rewards and reward systems for children in special education programs. The third theme, "Being Educated in Exile", addresses a prevalent concern of the students which is their perception that they are not wanted, not allowed to be in, and not included in mainstream classes as well as their view that they are victimized by peers due to their special class placement. These experiences result in "Feeling Ashamed". Many of the children were unhappy and angry about their educational situation, primarily because it resulted in being excluded and victimized. I will argue that this anger and sadness was a manifestation or a cover for feelings of shame. The fifth theme, "Saving Face" discusses the comments the students made about themselves and the fact that many of the comments showed a lack of acceptance of having learning problems. "Longing to be Unexceptional" addresses the desire to be normal and to be in a class which is perceived as more "normal" than "special" education. This theme also covers their comments related to preferences for school and class placement. The seventh theme, "Route to Freedom", presents and analyses the strategies which the students may have employed, or proposed that they could employ, to achieve their goals and wishes to be integrated more. Finally, the theme "Cloudy Forecast" discusses the predictions and assumptions that the students made about their class placements.

Within each section, I will present the results pertaining to an individual theme and then analyse the results and link them to other theories and research studies. Children whose perceptions and experiences did not entirely fit the central themes will be discussed and analysed in terms of explaining the reasons for their inconsistent or contradictory information. It was the inconsistent information which helped support the actual theory.

## In the Dark

In conducting the interviews and later transcribing them, it was striking how little many of the participants seemed to know about the means and basis for their placement in special education. Their expressions of uncertainty and unfamiliarity pervaded the coding category I had labelled "Knowledge" as well as similar categories related to their understanding of the reasons for their special education placement and the means by which this had happened. Thus, this theme relates to the participants' knowledge regarding special education procedures, definitions, decisions, placements, reasons for receiving help,

and reasons for any changes to their program or placement. It covers a range of information which will be organized into the following sections. The first section will examine their memory, knowledge, and understanding of how they were originally selected for special education and how they were placed into their current special education class. In essence, this involves their understanding of changes and transitions. The second section will present information related to their knowledge of the reasons for their placement in special education. The third area relates to their ability to explain common terminology used in special education and the final section deals with the issue of their uncertainty regarding all of these topics. I will then analyse the meaning of this information and relate it to other research.

Understanding of Changes and Transitions

The results pertaining to the participants' knowledge of how they were placed in special education are presented and summarized in Table 2. This table covers their memory of how and when they found out they would be attending a special education class, their knowledge of who makes the decisions pertaining to this, and their awareness of any meetings which took place regarding their class placement. Summaries of this information are provided beside each name and the names are organized according to class placement (the first 8 children are from the Self-Contained class and the last 6 children are from the Resource Rooms).

Many of the participants were unclear or vague in attempting to explain why they originally started receiving special education support and their transition to special education. As can be seen by examining this table, most of the participants proclaimed a weak understanding of what had happened to them. Some reported little understanding of how they were selected for special education, who makes the decisions, and how these decisions are made. For example, Bob was not able to explain the reasons for his transfer from his last school to his present school, Concord P.S., nor the means by which this occurred. Because he is from the Self-Contained class, this transfer would have occurred for special education purposes (to place him in a class which was believed to best meet his needs). Most of the children were able to provide some information about their transition to special education, yet this information was incomplete. They were able to recollect some

Table 2

Participants' Knowledge about Special Education

| **Student & *Summary*** | **Transition** | **Decision-Making** | **Meetings** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Jeremy**<br>*- mom seems to keep him informed, but he was confused about who makes decisions and about meetings* | - didn't know how he was picked for special ed, but "they" figured out he needed help in grade 2, through a tutor<br>- learns of changes from report cards & mom | - he thought his previous special ed teacher makes decision because he was tested by him<br>- talked about his mom & doctor being involved | - said he knew about special meetings, but confused them with parent-teacher meetings<br>- unclear about original meetings (e.g., IPRC) |
| **Larry**<br>*- not well-informed, but has some understanding of why he changed schools and who decided* | - found out about change when principal brought him for a visit to class at Concord; thought he was not wanted at last school | - thought principal plays a large role<br>- teachers at last school and parents decided he should come to Concord | - only remembered one meeting where teacher told him and parents he was not to return to that school due to behaviour |
| **Nick**<br>*- reported not being informed properly about changes, but had some understanding of why changed schools, especially during 2nd interview* | - didn't know how he was picked to come to Concord - found out after a party at his last school | - mom had to sign papers for him to get help<br>- "old school" decided he should come to Concord<br>- 2nd interview: reported teacher, principal and Board decide | - remembered a meeting in which he and his mother were told he should not return to last school<br>- at 2nd interview: thought there might be a meeting re next year |
| **Bill**<br>*- reported not being informed properly about changes, incomplete understanding of decisions and meetings* | - last principal told him he would be changing schools when he was taken for a visit to Concord - didn't know why he was visiting | - last principal decided he should change schools due to behaviour<br>- didn't know if anyone else decides except maybe his mother | - didn't know about any meetings<br>- at 2nd interview: said mom told him he'd be staying at Concord next year |
| **Sarah**<br>*- this student had some knowledge of process, but was confused re: why she changed schools, how she found out, who decides* | - didn't know why she changed schools - thought she was kicked out due to her behaviour<br>- confused, but thinks mom told her of change | - mom and Board of education involved in finding her a school<br>- they find a special class that is not full & then mom decides | - no knowledge of meetings<br>- referred to a "review", but was not able to say what that meant |
| **Bob**<br>*- had little knowledge and trouble recalling what happened, not well-informed* | - didn't know how and why he changed schools except maybe because there would be better help at Concord<br>- found out via a visit to Concord | - thought mom responsible for decisions | - knew about meetings at last school, but not able to explain what they were |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **John**<br>*- reported not being well-informed re: changes, but seems to have some knowledge of who decides and of meetings* | - was surprised when he found out he would be coming to Concord school- didn't know why changed<br>- mom didn't tell him | - adults in "school of education" decide<br>- 2nd interview: said teacher and mom also decide | - knew about some meetings at last school re where he was to go, but mom didn't go<br>- knew about a recent meeting re next year |
| **Jack**<br>*- mom keeps him informed, but he is confused about meetings and who makes decisions* | - started a special class in grade 3 due to reading skills, then began the SCC - note was sent home and mom told him | - previous special ed teacher and mom made initial decision<br>- mom wants him to take a test to leave special ed | - didn't know about any special meetings<br>- didn't know about next year, didn't talk about any upcoming meetings |
| **Tim**<br>*- did not appear to be well-informed re: whether he will be going to special ed; had some knowledge of who makes decision, but incomplete* | - unable to say how chosen for special ed<br>- at this new school, just started going to the resource room one day - thinks *he* informed school because there was no way else they'd know | - Board of education makes decision, didn't know who else except maybe his mom<br>- they decide based on his behaviour<br>- didn't know about any forms mom signs | - didn't know about any special meetings, but knew about meetings at last school - not able to say what they were for<br>- surprised he was in resource room again this year |
| **Helen**<br>*- had some idea about decisions and meetings but poor memory of how she got to Resource Room* | - thought she was placed in resource room "maybe because" grades were failing - has always been in special ed and never in a regular class for the whole day | - mother, teachers, and maybe principal decide<br>- mom does not always go to meetings | - not exactly sure about meetings, but maybe they have a big meeting and figure out she needs extra help there<br>- knew about an up-coming meeting |
| **Tom**<br>*- unclear about decision makers and meetings; poor recall of why went into the Resource Room* | - went from comp class to resource room - didn't know why - found out on grade 2 report card about going | - didn't really know about decision-makers - thinks maybe teachers and principal decide<br>- parents sign forms | - didn't know about any special meetings<br>- reported an upcoming meeting during 2nd interview |
| **Ali**<br>*- has a good understanding of recent transitions, decisions and meetings* | - she was in special ed at her last school (self-contained class) and came back to her home school ( resource room) because she was "better" | - teacher, principal, and parents decided she should come back to home school<br>- didn't know who originally decided | - she knew there was a special meeting before she went to special ed<br>- knew about a recent meeting re next year |
| **Eric**<br>*- vague and unclear re: meetings and decisions, poor understanding of how he got to special ed* | - started resource room in grade 4 because teacher knew he needed help - thinks parents told him, not teacher | - parents and resource room teacher decide and maybe regular grade teacher | - didn't know about any special meetings<br>- unclear about recent review meeting, teacher provided some info |
| **Mary**<br>*- reported poor understanding of how she went to special ed, but had decent knowledge of who/how decides* | - found out was going to resource room when this teacher came to her from her regular class one day in grade 4<br>- "I didn't know why I went" | - mom, teachers, and Board of education decide - had good idea of how they decide, but thinks regular grade teacher decides each year and maybe EA | - didn't know about any meetings - mom talks to teacher over phone about her progress |

details and experiences related to when they were placed in special education, but they did not present a coherent, well-informed picture of what had transpired. Many participants suggested that they were not well-prepared by their parents or school personnel for school and class transitions related to special education. For example, two of the children from the Self-contained Class relayed that they found out they would be transferring schools when they came to visit their new school (Concord P.S.). Furthermore, another boy from this class reported that he was surprised when he heard he would be coming to Concord and that his mother had not told him.

Psychological testing would have played a large role in officially placing these children in special education. Yet, none of the eleven participants who were asked about this clearly or completely remembered such an assessment, even after repeated questioning and probing (e.g., giving examples of the kinds of things they would have done). A few of the children had a vague idea of what had occurred, but they did not know the reasons for the testing. They often confused this event with having tutoring or with having special teaching. For example, Mary thought it was: "To learn more. To get more advice on some things" and that the tests were "...good stuff to learn". It should be noted that for most of the children, this testing would have occurred about 2 to 3 years earlier (during their primary years). Thus, any questioning has to rely on their initial understanding of what happened as well as their processing and memory of this event. Because such an event is typically short-lived (maybe a few weeks), it is not surprising that the children were not able to recollect and describe it well. I explained what the testing would have been for, usually during the second interviews, telling the students that it was part of the information that is used to decide whether and how much help children need. The children often expressed surprise and confusion when they were told this and some still had difficulty understanding the role that the testing played. Hence, this may be a difficult concept for them to understand, even if extra time is taken to explain it to them. Although the nature, procedure, and purpose of psychological assessments may have been explained to these children at the time of the testing, it does not seem to be something that they remember well. This may be due to the fact that this event was not a regular part of their school life and that they may not have been familiar with the person conducting the testing. The majority of participants in another study (who were children with learning disabilities in

special education) also stated that they did not know what had been found out about them through psychological testing (Schneider, 1984).

Seven of the participants from the Self-Contained class had experienced at least one school change due to their special education placement. When asked about their understanding of the reasons for their most recent school change, three of the children stated that it was due to poor behaviour, two of the children indicated that it was because they needed "more" or "better" help, and one participant reported that he did not know the reason for his school change. Thus, most of the students who had experienced special education school changes were able to state some reason for this change. In terms of the children from the Resource Room programs, two of these students recollected that they essentially just started attending a Resource Room class after having been in another resource program ("comprehensive" class) for a few years. In this Board, a "comprehensive" class did not require a child to be officially identified (IPRC'd) to obtain this form of support, whereas a Resource Room class did require IPRC designation and typically provided more intensive support. Two other children from the Resource Rooms reported that they just started attending this program one day and were surprised to find out each year that they still had to attend the Resource Room. Thus, they did not appear to be prepared at the beginning of the year for their special class support. Mary's description of how she found out she would be attending the resource room highlights this "surprise":

> When he came downstairs - Mr. L (Special education teacher) came downstairs - and bring me up and I didn't know why I went...So, he came up and I started to go there everyday. And he said "Mary's going to be coming here everyday to do extra help." And I didn't know what to ask him cause I was (inaudible). So, I didn't ask him anything. (Question: Ask who?) Mr. L - why I was going there.

Thus, Mary did not even know the right questions to ask, perhaps because she was so confused and surprised that she was not able to question what had happened to her. It is possible that many of these children feel this way and are then left to conjure up their own ideas as to what is happening to them and why. Many of the students reported being ill-prepared and ill-informed about receiving special education support. Some even stated that they had found out on their report cards.

The children may also misunderstand the reasons and procedures involved in a special education transfer. To illustrate, Mary expressed confusion regarding a friend who

had changed schools to attend a special education class: "Yeah. But, she went to grade 6. That's what I didn't get. Like, she was in grade 3, she went to a different school - skipped all these grades to grade 6." It is possible that this student was placed in a Junior special education class for Grades 4 to 6. When I suggested this to Mary, she remained confused, being sure that her friend had gone to Grade 6 at a different school. This shows that even attempts to clarify misunderstandings may not always help these students understand particularly confusing concepts such as why a younger student with learning difficulties would suddenly be attending a class with older students.

Many of the participants were asked about IPRC review meetings which were occurring around the time the interviews were taking place. These meetings take place each spring in order to review the student's progress for that year and make school and class placement decisions for the following year. Most of the children who were asked about these meetings either had not heard anything about them or did know of them, but not what they were for, even after some probing. Only three of the participants knew that there had been a meeting deciding their placement for the following year. The children were also asked whether they recalled a meeting which would have occurred when they were first placed in special education (the original IPRC). One student, Ali, was able to remember this meeting and explain that it was about the fact that she was not doing well. In addition, when asked to explain what an "Identification, Placement, and Review Committee" meeting was, she replied: "A meeting that means which school you're going to or how you need help or something." Another student stated that he had heard of something like "IPRC", but he was not able to explain what it was. It is important to note that, for most of the students, the original IPRC meeting would have occurred approximately 2-3 years prior, which is a long time for them to be able to explain something which they may not have known about and fully understood in the first place and something which they would not have attended. They would have to rely on receiving information from an adult (parent or teacher) about this meeting. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the students were uncertain what this meeting was and what had occurred. It should be noted that a great deal of probing was often required to ascertain their memories and knowledge of any school meetings. At times, the children discussed recent parent-teacher meetings, despite the fact that I tried to

clarify the nature of the meetings which I was referring to. It seemed that parent-teacher meetings were the most salient in their minds.

Not only had the children from the Self-Contained class experienced school changes related to special education, they had also experienced teacher changes and a sudden reduction in integration during the year that they were interviewed. It is not known whether this amount of change is consistent with other classes, but it seemed to be excessive and was significant to many of these children. Five of the participants from the Self-Contained class talked about the teacher changes and five also talked about the change in integration. The participants from the Self-Contained class reported that earlier that year, in the fall, they were suddenly withdrawn from their integrated classes and told they were to "earn their way back in." According to their recollections, this occurred immediately after the province-wide Ontario teacher protest in 1997, which suggests a possible association between the two events. Prior to this, the students from the Self-Contained class had been integrated for many rotary subjects, both academic and non-academic. One of the issues of the teacher protest was class size and it is possible that the general education teachers were not as willing to accommodate these needy children in their classrooms because these children would not be reflected in accounting for class size. In addition, the teachers may have been feeling particularly stressed and lacking in morale at this time which may have also influenced the decision to not have children with learning and behavioural needs in their classes as extensively.

The five students who discussed this sudden reduction in integration generally blamed others. Two of the students blamed the behaviour of other students from the Self-Contained class, one student blamed the Educational Assistant from this class, and another student blamed his previous special education teacher (from the year before). Only one participant, the only girl from this group, thought that it might have something to do with herself, although she was not certain. None of the children were happy about the loss of integration, but some had managed to "earn back" some of their integrated classes by the time of the interviews (late Winter). For example, Jeremy had lost all integrated subjects except Gym and Math, but he reported that he would soon be attending the general education class for Science and Social Studies, at the request of his mother. Interestingly, three of the children who discussed this issue (Nick, Sarah, and John) are the children with

the least amount of integration (10% per week). Perhaps this issue is salient to these students because they are integrated the least and see their peers attending more integrated classes than they do. Although it might be assumed they have the least amount of integration because they have more serious behaviour or academic difficulties, none of these three children blamed their own behaviour or academic skills for their loss of integration.

As noted earlier, the students from the Self-Contained class had also experienced many teacher changes the year they were interviewed. They had one teacher the year prior and were on their third supply/replacement teacher by the time of the interviews. The students offered different stories as to the reasons for these changes and different predictions as to what would be happening by the end of the year. For example, two of the students believed that their last supply teacher left due to illness whereas another student reported that she had left to take care of her sick son and that she would be coming back in June. In general, the students often reported confusion as to the actual events which had transpired and the reasons for the teacher changes.

In summary, the understanding that students with special learning needs in this study had regarding their transitions to special education programs and any changes within such programs was inadequate. The students' transitions to special education appear to have been poorly understood or remembered and they were not able to offer consistent explanations for any class or teacher changes. Frequently, the students expressed confusion and uncertainty when asked questions about transitions and changes. These finding are consistent with other research studies in which students and adults reported uncertainty as to how they were placed in special education and who makes the decisions pertaining to this (Armstrong, Galloway, & Tomlinson, 1993; Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1997; Vaughn & Klinger, 1998).

### Understanding of the Basis for Special Education Support

All of the students were asked to explain their understanding of the reason(s) they were receiving special education support. It should be noted that a portion of the children were reluctant to explain why they thought they were in the special education class or they declared that they did not know why. For example, Helen was tentative and non-committal

when speaking about why she was in the Resource Room: "maybe I need more help in some things and other kids don't." Sarah was also tentative: "Cause I probably need special help." and one boy from the Self-Contained class claimed that he did not know why he was in that class. Even when he did think of a reason (less people, can work better), he would not commit to this response at a later time. Some of the children needed some probing in order to ascertain their perceptions of why they were in a special education class. Yet, another boy from the Self-Contained class, John, would not elaborate on his responses and was reluctant to share his thoughts, despite probing. Thus, half of the participants were reluctant to explain why they needed help in a special education class or were non-committal when they did offer explanations. It is possible that this information is potentially negative and damaging to their self-concept and is something that they do not want to think about or talk about. It is also possible that they really do not think about this information much and, hence, had trouble generating responses. Yet, it is difficult to believe that they would not think about or have been told about the reasons for being in a special education class.

The reasons that were provided by the participants could be classified as either academic or behavioural. All of the children provided academic reasons for being in the special education class except for one student who asserted that he did not know why. The "academic" reasons included needing help with math, getting help in reading and writing, needing help with "troubles", having trouble paying attention in class and understanding the teacher, getting "more help", needing to catch up on things, needing to learn how to do the work properly, getting extra help on "stuff", and needing more attention than would be provided in a regular education class. One girl reported that she needed help with "education", but was not able to explain what this meant. A student from the Self-Contained class, Jack, focussed solely on his reading skills as the reason for placement in this class, indicating that this is what links all children in that class together: "Because we all have trouble in reading, that's why we're in that class". The students used "help" in some form or another approximately 161 times when explaining the reasons for receiving special education support. It should be noted, however, that I also had used the word a lot in the interviews. The phrases provided by the children were usually quite basic: "extra help", "help", "more help", "better help", "special help". It appears that "help" phrases can be

easily understood by students receiving special education support and that they have probably heard these phrases a lot when others talk to them about special education. However, many of the children had provided vague reasons for being in the special education class. For example, needing help on "stuff", needing help "to learn", "I just need to read." On the other hand, one student, Mary, provided detailed descriptions of the reasons for needing special education support. Her response when asked what her mother had told her about attending this class highlights this:

> She (mother) goes "Because you need help and you need to understand um what you're doing and to - you go there because you..need to..like.. give more - like you have to understand what you're doing before you do anything on your paper. And you have to pay attention... And not look around the class." That's one thing why I have to go there to look right at him, not anywhere else. Like not look here while he's talking there. Not look up here and around there and play with your pencil. And colour on your hand. You have to sit down and look right at him. And put up your hand if you don't know what he means. He would call you - and you would go to his desk and he would make you understand it. And then you do it. So, it's like you have to understand what you doing before you do anything. Like, the people in Mr. R's class (regular education class)- they understand what they're doing cause they um...they just know what they're doing.

Only one student, Jeremy, attributed his placement in the Self-Contained special education class to a specific problem, reporting that he had a "processing problem" and possibly a learning disability:

> Jeremy: I think Dr. B, our old doctor - said I had a learning disability
> Interviewer: Dr. B told you that?
> Jeremy: Yeah.
> I: What is a learning disability?
> Jeremy: It's when you have a hard time learning. It's hard to learn. That's why I need a small classroom - that's why I'm in room 101.
> I: That's why you're in room 101 - because of a learning disability?
> Jeremy: Yeah, but I'm getting better. Cause now I'm learning long division and math isn't that hard for me.
> I: Can you get cured from a learning disability?
> Jeremy: Yeah.
> I: How?
> Jeremy: Just...when you're in a special ed class for a while and - maybe for a year or two, something like that - then, you work hard, and get help.

When Jeremy was asked to explain "processing problem", he was only able to say that it involved not hearing what other people are saying.

Only four of the participants reported or alluded to behavioural reasons for placement in the special education class, three of whom were from the Self-Contained class (LD/Behavioural). All of these children required some probing or initial conversation about the topic prior to providing behavioural reasons. Two of the children alluded to behavioural reasons by talking about things they had done in the past, such as running away or not listening to the teacher. One of the students, Bill, focussed more on behavioural than on academic reasons, providing a list of things he had done at a former school. He believed that if he were to stop doing these things (fighting, talking back, ripping up his work), he might be able to go back to that school. Another student placed the blame for his behavioural problems (yelling and not getting along with teachers) on the teachers, reporting that they "bug" him. None of these children were able to provide any insight for their troublesome behaviours. Moreover, although placement in the Self-Contained class was a result of both learning and behavioural needs, only three of the eight students from this class even mentioned behavioural reasons for being there. Even after the other five children were specifically asked about any social or behavioural problems, they still did not believe, or would not admit, that this was a factor. In the case of two of the students, Jack and Jeremy, it is possible that they were placed in the Self-Contained class due to convenience (it is in their home school) and that they did not have significant behaviour problems. For the other children, it is possible that they did not see themselves as having such problems and that was the reason they would not admit to having social or behavioural needs. This may be a form of self-protection, which will be discussed in the next chapter. This may also be related to their social difficulties in that they are truly not aware that they may be behaving poorly and that is why they continue to behave inappropriately. Alternatively, their lack of admission may have resulted from the focus of their program being academic as opposed to behavioural. I do not believe that this is true, however, because when I observed the Self-Contained class, behavioural needs and expectations were quite clear and prominent.

The children were also asked what their parents and teachers had told them about the basis for their placement in the special education class. In most cases, their responses to these questions matched what they reported about why they think they are in that class. However, three of the participants reported that they had not talked to their parents about

this issue and that their parents had not said anything. Another student stated that his parents did not know why he had been placed in the special education class and that they did not think he needed to be there. Five of the children maintained that their teachers had not talked to them about the reasons for their special education placement. One of these students, Jeremy, stated: "Because - they never really told us, but they said we all know why we are here." Another of these students, Tim, reported: "She never tells us. Like, none of us ever ask." Thus, he suggested that they have not been told because they do not ask or do not want to know.

In summary, many of the students knew that they were placed in their special education class for more help, but were not able to discuss more specific needs or chose not to talk about this. Also, most of the children with behavioural needs did not admit to having these difficulties. It is quite possible that they have been informed, yet do not remember this information. It is also possible that they have not been informed in a manner which they can understand. The finding that most students knew that they went to their special class for "extra help" is consistent with a larger-scale study by Padeliadu and Zigmond (1996) which found that 80% of children with LD had some degree of accuracy when explaining why they went to a special class. Yet, only 20% of their sample were able to provide more accurate and detailed definitions of special education.

Understanding of Common Special Education Terminology

The participants were asked to provide definitions of various terms related to special education, many of which are used quite frequently among educators when communicating about children with special needs. These terms included IPRC, special education, learning disability, integration, and IEP. None of the children knew the acronym "IPRC", but when the full term was given to them (Identification, Placement, and Review Committee meeting), three of the children were able to provide some definition, but not a very clear one. For example, Helen stated: "like when the mother gets together with the principal and they talk about what's good for you and all that stuff." Eight of the fourteen participants were able to provide some definition for special education, although not all of these explanations were correct. For example, Tom believed that "it's a special month that they give kids more special help than they really need." And Eric reported that it meant "You're having a

special education stuff...you're good at working on stuff." The more "accurate" definitions tended to be fairly basic, such as "people that need to work in smaller classrooms." The remainder of the participants were not able to explain special education, even though some had used the term at other points in their interviews. Two of the remaining children appeared quite confused by the term. Three of the students who were not able to define special education did know that their Self-Contained class was the "special education class". Thus, although most of the participants were able to explain why they went to a special class for help, only a few were able to define "special education." This is consistent with a study by Vaughn and Bos (1987) which found that 60% of their Grade 4-6 Students with LD provided "don't know" responses to requests to define "Special Education" and only 30% reported that "special education" was a place for extra help.

Two of the participants were able to provide an explanation for "learning disability" and three were able to partially define it. Tim's definition is interesting:

> Like, when you have glasses - like, before you have glasses, you can't see as well as you're supposed to. As soon as you get glasses, like - it's like the classes are glasses for your eyes. That's what that class is like.

He basically provided a definition/purpose for a special education class in defining a learning disability. Perhaps the analogy he provided was one that somebody had used in explaining special education to him. During Tim's follow-up interview, he added:

> It's to heal you. You have to - like, it's like if you get sliced on your leg with a knife, it will heal. It's like when you are in school, and you can't spell, and you go to a spelling class - that heals your problem.

Often the term "learning difficulties" is used to describe children receiving special education support, especially if they have not been diagnosed with a learning disability. More of the children were able to explain "learning difficulties" than were able to explain "learning disability". Eight of the eleven who were asked to define this term were able to provide some explanation, such as "when you have trouble...learning." It is possible that this was a more practical and less threatening term for them to understand and explain (i.e., "difficulty" versus "disability"). All of the children would have been given a "Communications" label when they were designated as an exceptional learner through the IPRC, yet only one student was able to provide some explanation for this label. None of the

children knew what an IEP/ Individual Education Plan was, even though 13 of them would have had one at the time they were interviewed. Since the time of these interviews, this has become a more common term in the special education system in this Board. Thus, it is possible, but not definite, that more children would now be more familiar with this plan and its label. Most of the participants were asked to explain "integration", yet only three of them were able to provide an accurate definition. These three children understood integration as meaning that they could be with another class or could be with a class that contained more students. Another student, who was not able to define integration when specifically asked, had used the term "intercepted" in place of integration at another point in his interview. It was obvious by the context that this was what he meant.

All of these children had learning difficulties so it is not surprising that it was difficult for them to provide definitions for abstract terms which may not have been practically meaningful for them. Yet, they should be able explain terms such as special education, integration, IEP, and learning difficulties, given their relevance to their own education. When half of the participants were asked whether they would like to know what these words mean, only four of them indicated that they would. One of the students who did not express an interest in learning this information added that he would not like to know if they are "bad things". However, when he was asked whether he would like to know about his strengths, weaknesses, and progress, he reported that that would be "a good thing."

Uncertainty

In analysing the data regarding the children's knowledge and understanding of special education, it was striking how unsure many of these children were about what had happened and what would be happening to them in the future. They often hesitated prior to responding, sometimes changed their responses or would not commit to their responses, and often provided "I don't know" responses or qualified their answers/comments by phrases such as "I'm not sure, but...". Consequently, I thought that it would be useful to search all of the interview documents for phrases of uncertainty or tentativeness. The results of searching for the phrases "I don't know", "not sure", "I don't really know", "I guess", and "I don't think so" are presented in Table 3. As can be seen by reviewing this table, these statements totalled 471 in all 28 of the interviews, with an average of 34 times per

Table 3

**Uncertain/Tentative Statement Search Results**

| Participant | "I don't know" | "not sure" | "I don't really know" | "I guess" | "I don't think so" | Participant Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Jeremy* | 22 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 28 |
| *Larry* | 7 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17 |
| *Nick* | 18 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 22 |
| *Bill* | 77 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 77 |
| *Sarah* | 49 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 50 |
| *Bob* | 49 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 50 |
| *John* | 72 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 73 |
| Jack | 6 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Tim | 16 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 22 |
| Helen | 36 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 38 |
| Tom | 12 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 18 |
| *Ali* | 32 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 35 |
| Eric | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Mary | 10 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 0 | 21 |
| **Totals** | **416** | **18** | **14** | **20** | **3** | ***471*** |

* The italicized names are those participants who had, at one point, changed schools in order to attend a special education class. The other participants had not yet experienced such a school change.

participant over approximately 1 1/2 hours of interview time. There were clear differences among the participants in terms of the amount of uncertain/tentative comments used. Bill, Sarah, Bob, and John used these comments the most, ranging from 50 to 77 per participant. Helen, Ali, and Jeremy's totals were similar to the overall average. The remainder of the participants' totals were lower than the overall average (ranging from 10 to 22 phrases per participant).

Given the fact that there were clear differences among the participants in terms of how much uncertainty they expressed, I decided to do some statistical comparisons to determine whether there were any patterns to the differences (i.e., any "groups"). There was no significant difference in the number of uncertain statements used by the Self-Contained group versus the Resource Room group, $t$ (9) = 1.69, n.s. However, there was a significant difference in the number of uncertain statements used between children who had experienced a school change due to special education placement and those who had not experienced such a change, $t$ (10) = 2.68, $p < .05$. The children who had experienced special education school changes made significantly more "I don't know", "I guess", and other uncertain statements than children who had never experienced such changes. The former group's names are italicized in Table 3.

The above finding could be interpreted a number of ways. It is possible that the group of children who made the most uncertain statements were more resistant to sharing their knowledge or that they knew less about their school situation and related changes. However, this difference might be due to the fact that the children who had experienced special education school changes have more severe learning problems and this is associated with them knowing, understanding, and remembering less about what has happened to them and what might be happening in the future. It is important to note that this information should be used as supporting information and not as a major statistical finding because controls and analyses were not planned and this is not a controlled quantitative study. However, it is an interesting finding which might be probed further in future research with similar children. Comparisons with children who do not have learning problems and with children who do have learning problems, but not language or behaviour problems, could be examined.

Analysis of the Results: "In the Dark"

The results in this section suggest that the participants' knowledge and understanding regarding their transitions to special education, how the decisions are made with regard to special education placement, the reasons for any changes to their program, and the terms used in special education is inadequate. Thus, to a large degree, these children were "in the dark" about such issues. The students expressed uncertainty when asked questions related to their knowledge and opinions about special education, particularly those who had experienced related school changes. It might be thought that the way in which these children are moved to special education programs is important to helping them understand why they are there and "buying into" the need for support and change. If they have an inadequate understanding for the changes that happen to them, they are then left to conjure up their own ideas and beliefs about what has happened, which are often not accurate. Common sense suggests that the manner in which these children are moved to special education programs is crucial in terms of helping them comprehend and adapt to such changes. Unfortunately, the beliefs that they do hold may not be helpful in encouraging their adaptation to a new program. It appears that we, as educational professionals, may not handle this well in the sense that the children are left feeling uncertain as to what has happened to them and what it all means. This, in turn, may relate to outcomes in terms of how they progress and develop (academic, emotional, and social outcomes). Cosden et al. (1998) found that students' understanding of their learning disability was associated with cognitive and achievement test scores as well as perceptions of scholastic competence and global self-esteem. Those with a better understanding of their learning disability had higher test scores and more positive perceptions of their competence. However, the direction of influence may be that children with higher cognitive and academic abilities are able to understand the nature of their learning disability better rather than that a greater understanding leads to higher test scores.

Half of the participants were reluctant to explain why they needed help in a special education class or were non-committal when they did offer such explanations. In addition, most of the students did not know specific reasons for being in special education. It is possible that this information is potentially negative and damaging to their self-concept and is something that they do not want to think about or talk about, perhaps as a means of

protection. The development of depression may be associated with students with LD having a more accurate view of their academic competence (and need for help) and, thus, having an unrealistically positive view of their academic competence may provide protection against depression (Heath, 1995). It is also possible that the participants in my study did not know more accurate information about their needs because it has not been provided to them. Three of the participants reported that their parents had not told them the reasons for their special education placement and five reported that their teachers had not explained this information to them. Similarly, a portion of the students in another study reported that "no one" told them about their learning disability (Cosden et al., 1998). It would be useful to know what amount and type of information is helpful for students with learning needs to know and what is not helpful. They may find it difficult to deal with detailed information as to what they cannot do. Therefore, it may be more advantageous to focus on goal-setting (academic and behaviour) and strategies for achieving these goals. Emphasis on what students with learning disabilities cannot do may lead to a helpless pattern of learning in which they work in order to achieve performance goals such as grades and other favourable judgements of their competence (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). In this manner, students with a helpless orientation may seek to receive feedback which supports their capability and avoid tasks which make them feel incompetent (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). On the other hand, when children are encouraged towards skill acquisition, they may focus less on their ability and more on mastering the particular skills (i.e., a mastery-oriented pattern of learning) (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Because students with learning disabilities may be sensitive about their academic performance and may not have confidence in their abilities, they may tend to choose performance goals which suggest that they are capable instead of choosing learning goals which may question their ability. Thus, they may not respond to situations in which they are encouraged to learn about their strengths and weaknesses because this information does not support their shaky confidence.

The students expressed considerable uncertainty when asked questions pertaining to special education, often providing responses such as "I don't know" or "I'm not sure". This was especially true for those children who had changed schools because of a special education placement. Although an "I don't know" response suggests that no schema has been developed in order to process information and, as a result, an opinion state has not

been formed (Mason & Faulkenberry, 1980), there are many possible reasons why children may make such comments. These reasons include when they are asked a question which is too difficult or they do not understand, when they are asked about something that they have not thought of before and cannot formulate a response, when they do not want to answer or talk about a particular topic, or when they wish to act as though they do not care about the topic. It also may be that the participants in my study actually did not know the "answers" to the knowledge-based questions because they actually had no knowledge or an incomplete knowledge of such issues. Finally, the participants may have qualified some of their responses using "I'm not sure, but" or "I don't know, but" because they were not confident of what they were saying. Uncertain or tentative comments may have been provided due to low self-esteem, language difficulties (in terms of formulating responses or comprehending questions), hostility, defensiveness, anger, and lack of control and knowledge about their situation. In exploring the reasoning abilities of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, Hill (1993) ascertained that their thinking was characterized by a high degree of uncertainty and indecision. She suggested that this uncertainty relates to their sense of failure, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, low expectations for success, and poor motivation.

Similar factors may explain the uncertainty expressed by the participants in my study. Low self-confidence, hostility, defensiveness, or anger may stem from a perceived lack of control over their environment and the uncertainty which is present when experiencing educational changes. The fact that the students who had changed schools, perhaps more than once, because of their special education designation expressed more "uncertain" comments suggests that there may be an association between uncertainty and changing schools. It is possible that being switched from school to school leads to a higher degree of uncertainty over what has happened and what might be happening in the future given the instability and unpredictability which has been experienced by these students. It may be more difficult for them to understand and conceptualize their experiences because they have undergone more significant changes than the children who have not changed schools. In addition, it is possible that this group of children have a greater sense of failure with regard to academic achievement and peer relationships because they have had to leave schools due to their academic difficulties and have had to make new friends, perhaps

repeatedly. As Hill (1993) suggested, this sense of failure may relate to lack of confidence, motivation difficulties, and uncertainty in their thinking in general (not only with regard to their special education placement). This sense of failure may also lead to a hostile attitude.

It is pertinent to note that uncertainty is inherent in the whole special education and IPRC process. As educational professionals, we often do not definitively know what is going to happen and, consequently, cannot provide parents with any certainty in terms of what type and amount of special education support their children will be eligible for. In addition, parents often have difficulty understanding special education procedures and show poor recall of assessment information, even when efforts have been made to improve their understanding (Zake & Wendt, 1991). This is particularly so for younger parents of lower socioeconomic status and who have weak English language skills (Zake & Wendt, 1991). Furthermore, even at an IPRC meeting, the committee members making the recommendations often express uncertainty about a child's placement because it is dependent upon space in special education programs. In the end, if adults are not confident about a child's future and parents do not completely understand what has happened and the information that has been transmitted, it is not surprising that children are not knowledgeable and confident about issues surrounding their "special" education. What is important to consider are the responses to uncertainty in terms of the possible consequences of feeling uncertain about aspects of their life and future. This will be discussed in the next chapter when the theory is presented and explicated.

## The Power of Perks

This section presents findings which suggest the importance of rewards as incentives or motivation for these students to work. In this study, 12 of the 14 participants mentioned rewards such as stickers, points, treats, free time, and activity time as being a positive feature of their class. Ten of these children specifically mentioned these rewards in reference to their special education class. In this manner, the reward systems were identified as being the reason for liking the special education class or a "good thing" about it. The types of prizes mentioned included physical (treats, stickers, prizes), time (free time), and points to earn rewards. The participants also discussed ways in which the desired items could be earned: through positive behaviour, work accomplished in class, and

completed homework. Different classes appeared to have different rules for earning rewards. For example, in the Concord Self-Contained class, a reward or free time could be earned by completing "three jobs" in the morning. All eight of the children from this class were able to state this rule in more or less exactly the same way. It seemed that they had this "rule" ingrained in them and that it was something very salient, important, and helpful for them. The fact that they were able to remember and recite this rule is in sharp contrast to their inability to answer questions related to their special education placement ("In the Dark") and, therefore, suggests the saliency of these incentives. Perhaps the children from the Self-Contained class, most of whom had to change schools to attend the Concord school program, latched on to these rules and rewards as a means of structuring their new situation and helping them adapt to something which they did not completely understand. Two of the children from this class talked about the importance of understanding the reward "rules". One of these students, Jack, indicated that he was finding the teacher changes difficult because he did not know what rules and rewards were in place:

> ...Mrs. C's coming to be with us for the whole year, so I really don't know how I should be. Like, should I be -like, how should I be? Like, last year, when we had this thing, if you do so many jobs, you get an award. I don't know if we're doing that this year.

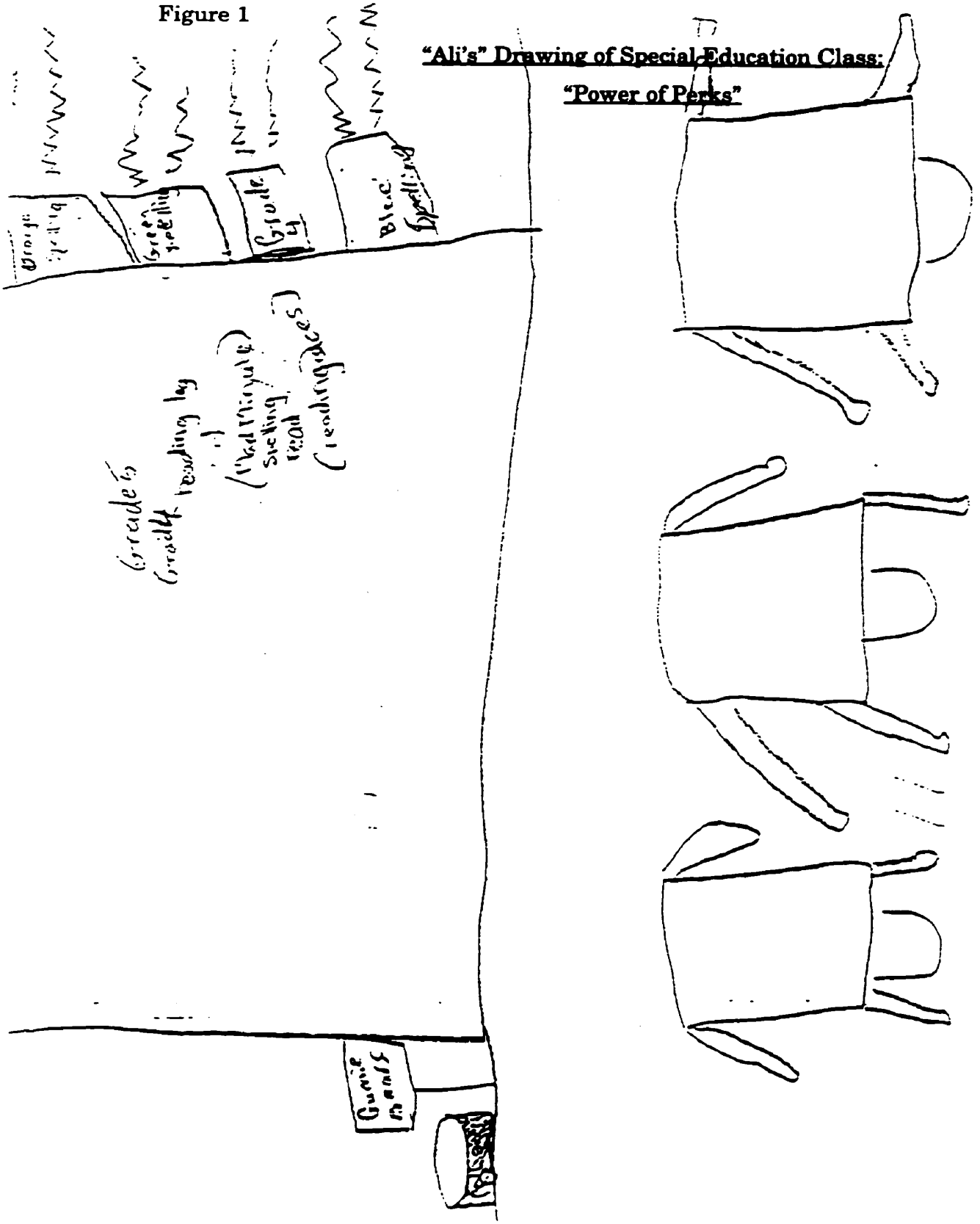
Structure, consistency, and predictability in the application of rewards were significant to these students. It was important that the rules for earning rewards applied to everyone. For example, the students from the Self-Contained class felt it was unfair if another student earned free time without having completed three jobs. The concept of earning rewards (edible treats) was even salient to one student, Ali, who otherwise seemed to have strong achievement motivation. Ali, one of the Resource Room students, often spoke about her enjoyment of challenging work and had managed to achieve full integration by the time of the second interview. Yet, she put "gummy bears" in her drawing of her special education class along with work listed on the blackboard (see Figure 1). Thus, although Ali was enticed by external rewards, she appeared to have the intrinsic motivation to succeed in learning.

It is relevant at this point to discuss some of my observations of the Self-Contained class. I spent a full morning in this class, observing the participants with respect to their

Figure 1

**"Ali's" Drawing of Special Education Class:**

**"Power of Perks"**



work behaviour and interactions as well as the general environment of the class. This was apparently a fairly typical day for this class. It was clear that much of their activity and behaviour were controlled through the use of timers, stickers on charts for tasks accomplished, checkmarks on charts for inappropriate behaviour, points gained or lost for bus behaviour, and free time for three jobs completed. There were constant comments from the teachers to reinforce or correct the students' behaviour and there was constant tracking of each student with regard to their task behaviour. Thus, much of their time was structured and controlled and many external management techniques were used, as is recommended in dealing with children with attention or behaviour problems (Barkley, 1997). Reinforcements and rewards were used frequently to maintain control.

The results implying the importance of rewards for these special education students relate to the students' beliefs and attitudes about schoolwork, that is, their actual motivation to work and learn. The comments that each child made about working, achievement, and education showed individual differences in achievement motivation. Achievement motivation refers to a person's motivation to compete and strive for success (McCelland et al., 1953). Some children are intrinsically motivated to achieve whereas others are more motivated by extrinsic factors. Those who tend to be intrinsically motivated or mastery-oriented like learning and like challenges in learning (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). On the other hand, students who are extrinsically motivated rely on external factors to motivate them to work and achieve; these factors include obtaining grades, winning the teacher's approval, and obtaining other external rewards. These students may work to obtain performance goals which provide them with feedback as to their performance whereas those who are more intrinsically motivated are more likely to choose challenging problems over simpler ones and to see themselves as being highly competent at schoolwork (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). In the course of the interviews, few of the children in this study made comments suggesting that they were mastery-oriented. Conversely, many made comments suggesting that they did their schoolwork and complied with school expectations in order to meet with performance goals or to obtain incentives.

The results regarding the salience of rewards and reward systems for these children supports this contention. Among the children who appeared to be motivated to achieve, Ali seemed to be the most mastery-orientated, even though she did appreciate the "gummy

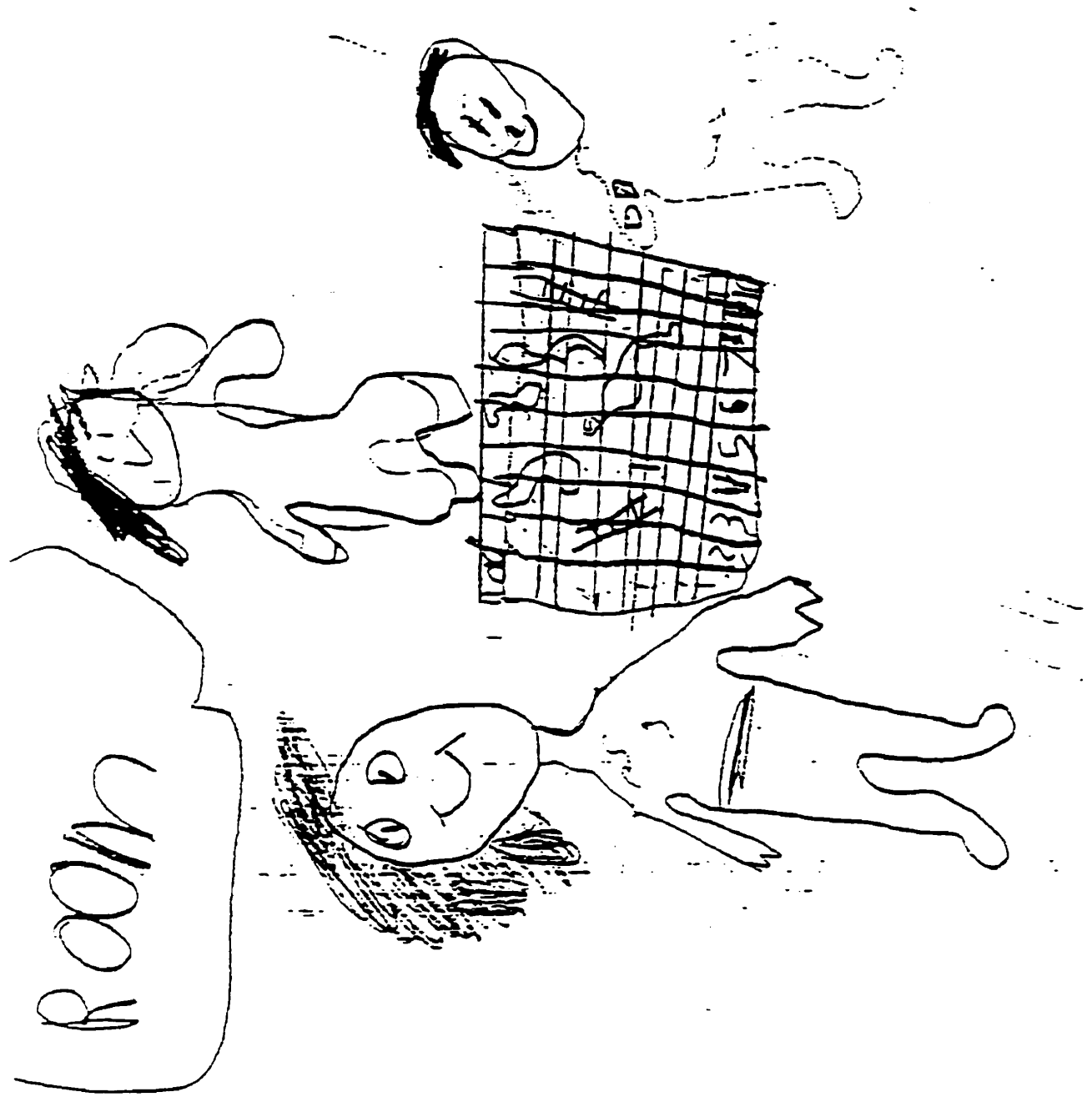
bear" treats. She often made comments related to trying harder work and liking challenging work: "I want another big challenge". However, Ali did need achievement feedback in terms of grades to let her know that she was doing well, reporting that "I got lots of Bs" on her report card. Two of the other participants, Mary and Jeremy, also expressed an interest in learning things that they did not already know, but Mary was also interested in obtaining certain marks. It appeared that marks provided her with information about her performance and her ability in relation to other students. Therefore, although these two children expressed an interest in learning, it may have been in order to achieve performance goals (favourable judgements of their competence).

The remainder of the children did not express a desire to actually learn because they liked to learn or because they wanted to increase their competence ("learning goals"). One student appeared to be more motivated to be integrated than to do better in school or to learn more. Two of the other students, Bill and John, did not seem to be at all motivated to achieve. Both of these participants made comments about school and work being "boring" and one added that he would rather be at home. Neither child expressed an interest in learning about and involving themselves in the special education process. These two children appeared to have a helpless style of learning in that they made negative comments about learning and expressed a negative affect related to learning (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Another group of five participants had questionable motivation to achieve in the sense that they did not make any comments about liking learning or being eager to learn new things, but they also did not make negative comments about learning or school. On the other hand, they did often remark on wanting to be in a class because it was "fun", suggesting that these students preferred environments that they enjoyed rather than those that were more academic. In addition, many of the drawings that the children did of their classrooms (special and regular education) did not depict students working, but instead contained empty desks or students standing or playing. For example, one of the drawings showed children playing a game of Snakes and Ladders, a chosen free time activity from the Self-Contained class (see Figure 2).

Placing a value on achieving various goals is also important in considering motivation (Dweck & Elliot, 1983; Weiner, 1985). If the goal is not a valued or important one to the child, it is reasonable to presume that they will not work hard to obtain it, unless

Figure 2

"Bob's" Drawing of Special Education class:
Preference for Games over Work



other variables are present such as parental pressure or external rewards. Furthermore, value can also relate to incentive in terms of the consequences of goal attainment (Weiner, 1985). In this study, there appeared to be a range of values placed on achieving and learning similar to the patterns observed regarding their motivation. Nine of the students appeared to value doing well in school, but some of these children valued these goals for other reasons. These reasons, which were primarily performance goals, included being integrated in order to be with peers or be in a class that was more fun, having their parents be proud of them, and obtaining certain grades. Three of the participants did make statements which suggested that they placed value on learning for the future in terms of wanting to get a good education or wanting to continue to higher grades. One of these students, Jack, directly related his comments to special education, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

> Interviewer: How long do you think you'll be in special education for?
>
> Jack: This is probably going to be my last year.
>
> I: Why?
>
> Jack: Cause I'm going to try - I'm going to try better. I'm reading better and I go to the tutors and we do reading. Every day, I'm going to read a book to my parents.
>
> I: How long do you think you should be in special ed?
>
> Jack: Only one year.
>
> I: So, next year should you be in or not?
>
> Jack: No.
>
> I: So, it sounds like in a way, you'd like to kind of be out of special ed?
>
> Jack: Yeah.
>
> I: Why?
>
> Jack: Cause...Like, there's this new kid named Sam. He was in special ed and he got out because he kept on working with his parents. So, I would like to do that still ...I want to do like a job. And I want to get a good education, I won't. That's the problem - that's why I want to be in that class (integrated class).
>
> I: To try to get a good education. So, special education - is that a good education or not?
>
> Jack: I think it's kind of good and bad.
>
> I: Why is it bad?

> Jack: Cause you're in special ed - you can't do some things. And you'd probably have to go back to school. You'd probably finish school and probably be pretty old so you can't do anything.

The comments that Jack made also speak to the worries, assumptions, and expectations that some of these children hold, which will be discussed in a later section. The remainder of the participants placed questionable value on education or on learning goals by what they said or did not say. The value placed on a goal not only influences the attainment of the goal, but it also influences the emotions which arise when a goal is reached or not reached (e.g., happy versus anger or shame). This will be discussed in the section relating to the participants' affective reactions ("Feeling Ashamed").

Prior to pursuing a goal or objective, people consciously or unconsciously consider their expectations of success/failure should they pursue the objective (Dweck & Elliot, 1983; Weiner, 1985). This expectancy, combined with value, influences their motivation. In addition, the expectations are related to attributional thinking in that the stability ascribed to a cause determines expectancy shifts for future goals. In this manner, if students are experiencing success and relate this to something stable (their ability), they would expect the success to continue. On the other hand, if the success is attributed to something unstable (luck), then the success might not be expected to continue (Weiner, 1985). There were only two children, Tom and Ali, who expressed positive expectations about their work and confidence in their ability to achieve their academic goals (being in the regular classroom). These two children were the only participants who were fully integrated during the time of the interviews. Although three students believed that they could handle the work in an integrated class, they did not expect that they would actually be integrated. The remainder of the children did not make positive comments suggesting that they expected they could achieve their goals. Moreover, a few of these students made negative comments, such as Sarah: "...I don't learn how to do French" and Mary: "... I always get a heartbeat and I always start to sweat when I'm doing a test. I always feel like I'm going to get zero." Even Jack, who appeared to be hard-working and motivated, made the following comment:

> Cause I think it's for my reading cause I don't know how to read that well like other kids. Cause I'm in reading level 3 and Mr. T is trying to get me on reading level 4. But, it's just too hard.

Thus, these children did not have positive expectations regarding their ability to achieve. This speaks to their self-perceptions, which will be discussed in a future section. It also influences their actual motivation to achieve and, consequently, engage in the learning process. Achievement motivation is also affected by the causal attributions students place on their successes and failures in learning. There are three dimensions of causality: locus of the cause (internal, external), stability, and controllability. Attribution theory will be discussed in Chapter IV as it applies to this group of students.

Analysis of the Results: "The Power of Perks"

In the first section, it was reported that the participants showed a lack of understanding and a level of uncertainty related to their placement in special education. A theory of uncertainty has posited that "people attempt to reduce the anxiety of uncertainty by acquiring 'risk capital'. They come to depend on knowledge of what to expect in situations in order to obtain rewards and avoid punishments." (Montagna, 1980, p. 31). Children with special learning needs may latch on to rewards due to their inadequate knowledge about why they are in such classes. Hence, they seek out structure and consistency to make some sense of their environment. Working to attain rewards is something they can cope with and understand. As a result, rewards are very important to them, perhaps because they provide them with some degree of certainty. Not only were rewards an attractive feature of their classes, many of the drawings that the students completed contained non-academic activities, questioning their motivation for and involvement in academic learning.

It is unclear to what extent the rewards/reinforcements influenced the participants' feelings about their special education class and, hence, what they would have thought of this class without the existence of rewards or with a different arrangement of rewards. It does, however, seem obvious how important rewards were for these children because it was a common theme and something that they quickly mentioned when asked about their special education class. The provision of incentives may play a large role in getting these children to work due to their motivational problems, poor engagement in learning, and poor class participation (Chapman, 1988b; Licht & Kistner, 1986; McIntosh et al., 1993) . Many of the participants in my study themselves expressed questionable achievement motivation,

including the value and positive expectations associated with learning. Their motivational problems may relate to the negative perceptions they have of their ability and the lower expectations for future achievement successes they hold compared to their peers without disabilities (Chapman, 1988b). Yet, these negative perceptions and expectations are not surprising given the history of school failure that would have been experienced for them to have been identified as exceptional pupils. Such failure experiences might impact on the value that children with learning disabilities place on school and their interest in learning, in addition to their expectations for future success (Chapman, 1988b; Grolnick & Ryan, 1990; Licht & Kistner, 1986). Unfortunately, these low expectations may be detrimental to positive achievement-related behaviours and associated successes (Chapman, 1988b) and remedial intervention may not improve their poor motivation (McKinney & Feagans, 1984). Hence, the necessity for external rewards to encourage poorly motivated children, such as those with learning disabilities, to work. Rewards are thought to be an effective means of encouraging learning and performance if they are given for successful task performance rather than for solely working on the task (Pallak, Costomiris, Sroka, & Pittman, 1982). This happens because the reward serves as information that a student is competent in a particular activity. If the reward is given simply for working on an activity (or completing "three jobs"), however, the children may attribute their working behaviour to a desire to obtain the reward. I believe that has been the case with many of the participants, particularly those from the Self-Contained class. They rarely, if ever, discussed accomplishments related to learning, only reciting that they work to obtain the free time they desire. They did not mention the quality of work related to the "three jobs", rather they merely reported that these jobs have to be completed. One student even implied that he felt doing three jobs was too much work. The theme of rewards in the Self-Contained class may have been so prevalent because these students may not have had the incentive of being integrated as much as the students from Resource Room classes did. It may have been more possible for the students from the Resource Room programs to be integrated and these students may have been motivated to work hard to achieve this as opposed to the daily rewards. On the other hand, the children from the Self-Contained class may have needed the other concrete rewards to motivate them to work because they did not have integration as a motivator.

In general, these rewards appeared to be powerful incentives and enticements for the pupils to complete their work and like a particular class. Yet, there may be implications of the emphasis on rewards or "perks" for these students. Token economy reward systems have often been used in classrooms to achieve order where behaviour is a key problem and little learning has been occurring. Deci (1978), however, proposed that behavioural disruption may actually be a response to the over-control of such a system. Furthermore, Lawrence and Winschel (1975) argued that the emphasis on easy success and high amounts of praise (and rewards) in special education classes, while being protective, may serve to discourage the children from developing internal responsibility for achievement. The excessive use of positive reinforcements may encourage the students to attribute any accomplishments to chance or the actions of a powerful others (e.g., their teacher). While material rewards are often effective in social or academic learning, they may have negative effects by undermining a person's interest in intrinsically satisfying activities (Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973).

Deci, Ryan, and Koestner (1999) examined the issue of the role of extrinsic rewards in motivation by conducting a meta-analysis of 128 related studies. Through this meta-analysis, they concluded that expected and contingent tangible rewards such as food or money had a significant negative effect on intrinsic motivation for interesting tasks (puzzles, word games). This result was found for participants ranging from preschool age to college age. However, verbal rewards (positive feedback) were found to have a positive effect on intrinsic motivation for adults, but not for children. Furthermore, tangible rewards were found to be more detrimental, in terms of intrinsic motivation, for children than for college students. Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (1999) concluded that rewards are indeed powerful to control behaviour, but they have clear consequences for future achievement behaviour in so doing. Other studies have found that classrooms and work climates which are controlling are associated with decreased intrinsic motivation as compared with climates which are more information-oriented (Deci et al., 1989; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). Although controlling environments can produce desired behaviour, they do not do well in encouraging self-regulation in terms of developing personal responsibility for motivating or regulating students' behaviour or work habits (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). Lytton (1986) found that parents' use of material rewards impaired cognitive competence

and positive social functioning in children and did not help to build the child's own internal controls. Rewards may lessen feelings of control over their own behaviour because the reward, and not the person, is viewed as being responsible for work completion. Thus, although rewards may work in the short term, they may have detrimental effects in the long-term (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). People may lower their aspirations and choose easier rather than more challenging work (Condry & Chambers, 1982) which, if done repeatedly and consistently, would affect their cognitive development.

The use of incentives to prompt children with special needs to work may lead to decreased internal motivation to work and learn as well as increased reliance on these external rewards (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). This, actually, was the case with the participants in my study; most were reliant on rewards, yet expressed little motivation to achieve other than to achieve these rewards. Some also expressed great interest in obtaining extrinsic cues of success (e.g., report card grades, test marks). Similarly, Lincoln and Chazan (1979) found that junior grade children with LD rated themselves as being significantly more extrinsically motivated than regular education students did in that they were more reliant on external means of evaluation (teacher feedback, grades), which is more characteristic of younger children. Lincoln and Chazan (1979) suggested that this may be an adaptive means of compensating for their past reinforcement history in that they lack experiences and feelings of success and need the extrinsic cues (signifying competence) to feel good about their abilities. The role of the teacher's response to the failures of children with learning disabilities should also be considered, which Clark (1997) has done. She determined that, contingent on effort, teachers reward boys with learning disabilities more than their peers without learning disabilities in response to failure. This may relate to the greater pity teachers feel toward boys with learning disabilities in comparison to the greater anger they feel regarding the failures of boys without learning disabilities (Clark, 1997). Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, the teachers held higher expectations of failure for the children with learning disabilities than for the children without learning disabilities, regardless of their ability or effort (Clark, 1997). This study holds implications in terms of classroom practice, suggesting that teachers may unwittingly impart attributional messages to their students with LD with regard to their failures, abilities, and expectations of continued failure. As

will be seen in the next section, the participants in this study were aware that their teachers may have viewed them as unable to do certain work.

There is final issue which should be considered when discussing the importance of rewards. Most of the children in this study mentioned "free time" in reference to rewards given for work completion: time to play games, go on the computer, or do something else of their choosing during this time. This was particularly salient for the children from the Self-Contained class. Perhaps one reason for the popularity of free time is that it provides an opportunity, in the midst of a highly structured and controlled day, to have some free will over their actions. For the most part, what they do during free time is their choice and can be something that they enjoy, be it play on the computer, read alone, or play a game with peers. This is an opportunity which cannot be overemphasized in terms of its importance because schools, in general, are quite extrinsically oriented, using various extrinsic control systems (grades, stickers, suspensions) to obtain appropriate behaviour and effective performance (Deci, 1978). However, unless rewards are used primarily to convey information, they may undermine a child's intrinsic motivation for the rewarded activity (Deci, 1978). Thus, while the provision of "free time" may provide some short-term control over children's behaviour, it may influence their perceptions of control regarding their achievement in the long-term. Using other procedures, such as self-management, to encourage on-task behaviour may result in better maintenance of work behaviour than do reward systems (Smith et al., 1987), without compromising achievement motivation in the long run.

## Being Educated in Exile

This theme has developed from a category labelled "Exclusion" which encompassed any situation, feeling, or experience in which the student was socially, physically, or emotionally excluded. In examining and analysing the results in this category, it became obvious that a key school experience of these students has been one of separation, expulsion (from schools and classes), and being refused things which were desired. In the end, perceptions of exclusion turned out to be a prevalent theme in the interviews. There were many different examples of exclusion in the interviews, including physical (being kept out of

somewhere), social (being teased or bullied), verbal (comments which excluded the student), and more subtle experiences (never having a chance to do something, having a teacher forget to include them). In addition, the participants reported being excluded from doing work, not being allowed in certain places, being told to leave places, and not being included in activities and experiences.

All of the participants provided some example of exclusion, but this was a more prominent theme with some of the participants than with others. The two children who had been fully integrated, Tom and Ali, provided only a few examples of exclusion in their interviews. Thus, exclusion was not a major theme in their interviews. On the other hand, three of the children from Resource Room programs, Mary, Tim, and Helen, as well as many of the children from the Self-Contained class, provided numerous examples of exclusion when they were asked about their experiences and perceptions of special education. In total, at least 38 examples of exclusion were obtained, which does not include the number of incidents of being victimized by peers. Many of these examples and comments will be presented, organized according to the type of exclusion that they represent: Exclusion from school, exclusion from class, exclusion by teachers, exclusion from work, physical exclusion, and victimization by peers. I believe that it is important to include many of these comments in the presentation of the results because, when they are examined together, they provide insight into what these students actually endure and struggle to understand in their school lives.

Exclusion from School

More than half of the participants commented on their experiences of changing schools or their fears of having to leave their school in the future. Eight of the students, at one time, did change schools due to their placement in special education. For the most part, being excluded from their schools was discussed as a negative experience in terms of being "kicked out" or "expelled" and as being something that made them sad. These experiences seemed to be quite salient in the minds of many of the students, even for some who had not had to change schools to attend a special education class. Because they did not have adequate knowledge as to the procedures and "rules" for special education decisions such as changing schools, some children who had not undergone a school move persisted in

believing that it was still possible. The following are the examples of actual experiences or fears that the students held about being excluded from their schools:

- Ali reported that she felt sad when she found out she would be going to another school (for a special education class) "cause I would miss all my other friends."
- Eric also felt sad when he thought that he might be going to another school to attend a special education class because "My friends are here. That's why."
- "And if you don't do all those stuff sometimes people might go to a different school" (Mary spoke about some children having to go to another school if they don't learn as much as other people, study hard, etc.)
- "I don't know (where her friend went). Some school - they kept it from her. They didn't want to tell her" (Mary talked about her friend who did have to go to another school because she needed more help).
- "... I was crying cause I thought, I thought if I keep on there, I have to go to another school" (Mary thought she would have to change schools if she kept going to the Resource Room class)
- "To learn - to get in a different classroom. Because my parents said I'm going in a different classroom, at a different school. They don't want me at that school." and "Mrs. B told me and my sister that we're not supposed to come to this school anymore. They told my mom and dad." (Larry's reply to being asked why he came to his present school).
- "I don't know but it's kind of tablets for me to take for temper cause I don't want to lose it at all. Cause if I do, I would do something to the teachers or any of my friends and then I would be expelled." (Larry spoke about ADD which he thought was the name of the tablets he took)
- "Like, in Kindergarten, I got expelled twice. Cause I wouldn't listen to the teacher" (Nick)
- "Cause I'll be leaving all my friends and my favourite teachers and all that....I didn't want to leave" (Nick talked about not feeling good about leaving his last school to come to his present school)
- "Cause I don't like the teachers and the principal." (Bill's reason for feeling good when he left one particular school)
- Sarah's response to why she changed schools: "Cause I got kicked out"
- "I left because they switched me to a different school" (John, about leaving a school)

Exclusion from Class

All of the participants, at one time or another, had been excluded from their mainstream (regular grade) classroom for different amounts of time. This was a salient issue for more than half of the participants who discussed being left out of their general education class and feeling that they did not belong there. With regard to the children from the Self-Contained class, their exclusion from the integrated classes was described as being an event that happened quite suddenly and as something that they did not fully understand. In most cases, it appeared that being excluded from certain classes was a negative experience for these students. Furthermore, it should be noted that one student from the Self-Contained class, Nick, was excluded from his special education class. The year he was interviewed, he spent much of his day in a Grade 3 classroom, despite being of Grade 5 age, due to his behavioural problems in the Self-Contained class. Nick reported unhappiness with this arrangement because he understood that the Grade 3 class was not his peer group. Nick, along with many of the other participants, discussed his exclusion from classes with displeasure. Some examples are presented:

- "I never had a chance to go to another classroom for the whole day" (Helen was talking about the regular classroom)
- "...it's like I don't belong to Mr. R's class anymore" (Mary talked about disliking being called "Mr. L's (special education teacher) kids." )
- "This year I went for a couple of months - going back and forth - but we had to stop. For a reason, that stopped. Except gym. Then,...last year, we were back and forth for everything." (Jeremy spoke about not going to as many integrated classes after a few months into this school year).
- "I don't know. It just did. Every kid goes to an integrated class, but then it stopped. And then we didn't go to math class for a while." (Jeremy was asked why he and others stopped being integrated as much)
- "I used to (go to the integrated class). But now, Mr. T thinks this contract thing so we're not allowed to go to French, Math, and the regular classrooms for a while. Unless you earned it or something like that" (Nick)
- "I've never been there for a long time." (Bob spoke about his integrated class)
- "They just took me out of there." (John spoke about his integrated math class)

- "...so everyone got kicked out. They said when we can't keep on doing that cause they were being silly so they can't come to our classroom" (Jack talked about not going to his integrated class anymore)

Exclusion by Teachers

Approximately half of the students relayed experiences of being forgotten, neglected, refused something, or excluded by teachers. It was their view that teachers were responsible for these negative episodes, either directly or indirectly. In many cases, the students reported that their teacher directly did or said something which left them out of an activity, event, or place. Most of these incidents were discussed as being related to the students' placements in special education or their identification as students with learning difficulties. The following examples provide insight into these experiences:

- "...cause half the time the teacher forgets to call us over to the class to learn about stuff" (Helen)

- "But, I hate when...the supply teachers come and they go "Who are you?" and stuff" (Helen spoke about coming to the integrated class half-time)

- "Usually, I would ask if I could stay in the classroom and try to do the work. But, I wouldn't be allowed....Like, usually, I would know how to do it, but I wouldn't be allowed" (Mary talked about not being able to stay in the regular classroom or do their work because her regular class teacher didn't think she could do it)

- When he spoke about why he did not go to French anymore, Bill said "Because the French teacher don't like me and I don't like her" and "Todd asked if we could go back soon and she said 'No, I don't want them in French.'"

- "Like...like I don't know where my French books went. The teachers took them away from me.(Why?) Cause They didn't want me to go to French" (Sarah)

- "That I can't go to that class no more" and "Like, one day I was going to go to Math and when I went there, the teacher said 'Get out of my class' and I said 'How come?' and he said 'That isn't part of the contract'" (Nick talked about how things were different that year compared with the previous year)

- John said that he was mad at his teacher (Educational Assistant) about not going for math anymore "Cause. She's the one that took me out"

- "Like, sometimes I'm always the last person to be answered." (Tim spoke about his integrated class)

- "...she never lets me be fully integrated" (Tim's reply to being asked if there was anything he didn't like about being in the Resource Room class)
- "if Mrs. B wants to have us, why doesn't she have us for the whole day? Why does we have to flip around?" (Tim spoke about being in two different classes)

Exclusion from Work

Some of the students directly reported that they were not allowed to do certain work because of their special education designation. This is not surprising given the fact that most students in special education are given different or less work to do and are not expected to do work which is considered too difficult for them due to their learning problems. Yet, some students may not be happy with this situation and may be eager to do the work that they are not permitted or encouraged to do. This was the case for a few of the participants in this study:

- "I want to learn how to do that (pointing to a math operation on a picture)... Mr. R doesn't teach me that." (Mary discussed not being taught 3-digit division)
- "I have this thing I don't do stuff because I'm in special ed or stuff like that." (Jeremy)

Physical Exclusion

To different degrees, most of the participants were physically excluded from the mainstream classroom at some point during each day. In addition, at times, they were physically excluded when in their integrated classes by being placed at the back of the classroom or by not having their own desk. Larry, a student from the Self-Contained class, was even physically separated in his special education class. Observations of him in this class showed that he was sitting at a desk behind a barrier at the back of the classroom (near the window), which was his usual seating arrangement due to his disruptive behaviour. I also observed that some of the other children in the Self-Contained class sat by themselves at individual carrels, whereas others sat in groupings of two. These seating arrangements were used to encourage the least disruptive behaviour and to encourage on-task work behaviour. I also observed that the door to the Self-Contained class was often left closed and that paper was placed on the door window to reduce distractions from the

hallway. Furthermore, all of the work in this class was individually done and there was no group work, except for free time activities, on the day of the observation. This meant that the children rarely interacted with one another and that there were no cooperative learning experiences. Thus, the physical placement in this class, along with the organization of activities and work, was designed to reduce inappropriate, instigating behaviours and to encourage on-task behaviour. These were measures used to isolate the students in order to prevent problems and maintain control in the class. The implication of this set-up, however, is that the students are physically excluded from one another as well as from other students and classes in the school.

Some further examples of physical exclusion commented by the students are as follows:

- "I think it's really good that I'm sitting by myself and I have no one to bother me, but, I feel sort of lonely half the time because there's nobody sitting beside me or anything" (Helen talked about sitting at the back of her integrated class)
- When asked whether he has a desk in his special education class, Nick replied: "Well, yeah, but now they use it as the scrap table."

Victimization and Peer Exclusion

Victimization and rejection by peers was the most prevalent type of exclusion discussed in the interviews. It is a form of social exclusion which all of the participants mentioned in discussing their special education experiences. In most cases, these experiences and situations were raised by the participants without prompting from me. Furthermore, nine of the participants specifically indicated that they were teased because of their placement in special education, another student implied this, and another student reported that she was teased because of her learning problems. The remainder of the participants either reported that they had seen other special education students be victimized or that they believed they were teased for reasons other than their special education placement (e.g., their race, having lice). Some of the participants reported quite serious instances of victimization, suggesting that this was something particularly salient to their school experience. One student from the Self-Contained class, Bob, spoke at length about being "beat up", or threatened to be "beat up", by other students. Yet, for the most

part, he attributed this to his newcomer status in the school (he had been there for approximately 6 months) and "hanging out" with a boy who had lice. Similarly, Bob's friend, Larry, believed that he was teased because he actually had lice.

Some other examples of peer victimization and exclusion are presented below.

- "You get teased and you might fail" (Mary explained why she doesn't want to be different)
- "I feel like - I feel okay. Even if nobody doesn't like me there." (Larry's reply to being asked how he feels being in his integrated class)
- Special education "makes me feel upset...And that I'm not worthy because I'm in a different class than everybody else and they all make fun of me." (Nick's reply to being asked what "special education" means)
- "Like, the other kids - they think I'm in grade 3 and I failed and all that..." (Nick talked about how he feels spending most of the day in a grade 3 class. He is grade 5 age)
- "I feel very sad that no one likes me." (Bob)
- Jack said that he was sad when he first found out that he would be going to special education "Cause I thought I would be with my friends the whole time."
- I don't like how people make fun of us cause we're in special ed. (Jack, when asked what things he doesn't like as much about class and school)

Children from both types of special education placements (Resource Room class and Self-Contained class) reported episodes of victimization linked to their special education designation. Accordingly, both groups of children appear to be at risk for being stigmatized due to their need for special education support. The names "stupid" and "dumb" appeared to be particularly popular insults used for harassing the special education students. Three of the students, Nick, Helen, and Jack, mentioned such derogatory names three times each in their interviews and another participant, Tim, provided 7 references to being called "dumb". Some striking quotes are as follows:

- Yeah, cause every time they call us "dumb" and everybody - at recess, they call us "dumb"....Like, the grade 6s. They always call me "dumb" cause I go there. (Tim, when asked about good things and some not so good things about going to the special education class)

- Sometimes they call me special ed boy - the other kids....Or, the "boy that doesn't know that much." (John talked about kids from his integrated class)
- You're stupid. (Bill reported that this is what others say about him being in the special education class)
- Most kids think that special ed is for people that are dumb and all that.....Special ed is for people that are stupid. And that they don't know nothing. (Nick)

These types of comments speak to the heart of children's insecurities because they attack something which is central to their self-concept: their intellectual ability. Special education students know that they need help to learn skills and information that most other students do not need help with. If they are teased for receiving this help, even called names which undermine their intelligence, it would seem to be a challenge for them to develop confidence and competence in learning in light of the information which suggests that they may not be capable of learning. Moreover, they may be placed in a position where they have to defend the fact that they receive special support to their peers. Helen, who received support from a Resource Room program, reported that she was asked many questions about being in this class:

> They go: "Why are you inside of Mrs. B's class?" and I say: "Because I need extra help." And after, they go: "But, sometimes I need extra help, and I'm not in that class." And after - like, before, they never really used to tease me, but it used to feel like they were teasing me (Q: What do you mean?) Like, saying stuff like "Helen's inside of Mrs. B's class" and all that stuff. And that hurt me, but I got over it really quick.

Helen later reported that other students would also say "she's so stupid, that's why she goes to that classroom." Even Tom, who was fully integrated and appeared to get along well with students in his regular education class, related that "I didn't like the Resource Room cause everybody used to bug me then." Apparently, children from the regular education classes would "bug" him and talk about the fact that he needed help, which would anger him. Similarly, the other participants reported that most of the teasing situations were instigated by students from the regular education classes. Yet, it was also the case that students from the special education classes bullied one another, as reported by the victims of such incidents. For example, three of the students from the Self-Contained class described episodes in which two particular classmates harassed them. In general, social problems

appeared to be prevalent in the Self-Contained class, as reported by the students themselves.

Inclusion Experiences

In order to ensure that I was not presenting an exaggerated view of these students' negative, exclusionary experiences, I purposely examined the interviews for examples of *inclusion*. Consequently, after the initial coding was completed, I re-checked all of the interviews for certain categories which I felt may have been under-represented. I did this to be confident that the under-representation was true to the data and did not result from oversights on my part. Inclusion was one of the categories which appeared to have been under-represented. More specifically, the original excerpts did not come from all of the participants and there were actually not many examples coded under this category. This may have resulted from the fact that it is easier to "spot" incidents of exclusion, especially when they contain statements such as "kicked out" or "get out", than it is to identify examples of being included in something. For this reason, I re-checked all of the interviews to ensure that I had not missed any data that could be classified as "inclusion", looking for incidents in which the participants were let in somewhere, invited somewhere, included somewhere, doing something that others do, being where others are, knowing what others know, feeling like everybody else, and fitting in with other children. The results from this examination follow.

Three of the children , Tom, Ali, and to a lesser degree, Jeremy, had been "included" in the sense that they talked about being fully or more integrated during the time of the interviews. In addition, Ali discussed a major experience of inclusion in the sense that she had come back to her home school from a self-contained class approximately 2 years earlier. Being included was important to many of the participants, due in large part to the opportunity to be with or have more friends. In general, the students expressed the view that being with friends is an important feature of school and is an important reason for liking a class.

- Ali: "Cause I like it better here than at AB (other school). (Why?) Because I have more
  friends here than AB." In her second interview, she said that this year was better

than last year "because I can see all my friends again."

- Tom also reported that this year was better than last year "Cause I like being in the regular class and I get to spend more time with my friends." He reported that a lot of his friends are in his class and that he does many outside activities with them.

- Jeremy reported that he feels good about being in the integrated class: "Most of my friends go there. J goes there, A goes there." He also reported that he likes this year better than last year because he has more friends and more people to play with at recess. However, Jeremy also stated that he would still like being integrated, even if he had no friends, because he likes those subjects in which he is integrated.

- Jack reported that he and some other children from room 101 were able to go on a trip with the regular class, which he felt was because they were the "most behaved kids." He felt good about being integrated because "I'm just one of the few people (from the special education class) that's going to gym." Jack liked his rotary classes because "my other friends give me help" and he wanted to be integrated more "Cause I get to see more of my friends than I do and I can tell my mom I did it." He talked about other activities outside of school that he does with friends from his integrated class. Thus, by his reports, Jack appeared to be quite included in the mainstream school life. It is important to note that Concord P.S. was his home school.

Some of the participants, even those who reported being excluded, seemed to feel that they were accepted in the regular education classes and had many friends there. For example, Helen reported that she was friends with "half of the class" and Tim stated that he was friends with "all of the boys, practically" in his integrated class. Tim actually spoke at length about wanting to be with these friends all of the time. Among the children from the Self-Contained class, one student reported that he would rather be in his regular class "cause all my friends are in there." On the other hand, another pupil from this class candidly reported that he was only friends with two other students from his special education class, not having any friends from the regular education classes.

A key issue of "inclusion" is the amount of time that each participant was integrated into regular education classes at the time of the study. These data are presented in Table 4. The amount of integration varied greatly among this group of children, ranging from 10% for three of the children from the Self-Contained class (John, Nick, and Sarah) to 100% for two of the "Resource Room" students (Tom and Ali). The range in integration hours between the Self-Contained class and the Resource Room program did not overlap. Students from the former class were integrated for 10-35% of their time each week and

Table 4

Summary of Program Support Checklist

| Student | Type of Program | % Time in regular education class | In-class special ed. support? | Special ed. Testing? | Collaboration between regular & special ed. teachers? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jeremy | LD/Beh | 35% | No | 2 /year | Yes - not specified |
| Larry | LD/Beh | 35% | No | 2 / year | Yes - not specified |
| Nick* | LD/Beh | 10% | No | 2 / year | No |
| Bill | LD/Beh | 20% | No | 2 / year | Yes - not specified |
| Sarah | LD/Beh | 10% | No | 2 / year | No |
| Bob | LD/Beh | 35% | No | 2 / year | Yes - not specified |
| John | LD/Beh | 10% | No | 2 / year | No |
| Jack | LD/Beh | 35% | No | 2 / year | Yes - not specified |
| Tim | RR | 50% | No | 2-3/ year | Yes - informal - program modifications (extra time, help with tests) |
| Helen | RR | 50% | No | 2-3/ year | Yes - informal - accommodations given to student in regular classroom |
| Tom | (RR) | 100% | 2-3 times per week | none currently | Yes - informal - student works well & does not need modifications |
| Ali** | (RR) | 75/100% | Yes - irregular | 3 times per year | Yes- informal - teachers communicate regularly |
| Eric | RR | 75% | Yes - as needed | 3 times per year | Yes - teachers communicate regularly, but special ed. teacher does most of the monitoring |
| Mary | RR | 65% | Yes - 2 times per week | 1 time per year | Yes - generally - student is given reduced work |

RR = Resource Room special education program
LD/Beh = Self-Contained class program for students with learning difficulties and behavioural needs
* Nick actually spent much of his day in a Grade 3 class during that year.
** Ali's numbers (percentage time in regular education) reflect a change to her program in March of that year when she was fully integrated into the regular classroom.

students from the latter program were integrated for 50-100% of their time each week. Therefore, these were clearly distinctive programs in terms of how much time was spent in mainstream classes versus the special education class. In some cases, the only "subjects" that the children from the Self-Contained class were integrated for were library, physical education, and computer lab.

Although it was stated earlier that some of the participants indicated that they had many friends in their integrated classes, this may not always be the case. Accordingly, one girl from the Self-Contained class expressed positive feelings about her integrated class "Because...there's lots of friends in there". Yet, further probing revealed that she only had one friend in that class, another girl with identified learning difficulties. It is important to note that I did not explore this topic further in terms of their definitions of "friends" and what they did with these friends because this was not a primary focus of my study. Whether or not they actually did have many friends in their integrated classes did not change the affinity that many of the participants had for these classes. They still reported feeling happy and included there:

- Like, I get to do work like everybody else. I get to do the same things as everybody else. ...Well, I'm like the same as everybody else when I'm inside that classroom." In her second interview, she said: "I just don't like being left out and not being called on or something. Or, not even knowing the time when I'm supposed to be over there to listen to the unit. I feel more in - like, more integrated - when I know what's going on and stuff instead of not knowing everything. (Helen)

- This was one time where I was in Mr. R's class (regular class). It was so cool. Cause I got - he (special education teacher) came in in the morning - that's when he picks us up - and I was ready to get up. And he (Mr. R) goes "You stay." And everybody else goes - I'm like "Aren't I supposed to go?" And Mr. R goes "You're gonna stay with me." And then that would help me. That was happy. (Mary)

The fact that Mary remembered this day, which had happened earlier in the school year, and spoke at length about it, speaks to her strong desire to be included and integrated in the regular classroom.

Being included in a class or a school goes beyond simply computing how much time a student spends in a particular class or how long they have been at their school. It is also

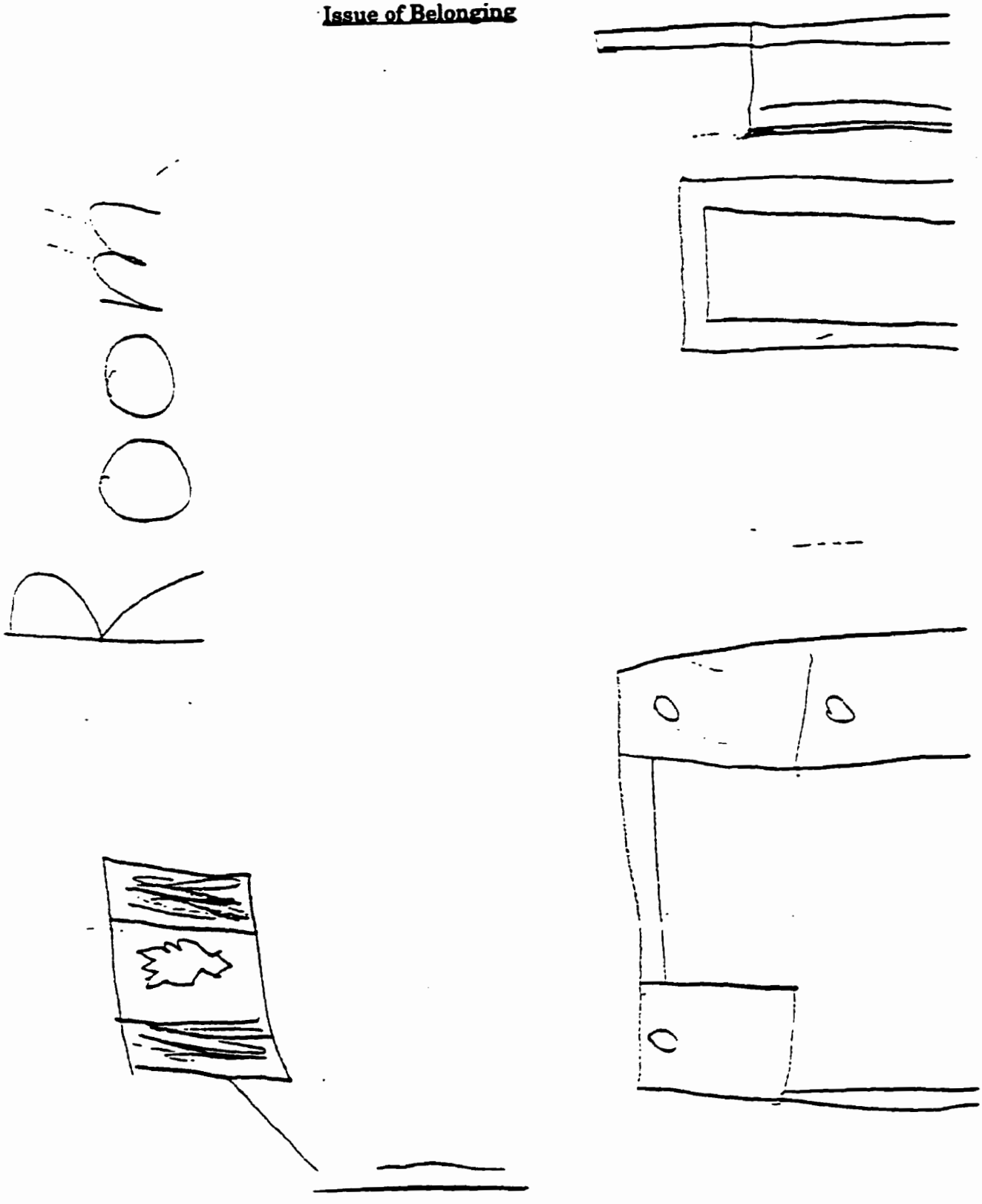
important to find out where they feel they belong and why. Six of the children from the Self-Contained class were attending a school that was not their home school and half of these pupils indicated that they did not feel that they belonged at that school. Two of these students felt that they belonged at a previous school and the other student stated that he would rather be at home. This latter student was obviously unhappy with his school and class placement because he actually did not feel that he belonged in either environment. With respect to the classrooms, there did not appear to be a clear placement (Self-Contained versus Resource Room) difference in the perceptions of belonging. Most of the participants (10) reported feeling that they belonged in their regular education classroom with half of these students indicating that they actually belonged in both of their classes. For example, Ali reported that she liked both classes and felt welcome in both the special education and general education classrooms. Contrary to the majority, three of the participants expressed the perception that they primarily belonged in their special education class. One of these pupils, Sarah, was spending 90% of her time in her special education class which may have affected her response. The other two children (Mary and Helen) felt that they mainly belonged in their special education classes, but added that they would have preferred to belong in the regular education class.

The typical reasons given for the perceptions of belonging related to their actual physical placement (e.g., the class is where they are), receiving help in that class, and, most importantly, having friends in that place. Yet, some of the children's responses were not completely consistent with their actual situation or with other information. For example, Tim felt that he belonged in his integrated class, and not his special education class, because that was where he was at the beginning of the year and that was where he had friends. Yet, when he was asked in the interview to draw a picture of "his class", he drew the Resource Room class. Further discussion revealed that he actually did not seem to feel wanted by the teachers or completely included in any class. Similarly, Nick's drawing of his integrated class was also contradictory in that he perceived that he belonged there and was accepted there, but only put himself in the drawing (see Figure 3); he actually was spending little, if any, time in the integrated class. Two other students from the Self-Contained class also reported belonging primarily in their regular education classes even though they were

Figure 3

**Nick's Drawing of his Integrated Class:**

**Issue of Belonging**



spending little time in this class. It is possible that when the children responded to this line of questioning, they were providing "wishful thinking" responses rather than actual reflections of where they felt included. The students may also have defined "belong" in a different manner in replying to this line of questioning. They may have applied this term to any situation in which they were present or preferred to be present. Furthermore, when they responded, they may have been thinking of where they felt good, happy, or most content, rather than considering issues of fitting in, being included and involved, and relating to peers and teachers.

Analysis of the Results: "Being Educated in Exile"

The results relating to the exclusion that these students reported suggests that this is a dominant aspect of their school life. The participants perceived that they were excluded from classes, schools, and peers as well as from participating in decision-making about their education, an issue which will be discussed in the next chapter. Furthermore, some of the examples of exclusion, particularly those involving victimization, were repeatedly raised by the participants, implying that these experiences were quite salient to them. It is relevant to point out, however, that the two children who were fully integrated provided few examples of being left out, kicked out, or victimized at school. Hence, these two students did not experience, perceive, or choose to report that they were excluded to any great extent. This did not appear to be a prevalent aspect of their school experience, perhaps because they were more socially accepted or exhibited more socially acceptable behaviour at school. It is also possible that their social acceptance had a positive influence on their attainment of full integration. Moreover, achieving this integration may have made them feel less excluded (from classes, from work) and more included, as reported in their interviews. Full-time integration of students with learning disabilities into a team-teaching classroom has been associated with acceptance by classmates, the perception of having friends, and the perception of being socially accepted in a classroom with a combination of students with and without learning disabilities (Juvonen & Bear, 1992). Furthermore, children without learning disabilities may view students with special needs who spend their time in regular classrooms as significantly more capable than those who spend their time in special

education settings (Bak, Cooper, Debroth, & Siperstein, 1987). This may reduce the amount of victimization which those students experience.

Examination of the examples of exclusion suggests that they may have resulted from a lack of understanding of others (teachers, supply teachers, regular education peers), poor behaviour on the part of the participants or other special education children, poor work quality (not being able to do the work, therefore, not allowed to do it), or simply because they were in "special education". In many of the cases, special education was directly linked with exclusion and instances of teasing. According to the participants, being associated with a special education class was believed to cause, directly or indirectly, many of their negative experiences. For example, they reported not being allowed to be somewhere or do something because of attending a special education class. Furthermore, most of the participants stated that they were victimized because of their special education placement. Finally, many of the students had experienced, or feared they would experience, exclusion from a school or class because of being in special education. To illustrate, when discussing the work in her regular education class, Mary reported that:

> And sometimes I can do the spelling...but usually I wouldn't be allowed to because I have to go to Mr. L (special education teacher). And sometimes I would want to do math that has the same, like, math that has the same as everybody else. (Question: Why do you think he won't let you?) Cause he think that I wouldn't understand it...I think he knows that if I did understand it, why would I be going to Mr. L..I bet he thinks that I'm in a special class that hardly does that work so he doesn't bother it - about my work. But, I want to do it...

Mary thought that she was not allowed to do the work that she wanted to do because of her placement in special education and because her teacher used that information to prevent her from doing regular class work. It is interesting that the students' explanations for being excluded rarely went beyond the fact that they were in special education. There was little in-depth discussion as to why it would be that they could not do certain things or were not allowed somewhere, only comments to the effect that it was related to their placement in special education. In support of the children's beliefs, research has shown that special class placement alone can serve as a "label" which identifies children as being different. Even if other students are not aware of the official "exceptional" label, they may perceive students with learning difficulties as less capable simply because they attend a class for support (Bak

et al., 1987; Guterman, 1995). It is likely then that peers view special education placement as a label signifying less capability. In turn, these perceptions may result in the victimization experienced by special education students, particularly that which undermines their intelligence (e.g., "stupid", "dumb").

The stigma and exclusion associated with special education placement has also been reported by students in other studies (Albinger, 1995; Guterman, 1995; Jones, 1972; Reid & Button, 1995; Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1997; Sabornie, 1994). One of these studies found that children with learning disabilities in resource room programs were victimized significantly more, expressed more loneliness, and reported less integration and participation in their schools (i.e., more excluded) than children without learning disabilities (Sabornie, 1994). In addition, themes of isolation and victimization, attributed to actual placement in special education, were prevalent in interviews with a group of children about their experiences with being labelled as learning disabled (Reid & Button, 1995). Like the participants in the present study, these students shared experiences of being taunted by peers and missing work in class. In order to protect themselves against the victimization and name-calling, some special education students have gone so far as to create fabricated stories about their location during the times they are not in their regular education classes (Albinger, 1995). Unfortunately, the victimization by peers, as well as difficulties with friendships, can continue to be stress factors for children with learning problems into their middle school years (Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1998).

The terms many of the participants used to describe their exclusion experiences ("kicked out", "not wanted", "not allowed", "doesn't let me", "took me out") imply a large degree of control by another person, often a teacher. Some of these phrases even suggest something quite malicious and conscious on the part of the person causing the segregation. In the eyes of the children, it may not just be the peer victimization which is perceived as "bullying" and as something negative. Actions by adults which exclude them and make them feel different also appear to be perceived as harmful. Cullingford and Morrison (1996), in discussing the experiences of exclusion reported by young offenders, suggested that:

> The problem of bullying is not a matter of clearly identifiable incidents and isolated individuals. It is pervasive in less obvious forms which are difficult to detect and define. From the point of view of those who are 'picked on', it is not only children but teachers who are involved in more subtle forms of bullying behaviour that can be

> embarrassing and hurtful and ultimately cause feelings of alienation and social isolation. (Cullingford & Morrison, 1996, p. 137).

The participants' experiences of actually being excluded from their schools or fearing such permanent exclusions are more obvious examples to consider. Well over half of the participants had noted such experiences and had described them as being something particularly upsetting or fear-provoking. In addition, some participants discussed having been temporarily suspended from school at one time or another. Being excluded from a school on a more permanent basis, even if it is to attend another school, is a significant school event. In England, children with special education needs are over-represented in permanent exclusions due to the fact that this is more cost and time-effective than attempting to garner additional resources for these pupils using a lengthy formal assessment and identification process (Hayden, 1997). Booth (1996) argued that "the notion that 'disciplinary exclusions' are in the interests of others while the exclusion of pupils categorised as having 'special needs' is 'for their own good' cannot be sustained. The possibility has to be considered that the categories which legitimate life outside mainstream schools represent disposal options for unwanted pupils" (p. 29-30). Children who were interviewed about their exclusion experiences (temporary or permanent) reported that exclusion was a significant event for them, even if they had only been excluded for a few days (Hayden & Ward, 1997). Many of the children discussed missing their friends and being eager to go back to school, yet all but one of the 22 children who were interviewed in that study experienced further disruptions in their education. Thus, being excluded from a school is a major experience which students have little control over. Despite the fact that there are differences in the type of exclusion experienced by pupils in England and the type experienced by the participants in my study, one could easily infer that the perceptions and feelings caused by these events are similar. Both groups may believe that they were not wanted by the school they left and both may miss their friends.

The incidents of exclusion and victimization shared by the participants were clearly perceived as being stigmatizing in nature. Therefore, it is important to ask to what purpose does excluding and stigmatizing these students serve. In examining the examples of exclusion that the participants reported, the purpose of these situations seemed to be to exert some control over the students, perhaps because of their poor behaviour, academic

weaknesses, or social difficulties. According to Page (1985), stigma is a major form of social control in society and the labelling utilized in special education, although useful, is a means of sanctioning and stigmatizing children. The ridicule of special needs pupils by other children is a form of psychological sanctioning used to gain social control, ostracize, and exclude (Page, 1985). The goal of bullying is to attain power over someone who is weaker and more vulnerable, perhaps it is even "the systematic abuse of power" (Smith & Sharp, 1994, p. 2). Children are particularly vulnerable to victimization because, unlike adults, they do not have rights or the awareness of rights (Smith & Sharp, 1994). This may be particularly true of children requiring special education support. Because the people responsible for their class placement have power and status that they do not have, these children may feel powerless and may find it hard to argue against the stigma associated with special education. Therefore, it may be difficult for them to defend themselves against victimizing peers when the "cause" of the victimization is something which has transpired from adults who have power and "know better." Excluding the students from classes, schools, and work may have been thought to be in the best interests of the children in that it placed them in the most appropriate setting and prevented them from disturbing or interfering with their peers' education. Yet, this may not be the perception of students with learning problems who are left to conjure up their own attributions as to why they are excluded. They may blame themselves and their difficulties or they may look elsewhere for the causes. Accordingly, the students from the Self-Contained class always blamed their exclusion from the regular education classes on the poor behaviour of their special education classmates, never personally claiming any responsibility for the reduction in integration.

The stigma associated with special education, and caused by the teasing and separations that the children experience, has implications for these pupils. "Whether it is a visible mark or, an invisible stain, stigma acquires its meaning through the emotion it generates within the person bearing it and the feeling and behaviour toward him of those affirming it. These two aspects of stigma are indivisible since they each act as a cause or effect of the other." (Cumming & Cumming, 1972, p. 449-50). When asked how the situations of exclusion and victimization made them feel, most of the participants (11) reported feeling upset, "not nice", hurt, sad or mad. Obviously, comments and actions by other children which stigmatize them and their special education placement often elicit

quite strong feelings in these students. Unfortunately, many of the children appeared to have been defenceless against being teased and bullied for their placement in special education. Furthermore, despite the fact that having a learning disability and attending special education is not an obvious stigma (e.g., such as a physical disability), these students were unable to hide this information ("pass") like the students in Albinger's (1995) study tried to do by fabricating stories. In many cases, students receiving special education support are not able to hide this fact as it can be readily viewed by their peers. Thus, these students may have little choice but to be stigmatized as being of inferior intelligence because of their difficulties and need for support. Consequently, previous research has clearly found that children with special educational needs are at greater risk of being victimized than are regular education students (Sabornie, 1994; Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1994).

Even if these students are not victimized as frequently as they reported, the fact that they perceive they are and perceive this as being a major aspect of their special education involvement is significant to consider. Self-perceived victimization has been associated with characterological self-blame (blaming one's character), loneliness, anxiety, and low self-worth (Graham & Juvonen, 1998). Self-perceived exclusion and victimization, in the case of the participants in my study, might relate to the fact that the actual premise behind special education in that it is different and separate from regular education. In many cases, the participants actually identified their placement in special education as being the reason for their exclusion and victimization. Yet, there may be other variables placing certain special education children at risk of being victimized, as with children in general. These variables may include low self-regard and behavioural risk factors such as internalizing problems (social impairment) and externalizing problems (aggressive, disruptive behaviour) as found in a study by Egan and Perry (1998). Many of the participants in my study, particularly those in the Self-Contained class, did have behavioural problems which perhaps placed them at increased risk for being victimized by their peers. Furthermore, the interview data suggested that these students were also involved in bullying other special education students, which is consistent with research finding that special education pupils are over-represented as bully-victims (Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1994). However, if the participants in my study erroneously perceived even some of their experiences as being

exclusionary, it is useful to explore the basis for their perceptions. It may be that the actual separation from peers caused by special education placement influenced these children to perceive other situations in a similar manner. In addition, the role of their social competence deficits must be considered as a factor in their perceived or actual isolation (see Bender & Wall, 1994 for a review).

Victimization may have quite serious implications, including depression, negative self-views, suicide attempts in later life, and low self-regard over time (Egan & Perry, 1998; Olweus, 1993a). Peer victimization may undermine factors such as supportive treatment by significant others, self-observation of competent functioning, and positive social comparisons (Egan & Perry, 1998). It may also have more immediate effects such as an impact on relationships with family members, an impact on school work, a reluctance to attend school, suicidal feelings and attempts, and physical illnesses (Macleod & Morris, 1996). It is quite possible that exclusion and victimization episodes, particularly if they are continual, lead to changes in the students' self-perceptions. In turn, low self-regard contributes over time to further victimization (Egan & Perry, 1998) and may influence the students' interactions at school, their desire, motivation, and engagement in learning, and their feelings about special education. It is not surprising that a student would feel negatively about receiving special education support if comments are made which emphasize that this support makes them different in fundamental ways (e.g., intellectual).

Many of the participants discussed the importance of feeling included and having friends, particularly in their integrated classes. The majority of the students felt that they belonged primarily in their general education classes, although some of the students actually spent very little time there. Thus, although their integration and experiences of inclusion in the mainstream may have been minimal, the students suggested that these experiences were meaningful to them when they happened which is in contrast to the negative connotations associated with their placement in special education. Yet, spending time in an integrated class for any period of time is no guarantee that a child will be "included" in that program. Although the students stated that they had friends in their integrated classes, this is no assurance that these peers are what others would define as "friends" nor that the special education children were truly accepted and socially included as they reported. Discrepancies have been found between "friends" nominated by children with

learning disabilities and those nominated by their parents (Wiener & Sunohara, 1998). This was partly because the parents claimed that there was no ongoing companionship between their children and the child-nominated "friends" outside of school (Wiener & Sunohara, 1998). Hence, children with LD may be confused about who is actually a friend suggesting that some of the participants in my study may have miscalculated their friendships, particularly in their integrated classes. Those students with little integration, who spent most of their time in a self-contained class, may be particularly at risk, socially. Children with learning disabilities who are placed in self-contained settings may be more likely to be neglected than those who spend most of their time in regular education classrooms because their peers without learning disabilities may not consider them as part of their class, but as part of a "special class" (Wiener, Harris, & Shirer, 1990). Being ignored and rejected by peers (low social status) are more psychological forms of bullying which have been associated with negative effects among students with learning disabilities, including feelings of loneliness (Tur-Kaspa, Weisel, & Segev, 1998).

In summary, it is clear from this research and others (Reid & Button, 1995; Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1997; Sabornie, 1994) that many students receiving special education support are victimized and, as a result, feel stigmatized. The participants in the present study attributed this to factors outside of themselves. Yet, feeling excluded and stigmatized would likely relate to perceptions that they do not belong, are not wanted, do not fit in, and are not good enough intellectually and socially: "People will react against the system that has stigmatised and rejected them." (Cullingford & Morrison, 1996, p. 144). Whether they are able to take action to deal with their experiences and perceptions is questionable, which may result in negative consequences such as depression and low self-regard. In addition, being victimized might affect their ability to focus on their lessons because they may be thinking and worrying about this issue (Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1994). Unfortunately, teachers may underestimate the degree to which their children with special learning needs are being bullied, which means that the effect that this has on their behaviour and schoolwork may go unnoticed and unresolved (Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1994). What will now be considered are the feelings which the participants associated with their negative experiences of being excluded and victimized.

## Feeling Ashamed

In beginning this section, it is important to emphasize that I do not believe that I have complete information from the participants regarding their emotions. This stems from the fact that, as with people in general (Weiner & Litman-Adizes, 1980), I do not believe that these children have the necessary language to describe their affective experiences well nor did I attempt to gain more detailed information on this topic. The children often discussed how they felt when speaking about their beliefs or experiences or I would ask them how a particular situation or experience made them feel. In reporting their emotions, as with their beliefs, knowledge, and experiences, the students were limited by their ability to express themselves verbally. Consequently, the emotional language that they used was quite basic, albeit meaningful for them.

It was reported in earlier sections that many of the participants had inadequate knowledge about their education and that they had experienced exclusion and stigmatization. The perception of many of the students was that being left out and teased resulted from their placement in special education. The issue to now consider is what follows from these experiences in terms of the feelings that are instigated. In the interviews, the participants often made comments about feeling sad, "not happy", bored, or upset, essentially, labels which suggested a negative mood. Eleven of the participants mentioned having these feelings at least once in their interviews. In examining the situations surrounding these feelings, the most common included being victimized for receiving special help (7 participants), hearing that they might be changing schools (6 participants), and having to receive special help and not stay in their regular classroom (3 participants). Being aware of not doing well, failing a grade, and not being liked were also mentioned as causing negative feelings. Two children from the Self-Contained class, Bill and John, spoke at length about aspects of school being "boring". These aspects included being in special education, being in a class that does not have certain activities, and having to do certain work. Both children, particularly Bill, appeared quite sad and apathetic while they were being interviewed and rarely smiled while talking about school. Given the situations in which they reported being "bored", I believe that their choice of this word is an indication of their negative mood and unhappiness with their educational situation even though they did not use words such as "sad", "upset", or "lonely". Two of the students, Helen

and Mary, spoke of crying in relation to their educational situation. Helen even began crying at one point during her interview when she was discussing her unhappiness with school. When I observed her in her Resource Room classroom, she did not appear active or happy in this environment, even though she was involved in the class and exhibited on-task behaviour. Another participant, Tim, was observed to be engaged and active in what was going on in the same Resource Room class, but often whined, complained, or disagreed with adults, displaying his unhappiness in this manner. Mary also made many comments when she was in her special education class, and needed to be continually prompted to work. At one point, she became frustrated and even began crying and complaining when the teacher reviewed her work with her. In her interview, Mary reported that not doing well and feeling sad about this would lead her to feel like giving up, but that she would not do this.

Eight of the participants reported angry feelings and incidents in their interviews. The situations which provoked such intense feelings included: teasing for being in special education (4 participants), other bullying situations (3 participants), not being allowed to go to their integrated class (2 participants), and being told to "get out" of a class by a teacher (1 participant). In general, the situations related to anger are similar to those which evoked sadness in that they excluded or isolated the students. The following exchange with John provides an example of a situation which led to his displeasure:

> I: Does another teacher ever - so you take gym with room 201. Do you do any other subjects with room 201?
>
> John: Used to.
>
> I: You used to? Yeah. But, then that changed. How do you feel about that changing?
>
> John: I don't know.
>
> I: Did you feel good when that happened or not good?
>
> John: Mad.
>
> I: Mad? Why mad?
>
> John: (Pause). I don't know.
>
> I: Did you feel - who were you mad at?
>
> John: Huh?
>
> I: You said you were mad when you had to stop going for math. Who were you mad at?

John: My teacher.

I: Which teacher?

John: Mrs. G (Educational Assistant in special education class).

I: Why were you mad at her?

John: Cause. She's the one that took me out.

Thus, John directed his anger at the person he believed was responsible for the decision to take him out of his integrated class. In essence, this was the person whom he believed had the control to remove him from something that he liked.

Helen also explained how she felt about not being in a regular education class full-time:

> But, most of the time, I just feel like why can't I just be like every other kid that goes to that same class - Mrs. J's (regular grade class). And be like a grade 5 student and stuff. Like, even though I am a grade 5 student, but, you know, be like a real- I feel like I'm not a real grade 5 student. I'm just, like, part-time, or something like that because real grade 5 students go to the class for the whole day, not half day. That makes me very mad. ...but, I just feel mad because I want to be like every other kid and I want to get the chance to be inside of Mrs. J's class and not always be inside of Mrs. B's class.... sometimes I just feel like I'm stupid or something like that. Cause I don't know the stuff in there.

Helen wants to be normal and it makes her angry that she is not. It was not completely clear whether she directed her anger at herself or at others (adults), but it is clear that the cause of her anger was feeling different from others and being separated from other children. I think that it is quite possible that she directed her anger at whichever adult she believed was preventing her from being integrated and also at herself for not being like other students and not knowing things that she believed she should know.

The participants made some comments which provide insight into the relationship among their class placement, victimization, and feelings about themselves:

> Interviewer: You treat class 101 as a regular class. I asked you how you felt about class 101 and you said that you just treat it like a regular class. How do you do that?

> Nick: Well, I - I guess there's one teacher and more kids in the classroom. From my point, that's how they make it look like a regular classroom.

I: Why do you do that?

Nick: So I don't feel bad about myself. Like if people tease me then I might feel bad about myself being there.

Nick viewed himself as not being worthy when he is teased because of his special education needs. Thus, his class placement and its resulting victimization affected his view of himself. As reported in the "Being Educated in Exile" section, some students believed that their self-perceptions and behaviour would change if they were integrated more. The following quote embodies the changes which the students thought would occur following increased integration:

> I'd feel a lot better about myself. I would feel confident - like I'm getting a chance and if I really did get a chance, I would really take it up and say " I need to practice this" and stuff. Most of the time, I don't practice.

Some of the students may have also personalized some of their special education experiences. For example, Tim, who attended a Resource Room program, interpreted the fact that he attended two classrooms as signifying that neither of his teachers wanted him: "...they have to take their turn switching me around cause I'm so bad for them." Thus, some of the students were clear about the role that special education placement played in their perceptions of themselves, mainly due to the stigma and victimization which resulted from their placement.

It is relevant to report that the participants also described positive, happy feelings in their interviews. Thirteen of the students reported "positive" feelings and many did so an average of 2-3 times in their interviews. One student, Ali (who became fully integrated), made many positive comments in her interviews, such as nine "happy" statements in her first interview. She was happy about her classes, getting gummy bears, and her report card. In general, the types of situations and experiences which related to positive feelings were those which suggested the children were being included and involved (being in the integrated class, having friendships), were doing things that they liked to do, and were doing well academically (pride). Only two students, Tom and Ali, spoke of feeling good about their report cards, possibly because they attributed their grades to their own ability. In turn, these feelings of pride might motivate them to continue seeking success on future

tasks. People who attribute achievement on a difficult task to personal ability feel good and are motivated to attempt additional difficult tasks (Weiner, 1980).

Analysis of the Results: "Feeling Ashamed"

Examination of the examples of sadness and anger demonstrates that it is the incidents and situations of exclusion which were reported to have caused the students' negative feelings. These incidents included not remaining in a specific class, believing that they might have to leave a class or school, being teased by peers, and not being liked. Most of the participants reported feeling upset, "not nice", hurt, sad or mad when they were victimized by peers. Thus, the comments and actions which stigmatized the students for being in special education elicited strong feelings in the victims. Children who are victimized, no matter what the reason, do report an effect on their emotional state, primarily feelings of sadness, misery, fear, depression, shame, and humiliation (MacLeod & Morris, 1996). Victimized children may feel ashamed because they are bullied and helpless to do anything to resolve this situation (MacLeod & Morris, 1996). It is quite possible that these feelings are evoked because being or feeling victimized, excluded, and stigmatized affects their self-perceptions. Yet, the participants focussed more on the effect that being excluded and teased had on their emotional state than on their perceptions of themselves, perhaps because this was easier and less threatening information to share. However, intuitively, the negative feelings which they shared would have arisen due to attacks on their self-perceptions. That is, they would have been unhappy or angry because these negative experiences threatened their images of themselves as being capable and liked students. In the pupils' descriptions, the events led directly to emotions, but they may not have been able to describe the effect the events had on their self-perceptions. Therefore, they focussed on their emotional reactions, which were obvious to them. Page (1985) suggested that all people who are stigmatized likely *experience* feelings of stigma in some way, feelings which may be induced by the comments of others or by official stigmatization (e.g., official exclusion). Page (1985) further argued that a person who experiences severe feelings of stigma may feel that their whole identity is damaged depending on the attribute which has been stigmatized. In the case of the participants in my study, they may have felt that their intellectual "identity" was damaged, due to the bullying and teasing by peers

which designated them as being of inferior intelligence, but were not able to articulate this. This damage may have lead to the strong feelings which were generated (anger, sadness). However, feelings of embarrassment and shame may also result from being stigmatized, with shame being the more intense emotion (Page, 1985). Hence, I labelled this theme "Feeling Ashamed" because I believe that the statements of sadness and anger actually signify the shame that these students experienced or were trying to protect themselves against when they were excluded or victimized. Shame, or feeling inferior, is an:

> ...intense sense of displeasure about one's status and a wish to be changed: to be smarter, stronger, neater, more ethical, or more beautiful. The core of the feeling experience is distress concerning a state of the self that the person feels defines the self as no good or as not good enough." (Miller, 1985, p. 31-32).

It is not surprising that the participants in my study did not report feeling ashamed because verbally acknowledging this self-conscious emotion is a developmental acquisition which does not usually emerge until middle to late childhood (Harter, 1999). It is therefore possible that the participants had not yet reached this developmental stage or that they did not want to admit feeling ashamed. In addition, even clients in therapy have difficulty identifying and speaking about their shame experiences (Tangney et al., 1995). Feelings of shame may result from committing transgressions that violate ideals for the self or from incompetence such as achievement failures (Harter, 1999). In the latter case, the self does not measure up to personal or social standards, either recognized by the individual or pointed out by others, which is attributed to an inherent lack of ability (Harter, 1999). Feeling ashamed, therefore, results from perceiving the self as inadequate and worthless. Accordingly, it is possible that the students in my study did not report feeling ashamed because acknowledging this would mean that they must also acknowledge that their behaviour has fallen below an accepted standard and, in turn, that they are inferior (Page, 1985). Similarly, some of the students may have expressed boredom in an attempt to protect their self-esteem by devaluing the work given to them. Therefore, they might not have felt ashamed, even if they did have difficulty with their work, because this work was given little value (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

As discussed above, instead of shame, most of the participants reported feeling angry, sad, or upset in response to certain situations. More specifically, eight of the

participants reported anger, usually in response to circumstances which excluded and isolated them from mainstream education. Hayden and Ward (1997) also found that half of the children they interviewed about their exclusion experiences felt angry about being separated from their friends and not being able to attend school. Children with learning disabilities, in particular, may have greater school anger than other children, even when they have experienced the same number of provoking situations (Heavey et al., 1989). This anger, along with sadness or frustration, may result from a desire of pupils with learning disabilities to not have learning problems and to do better in school (Albinger, 1995). Miller (1985) suggests that anger may result from a person being reduced to shame and that it actually may function as a "sanctuary" from feeling ashamed. This occurs because feeling ashamed suggests a painful self-image to the person (e.g., incompetence) which they would rather guard against than experience or accept (Miller, 1985). Thus, people may choose anger as a protection against shame and even deny that they feel ashamed. "A move from shame to aggression represents a shift from a passive state in which one is victimized by pain to a state in which the self mobilizes around an action" (Miller, 1985, p. 130). In the case of the participants in my study, anger may have afforded them the opportunity to blame others, rather than themselves, for their negative experiences. This issue will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Many of the participants reported feeling sad because of certain negative events and experiences, but I cannot state how pervasive this sadness was or exactly what it signified. The sadness did sometimes relate to school or class changes, which I have conceptualized as exclusion, but which could also be viewed as losses and as feelings of loss. Moving to a new school or neighbourhood may be associated with a loss of friends (Rubin, 1982). Frequent moves may cause serious social handicaps due to this lack of friends which, in turn, leads to loneliness (Rubin, 1982). The participants in the present study often expressed yearnings to go back to former schools, to be at their home schools, and fears of losing friends due to the school and class changes. Rubin (1982) believes that it is difficult to integrate into a new school environment in which everybody knows everybody and that this may be more difficult as children get older and cliques are already established. It could be further assumed that this would be most difficult for children with learning disabilities or behavioural problems who have social skills deficits. Students with learning disabilities

potentially experience significantly higher levels of loneliness than their peers without learning disabilities, attributed mainly to their status as a newcomer and their lack of social relationships (Tur-Kaspa, Weisel, & Segev, 1998). This loneliness might be most apparent in children who believe that the lack of friends is due to something beyond their control (being placed in special education) or something negative within themselves (e.g., social problems, learning problems).

In summary, the anger and sadness reported by the participants may have resulted from such experiences attacking their self-perceptions and making them feel ashamed. This shame could occur because others have implied that, intellectually, they have been failures. Cooley (1902) proposed that we base our perceptions of ourselves on how we think others judge us. Hence, if children hear information which suggests they are not good enough ("You're stupid"), see that they cannot do the same things as others (do the same work, be in the same class), and do not have sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge about their education to understand these experiences, how can they be expected to feel confident and competent? In turn, changes in their self-perceptions, in terms of not feeling confident, may affect their interactions at school, desire and motivation to learn, comfort with being in the special education class, and engagement in learning.

## Saving Face

In considering the impact of the experiences of students in special education, it is also valuable to examine their perceptions about themselves. Although I did not ask the participants direct questions about their self-perceptions, such comments often arose during the course of the interviews. This section will examine how the students viewed themselves in comparison with students who do not have learning disabilities and the students' perceptions of their school difficulties. In addition, the relationship between their special class placement and their views of themselves will be discussed. Finally, this information will be considered in light of some of the research in the area of the self-perceptions of students with learning disabilities and in the context of the negative experiences which were discussed.

Some of the children made comments which provide insight into with whom they compare themselves. The two students who had been fully integrated, Tom and Ali,

appeared to view themselves as being like other regular education children and as being capable of handling regular education work. Neither of these students identified themselves as being "different" or as having learning problems nor did they report any negative self-perceptions. On the other hand, two other students (Helen and Mary) reported that they did not feel like other students from their regular education classes. Helen's comments pertained to not feeling like a "real" grade 5 student and Mary stated that she feels like "nothing". Both girls associated these and other perceptions to their placement in the special education class.

> Helen: ... I just feel mad because I want to be like every other kid and I want to get the chance to be inside of Mrs. H's class (regular class) and not always be inside of Mrs. B's class (special education) doing all - doing like- I feel like - sometimes I just feel like I'm stupid or something like that. Cause I don't know the stuff in there. ..And that really made me feel upset because what's so wrong with me. I didn't do nothing to nobody. Why can't I just be like every other kid?

Helen, Mary, and another student, all from Resource Room programs, believed that if they were integrated more, they would, in a sense, be normal and perceive themselves more positively. Helen stated that she would feel better about herself, more confident, and the same as other students, if she were integrated more. Mary indicated that she wanted to be the same as other children so that she could feel smart and help others. All three students felt that they could handle the regular program with minimal help. It was clear with whom these three students, along with Tom and Ali, compared themselves.

On the other hand, it was difficult to determine with whom the students from the Self-Contained class compared themselves because most did not comment on this matter. Only one student, Jack, reported that he may associate himself with other students in his special education class. He commented that he was like other children in this class because they all had reading problems and "the same abilities as I do." Jack and one other student from this class, however, viewed themselves as being better behaved and quieter than the other children in the Self-Contained class. Jack even reported that he feels good about being integrated for math and gym "Cause so many people can't go to math and there's this one kid - named D- he can't go to gym." Thus, an important part of his self-perception is comparing himself and how much he is integrated with other children from his special education class.

The students also provided information regarding their perceptions of their school difficulties. In the "In the Dark" section, I reported that half of the participants were reluctant or non-committal when they were asked to explain why they needed to be in a special education class. They were able to recognize that they required academic help, but some of the students from the Resource Room programs suggested that their academic problems were caused by external factors. For example, one student blamed her distractibility on people talking or on boring teachers, another attributed her problems to her mother's inability to consistently help her, and a third student believed that he had difficulties because he was born in another country. One student viewed his problems as being related to effort which is an internal and unstable factor. This participant suggested that if he were to work harder, he would no longer have trouble in school. Many of the children from the Self-Contained class did not seem to be aware of their academic or behavioural difficulties. Two of the students, Jeremy and Jack, were aware that they had academic problems, but denied having behavioural problems. On the other hand, another student from this class, Larry, made many comments about controlling his behaviour, but did not discuss his behavioural or academic difficulties with any insight. Three other students showed some awareness of their behaviour problems and need for some academic help. They did not, however, actually comment as to how they view themselves. One of them even reported that he would not have trouble keeping up with the academic work in regular education classrooms if he were integrated more. Another student from the Self-Contained class, Bob, showed little self-awareness and did not seem to be aware of his difficulties, only conceding that he needed a quiet room in which to work better. Bob denied having social, behavioural, or academic problems. As was reported in an earlier section, none of the children from the Self-Contained class admitted to having any part in their loss of integration earlier in the year. Many of them blamed this event on the poor behaviour of other students from this class or on the unfairness of teachers. Thus, they perceived that their own behaviour did not play a role in being withdrawn from their integrated classes. Alternatively, they did not want to admit responsibility for this loss, although they may have been consciously aware of their misbehaviour.

During the course of the interviews, I had the opportunity to ask 11 of the participants whether they "knew anyone" with a learning disability or learning difficulties.

None of the children clearly identified themselves as having a learning disability, although one student thought that he might because he had a "processing problem". Furthermore, only two of the students "guessed" that they had learning difficulties. On the other hand, a few of the participants were able to identify friends or relatives who possibly had a learning disability or learning difficulties based on the definitions they had provided of these terms. For example, when I asked Ali if she knew anyone with learning difficulties, she replied: "Uh...my friend Tina. She goes to Mrs. C's (resource teacher)." Thus, although Ali had formally identified learning needs and should have had more severe learning difficulties than a child who visits a resource teacher, she identified her friend, and not herself, as having learning difficulties. It is important to note that I usually did not directly ask the children whether they had a learning disability or learning difficulties. It may be that they had already included themselves and assumed that I was referring to other people in asking this question. Yet, it is interesting that most of the children did not identify themselves as having such labels. This lack of self-identification may have resulted from their confusion surrounding these diagnostic labels. Although all of the children had been officially identified as having learning problems ("Communications/LD exceptionality), it is possible that few, if any, were ever *diagnosed* as having a learning disability or learning difficulties. Most had probably been assessed through the Psychology department of the school Board whose primary purpose is to identify the needs of the child and make recommendations for the most appropriate support. At the time of this study, diagnosing a learning disability was not a necessary requirement for children to be identified as needing formal special education support via an IPRC. Rather, they needed to meet the criteria for a particular exceptionality label which *implied* a learning disability. It is possible that their abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and needs were discussed with them without being officially diagnosed with a learning disability. Thus, whether their lack of awareness of their learning disability represents their "In the Dark" knowledge about special education or reflects their self-perceptions, in terms of not wanting to view themselves as having learning difficulties, is difficult to know. What can be said is that few of the children in this study expressed a complete and competent understanding of their needs, weaknesses, and strengths. For example, they sometimes assumed that a task or subject was "easy" for them if they could get it done quickly, with no mention being made of the correctness of the work.

Analysis of the Results: "Saving Face"

Heyman (1990) argued that before children with learning disabilities can progress in remediation or achieve psychological growth, their interpretation of their disability has to be understood and clarified with them. The results of this study showed that, for the most part, the participants did not recognize themselves as having a learning disability or learning difficulties. Furthermore, they were reluctant to discuss their school difficulties and, when they did, many claimed that other factors caused these problems. A few of the children proposed that if they were integrated more, their problems would disappear and they would be "normal." I suggest that the purpose of these perceptions is to protect their self-images in light of their difficulties; in essence to "save face." Only two of the children made clear derogatory comments about themselves, but they blamed these perceptions on their placement in special education, not on something inherent in themselves; this may be self-protective, an issue central to the theory I present in the next chapter. Interestingly, children who feel better about themselves may have false impressions of their learning disability in that they may deny the extent of their problems (Cosden et al., 1998). Other studies have also found that students with learning disabilities did not identify themselves as having this diagnosis or actually denied having a disability when they were interviewed about their school experiences (Albinger, 1995; Guterman, 1995; Reid & Button, 1995). Even when these students understand that a learning disability does not mean stupidity, they may still deny having one because their peers view it as signifying a personal deficiency (Guterman, 1995). Furthermore, even vocationally successful adults with learning disabilities have expressed concern that others would find out about their handicap and feel a strong need to hide it from other people (Gerber, Ginsberg, & Reiff, 1992). On the other hand, another group of adults with learning disabilities indicated that this label was preferable to the belief that they were "stupid" or to the thought that others might see them that way (Galambos, 1998).

The above information suggests that whether it is preferable for people to understand that they have a learning disability or whether it is better to not know or understand this, may depend on the actual person and her coping mechanisms. Denying a disability may be beneficial to a person's self-concept if such a person does not view himself as unintelligent. However, studies have also shown that children who have positive

perceptions of their learning disability, in terms of it being specific, modifiable, and not stigmatizing, have better academic self-concepts and perceptions of nonacademic competence, higher self-esteem, better reading scores, less serious achievement problems, higher self-perceptions of ability, and feel more socially accepted and supported (Cosden et al., 1998; Heyman, 1990; Rothman & Cosden, 1995). Furthermore, children with learning disabilities who are more likely to attribute their school difficulties to their learning disability, rather than to low intelligence, may protect their self-worth (Renick & Harter, 1989). Thus, the children from these studies did not deny their learning disability, but tried to frame it in a less debilitating manner which was associated with more positive perceptions of competence, social support, and better achievement. Students with a more negative view of their learning disability see their learning disability as more general, stable, and stigmatizing, perceptions which may generalize to their overall cognitive ability, not just their academic achievement (Rothman & Cosden, 1995). Accordingly, a child like Mary from my study, who viewed herself as "nothing," as not very capable, and as stigmatized by others for her class placement, and who "guessed" that she had learning difficulties, may continue to experience severe academic problems, despite her desire to be integrated and "smart" like her peers. On the other hand, a student such as Ali, who appeared to see her difficulties as modifiable, specific to certain areas, and non-stigmatizing, may have higher perceptions of herself and her ability; in turn, this, along with supportive parents, may relate to better academic progress. Yet, the direction of the relationship between children's perception of a learning disability and their perceptions of competence is not clear at this point. That is, does having a more positive view of a disability lead to better achievement and self-concept or does the reverse occur? Do children who have a negative view of their cognitive ability assume that their learning problems are global, stable, and stigmatizing or does the latter perception generalize to overall cognitive ability?

It is easy to understand the need that these students had to deny their learning disability or to avoid thinking about it, if this is what they did. Accepting the LD label means clear acceptance of not meeting certain academic standards. Consequently, children who "fall short" of others when comparing themselves to set standards risk feeling incompetent and inadequate, which may threaten their self-perceptions and actual achievement (Harter, 1999). On the other hand, feeling good about their skills and abilities

encourages and motivates people to pursue goals, persist on even challenging tasks, and achieve ideals (Harter, 1999). The lack of awareness that the participants showed regarding their difficulties and having a learning disability may have allowed them to "save face" in light of experiences and events which suggested that they were different and less academically able than their peers. This may have allowed them feel good about their abilities and, in turn, to maintain the motivation to persist on academic tasks, even those which are difficult. Yet, it should not be forgotten that these students were also reliant on concrete rewards to motivate them to complete tasks, perhaps not being sufficiently internally motivated.

## Longing to be Unexceptional

As discussed in the above sections, the children expressed negative feelings in response to their experiences of exclusion and victimization. Perhaps as a result of these experiences and feelings, many the participants communicated goals, wishes, wants, or preferences for changes to their education. These wishes were expressed in terms of something that they did not have, such as certain experiences, class placements, and personal attributes, but wished to have. Consequently, the types of wishes that they communicated involved something tangible or physical, a placement change, a school change, to be included/belong somewhere else, a change in their self-concept, a social change, or "a chance" to do or have something. I will focus on their desire to be placed in another classroom and to be like other students because these ambitions appeared to be most related to special education.

The results showed that nine of the fourteen participants wished that they could belong somewhere else in terms of another class or another school. One of these students, Helen, wanted to be in the regular class full-time and to "get dismissed there". In relation to this, she wished that she could get her work done faster in order to be integrated into the regular classroom for more of the day and not be in special education. Helen stated: "I wish I could just - my dream is just to have one chance inside of Mrs. H's (regular teacher) class. Like, for one week". When she expressed this "dream", she qualified it with the perception that "it" would never work and that she would not be allowed to do this, even though she believed she could handle a regular program. Helen expressed these feelings to her mother,

asking whether she could have a change to her program, but her mother responded that this should be left up to the teacher. On the other hand, another student, Tom, who also had reported wanting to be in the "regular class", was successful in obtaining his wish. Similar to Helen, he had expressed his feelings to his mother. However, in his case, his mother shared this information with his teacher and this resulted in full integration.

Another student who expressed a desire to be in his regular classroom, Tim, commented that this was because he perceived this class as being "fun". He also reported that he would know more if he was integrated for more of the day. Tim's desire to be integrated was highlighted when he was asked to define "integration" to which he replied: "I get to go back to my other class" and then: "Sometimes I wish I was in my other class." He further elaborated on this issue in his second interview:

> Yeah, because then I could, like, I'd be with all my friends and they wouldn't call me dumb no more. (Q: Why is that so important to you?) Cause I don't like it and I want to be integrated cause I want to be with all my friends.

Essentially, Tim's wishes involved not wanting to have the negative repercussions which he associated with his placement in special education. Rather, he wanted to feel included in the regular classroom. Another student also expressed similar attitudes, indicating that he would rather not be in the special education class so that other children would not make fun of him. Similarly, Helen's wishes to be in the regular classroom were motivated by her desire to be like other children and to not feel excluded:

> ...But, why I want to stay inside of Mrs. H's (regular) class -like, half the time when I'm made fun of, people won't look at me differently and say "Oh, she's in my class" and stuff. But, I hate when teachers come - when the supply teachers come -and they go "Who are you?" and stuff. Like, "What are you doing here? Aren't you supposed to be in the other class or something?" and I have to explain the whole thing over again. Like, I'm in here half-time - I have to come over here for half of the day and stuff.

Three participants, all from Resource Room programs, expressed wishes related to being "normal" or to be like other children. This longing related to a desire to know things that other children know, to be able to do the work that they do, and to figure things out like they do. Essentially, this reflects a desire to have similar intellectual and academic attributes as their peers without disabilities. The students indicated that they would feel like one of the "regular" students if they were placed in the regular education class more. In

addition, wishes such as not wanting to continue in special education, wanting to learn "hard stuff" and how to do things the "right way", and wanting to get "up to a higher grade", which were expressed by other participants, also reflect a desire to be normal. Mary's comments on this topic are the most poignant and heart-breaking. The following exchange between her and me, which I feel is important to include in its entirety, exemplifies her strong desire to be like other students:

> Mary: Because I want to be like - I don't - I want to be like them because, like, um, they're - I like to do the work that they do. And I would like to because I want to try, like, how hard it is and see what's easy and what's hard. Cause I want to learn some of the hard stuff in there. Cause I just learn easy work - some of the easy work - and I never get to - I never get to do any hard work. Like, stuff that I want to do. Like, sometimes I want to do the division that's hard, but I'll still do it. Even though it's harder I would want to. And that's why I want to go to Mr. R cause Mr. R will do the hard stuff and even if -even if it takes me all day, I'll learn how to do it.
>
> I : Why do you want to know the hard stuff?
>
> Mary: To be like them.
>
> I: Why do you want to be like them?
>
> Mary: Because...they're smart and they know more.
>
> I: Are all of them smart?
>
> Mary: ...um.
>
> I: Or, you just think they're smarter than you?
>
> Mary: Uh huh (yes). And, they know more and like, so - like, I don't have to ask them any questions. And I don't - I wouldn't have to go to Mr. L, like, often. I would get to maybe spend a day or two at Mr. R's cause I do all his work.
>
> I: Why do you want to be so much like the other kids?
>
> Mary: Cause they're so smart and they know almost everything.
>
> I: But, not all of them are smart?
>
> Mary: Except the ones that go to Mr. L (special education teacher).
>
> I: No, but even the other ones - not everybody is all - everybody's different. ...But, you don't want to - do you not want to be different?

Mary: Yeah.

I: You want to be the same as the other kids.

Mary: Yeah.

I: What's wrong with being different?

Mary: You get teased and you might fail. And it's - and it's like -it's just, I want to be, um, the same because I can help other people if they need help. Like, if I was in class and someone asked me "Can you please help me?", I would be able to help them. If I'm not, then - and that's why I can't - because I go to Mr. L and I wouldn't - I wouldn't know what to do there, at Mr. R's. It would be, like, if one person asked me for help, I'd be like "But, I don't do that work." But, if I did that work, I would have helped them.

I: Right. And that would make you feel good - helping?

Mary: Yeah.

I: So, you want to be like them so you can help other kids, and so you won't be teased and so that you won't feel like you're different?

Mary: Yeah.

(A few lines later):

I: Why do you compare yourself so much to other kids? Like, to kids in Mr. R's class?

Mary: What do you mean?

I: Well, you told me, in the last interview, that when you were born, there were all these problems - when your mom gave birth to you.

Mary: Yeah.

I: So, you had all these problems early, that other kids in your class didn't have. So, because of that - why do you compare yourself to them? Why do you make it so hard for yourself - comparing yourself to them?

Mary: Um..cause I - I always want to compare myself to them because it's like I'm nothing and they are something. And I always want to - like, be like them and if my friends would always help me, then I would get it - some of them, I would get it. Then, like, I would forget it, but they wouldn't. Like, they would have it in their mind cause they'd be studying and I would keep studying but it would pop out of my mind, cause I'm always frightened. But, they aren't cause they're used to it all the time.

It is clear when Mary's comments, and those from other students, are examined that these wishes actually involve not wanting to be different because not being exactly like other children has clear ramifications. These consequences include exclusion, stigmatization, and victimization by adults and peers as well as by the school system. According to these participants, there are still negative repercussions in society for being different and not part of the norm. Being similar to other students in the sense of being "smart" and able to do things is evidently a more attractive alternative for some of these children. In this manner, the negative implications of exclusion would be avoided because people would not ask stigmatizing questions about receiving special help, peers and "friends" would not call you "dumb" or "stupid", people would not look at you differently, you could avoid having to clarify class lessons which calls attention to your difficulties, you could feel part of a regular classroom, and you could have the correct answers when other students seek help from you. Unfortunately, it is not easy nor quick for these students' wishes to be "normal" to be realized, due to their often severe academic difficulties.

Placement Preferences

The children often made statements indicating a preference for a particular class or school. These statements sometimes over-lapped with their expressed wishes and wants as both tapped the issue of belonging. The expressed preferences for school (if they had changed schools), class placement, and type of support are presented in Table 5. I have also indicated in Table 5 whether their actual situation is consistent with their expressed preferences.

Review of Table 5 shows that half of the children were dissatisfied with their current school or program, having expressed clear preferences to have their education set up differently. Four of the six children who were not currently in their home school, all from the Self-Contained class, were not attending their preferred school or program. It is possible that the other two students from the Self-Contained class, who reported contentment with their program and school (Sarah and Larry) despite not being in their home school, might have had more time than the other students to adjust to their situation. Moreover, their contentment might not have endured should they have continued changing schools. The other children from the Self-Contained class for whom Concord P.S. was their

Table 5

Participants' Class and School Preferences

| Resource Room Class Students | Self-Contained Class Students |
|---|---|
| Tim preferred to be fully integrated, which he viewed as being fun and having other positive consequences. In-class support was okay if needed (for math and spelling), and possibly some special education withdrawal support, he later conceded. *Tim's situation was not consistent with his expressed preference.* | Jeremy wanted to remain at his home school, which was the case. He wanted to be integrated more (due to friendships) and not be in the special ed. class as much. *His preference was coming true during the time of our interviews, as he was being integrated more.* |
| Helen wanted to be in the regular class full-time, but later conceded that in-class help would be "ok" and that she might continue to need/prefer withdrawal support for math. *Helen had not yet achieved her preference, but there was to be a change in her class set-up the following year.* | Larry preferred to be at Concord P.S. ( "play" reasons) even though this was not his home school. He wanted to be integrated for Gym & Art, but be in the special ed. class for reading, spelling, and "treats." *Larry's situation was fairly consistent with his preferences.* |
| Tom preferred to be in the regular class and to receive help from his peers, parents, and the teacher if needed. If necessary, special education support would be acceptable. *Tom was able to achieve his preference the year he was interviewed.* | Nick was content with Concord P.S. (not his home school), but preferred to be integrated more because "it's fun" and only be in special ed. some of the time. *He spent most of his day in a Gr. 3 class, so his situation was not consistent with his preference.* |
| Ali preferred the regular classroom to the special education class, even though she did not dislike the latter. If she needed help, the Resource Room would be acceptable. *During the interviews, Ali was able to achieve her preference.* | Bill preferred to be at home or at his other school (because of waking up too early). If he had to be at this school, he preferred to be in the regular class because of Gym, Math, and friends and also so that he would not be made fun of. He found the special ed. class boring and did not like it. *Bill's situation was not consistent with his preferences (for school or class).* |
| Eric preferred to be in his regular classroom for subjects that he liked (Gym, Art, Science), but conceded that special education was necessary for spelling because he needed help with this. *Eric's situation was consistent with his expressed views for preference, but not with observations of him.* At one point, he did say he wanted to stay in only one class. | Sarah appeared content with Concord P.S. ( not her home school) but liked another school better due to friendships. She liked the special ed. class because of its computer. *Sarah's situation was somewhat consistent with her preferences because she expressed no real desire for change.* Yet, she was to be changing schools the following year for grade 7. |
| Mary's obvious preference was to be in her regular classroom, so that she could learn "hard stuff", and to receive help from her mother when needed. *Mary's situation was not consistent with her expressed preference.* | Bob reported that he would rather be at his "old, old school" because it was his home school and he was not "beat up" there. He was not content with either his integrated class or his special ed. class because of being beat up. He said that it did not make him feel good and that he didn't want to be in special ed. *Bob's situation was not consistent with his preferences.* |
| ***All Resource Room students preferred to stay at their "home school" which was consistent with their circumstances at the time of the interviews. | John wanted to be at his last school because of nice teachers; he did not draw Concord P.S. when asked to draw "his school." He was unclear about what class he wanted to be in, but did not really seem to want to be in special education. *John's situation was not consistent with his preferences.* |
| | Jack was happy with Concord P.S. (it's his home school) and did not want to leave. He seemed fairly content with his class arrangement, but wanted to be integrated for Math & Science (see his friends more) and receive special education, for the time being, for reading and spelling. *Jack appeared fairly content with his program, but some changes were expressed.* |

home school (Jeremy and Jack), expressed some desire for class change, but were fairly content with their situation, believing it would change in the future in that they would be integrated more.

Among the children who at one time were associated with Resource Room programs, half of them (Helen, Mary, and Tim) expressed clear preferences to be integrated more and thus, were not happy with their current program set-up. Two of the "Resource Room" children, Ali and Tom, had achieved their goals and preferences to be completely integrated and hence, were happy with their arrangement. The remaining Resource Room student, Eric, expressed contentment with his program, but observations of him were not entirely consistent with his reports. When I observed Eric in his special education class, he appeared to be a passive participant and not entirely comfortable in this environment. On the day in which I observed him, he was nearly 20 minutes late for his special education period, arriving only after another student went to retrieve him. Furthermore, both his regular education and special education teachers reported that this was not an isolated incident and that he often needed to be prompted to go to the Resource Room. They believed that Eric preferred to remain in his regular classroom because that was where his friends were and because he had witnessed the full integration of another special education student. If my observations, along with those of his teachers, are correct then either Eric did not wish to disclose his true feelings and wishes to me or he was unable to express himself well. In any event, the regular education class appeared to be an attractive place for many of the students from Resource Room programs, something to which they strived to belong.

Analysis of the Results: "Longing to be Unexceptional"

Over half of the participants in this study expressed wishes and preferences to be placed in a different school or class, being dissatisfied with their educational programs. Other studies have also found that students with learning disabilities have less school satisfaction than children who do not have learning disabilities (Deshler et al., 1980; Vetter, 1983 c.f. Tollefson et al., 1984). This dissatisfaction essentially stemmed from their greater academic difficulties which they blamed on cognitive difficulties (Tollefson et al., 1984). Pugach and Wesson (1995) found that some of the students with learning disabilities whom

they interviewed were unhappy when they did not belong or identify with their age-appropriate general education class, being aware that they were doing much younger "stuff" in the resource room. Similarly, the participants' desire for change essentially involved not wanting to be different and wanting to avoid the negative repercussions associated with special education (stigma, exclusion, victimization). These children did not want to be different; hence, they "longed to be unexceptional", preferring to be like everybody else. Three of the participants specifically expressed wishes to be "normal" like other children. This is not surprising given the findings of a study which synthesized the research on students' perceptions of classroom modifications (Klinger & Vaughn, 1999). This synthesis revealed that students with learning disabilities want to be involved in the same activities, read the same books, be given the same homework, be judged according to the same grading criteria, and be a part of the same groups as their peers without learning disabilities. In essence, these students wanted to be treated the same as other students, but it should be noted that they also recognized their need for a slower instructional pace and extra teaching of concepts (Klinger & Vaughn, 1999). However, contrary to my findings, a review of studies which examined students with learning disabilities' preferences for placement revealed that a majority of the students, in 6 studies, preferred resource room support to in-class assistance (Vaughn & Klinger, 1998). The discrepancy between their results and those of my study may reflect the use of different questions and probing in the interviews (e.g, "Where would you prefer receiving help?" versus "Where would you prefer to be?"). Participant differences should also be considered because many of the participants in my study were from a Self-Contained class whereas all of the other studies involved children who attended resource room programs or full inclusion programs. Thus, the participants may have experienced more negative factors associated with their placements and placement changes than did the participants in the other studies. It should also be noted that some of the reasons offered for preferring the resource room in the Vaughn and Klinger (1998) review related to the work being easier there or it was more fun, suggesting that it was these factors which the students preferred and perhaps not the actual setting.

Given that the participants expressed clear preferences to be "normal" or to be placed within the regular education class, it can be deduced that they were not content to be "exceptional" students. This "longing to be unexceptional" theme is analogous to an

unacceptance of themselves and their situation. If these children were accepting of themselves, their difficulties, and their need for special help, they would not be expressing a desire for change. This dissatisfaction may stem from the exclusion and victimization which resulted from their learning differences and special education needs. Reiff and Gerber (1992) point out that having a learning disability is not truly a "hidden handicap" within the educational system. A student with such a disability cannot always hide it and parents, teachers, and peers may be very aware of the condition and its meaning because it requires some separate education (Reiff & Gerber, 1992). Adults with learning disabilities recall an intense dislike of school at some point during their education, resulting in attempts to hide, avoid being chosen, and avoid being embarrassed by their teachers (Reiff & Gerber, 1992). Another adult's recollections centred on feeling sad as a child because he believed he was stupid and wanted to be like other boys and not be "dumb" (Druck, 1994). This person wanted to be smart as a child and used compensation strategies throughout his development to cover up his perception that he was not intelligent (Druck, 1994). As with the participants in the present study, the adults from these studies illustrate a desire to not be different and not be singled out for any negative differences. It is possible that the participants in my study believed that being integrated more would lead to or provide support for their desire to be "smart" and capable like other students which describes their "ideal" selves. Thus, the "longing to be unexceptional" expressed by many of the students might alternatively be conceptualized as a discrepancy between their real and ideal selves (Harter, 1999; Rogers & Dymond, 1954). Accordingly, their wishes to be unexceptional and "normal" exemplified an "ideal" self to which they aspired and viewed as preferable. In general, people have representations of their actual attributes (their real selves) but also develop representations for what they want to be or think they should be (Harter, 1999). Unfortunately, a failure to achieve their ideals can lead to negative outcomes such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression (Harter, 1999). Although young children tend to confuse their actual and desired competencies, making overestimations when rating themselves in various domains, Harter (1999) believes that the cognitive advances in middle childhood lead children to compare their self-representations. These comparisons can potentially result in a discrepancy between their real and ideal selves. In support of this developmental change, Glick and Zigler (1985) found that older and brighter children

exhibited greater real-ideal self disparities than younger and less intelligent children. Continued social experiences provide the "standards" and "ideals" for children to live up to (Harter, 1999). In the case of the participants in my study, the standards were set by children in regular education classes. Yet, it is difficult to state whether the students were all able to form discrepancies given their age (middle childhood) and learning difficulties. Although some were able to say that they wanted to be smarter, most focussed more on the educational changes which they desired rather than on any changes to themselves.

An alternate, yet similar, conceptualization is that posed by Markus and Nurius (1986) who depict any discrepancies as being between real and "possible selves." Possible selves are the selves that we would like to become or could become or are afraid of becoming. They are thought to function as incentives for future behaviour because one can have a repertoire of possible selves which includes enduring goals, aspirations, motivations, fear, and threats (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Positive possible selves motivate and guide people to realize their desired futures whereas unwanted and feared selves can block action or prompt avoidance of what people fear becoming. Yet, if feared selves are combined with a positive image, this can serve as a motivator to do what is needed in order to avoid what is feared and achieve what is desired (Markus & Nurius, 1986); all provide direction and motivation for action, change, and development and, in so doing, involve goal-setting behaviour. However, failure to achieve a desired goal may activate a particular possible self as being unsuccessful (Markus & Nurius, 1986). It is difficult to determine whether the participants in the present study were thinking of possible or ideal selves when they spoke of the changes which they desired. They were expressing "like-to-be" selves, but it is unclear whether they truly believed that this image was possible. Whether what they expressed were ideal selves or possible selves, they clearly held a desire to be normal, regular students attending normal, regular classes and doing all the things that those students do.

In an earlier section, "Feeling Ashamed", I presented the view that the children's emotional reactions to being excluded and victimized might have been due to feelings of shame. The shameful feelings may have stemmed from perceiving that they were inadequate in some way as alleged by the information received from others. Negative emotional outcomes may occur when the actual self does not live up to that which is desired or is ideal (Higgins, 1991). More specifically, a discrepancy between the actual self and the

ideal self can potentially lead to distress in the form of "dejection" emotions such as sadness, discouragement, and depression (Higgins, 1991). A sense of dejection or discouragement results from losing the ability to act consistently with the self-definition goals set by the model of self (Oatley & Bolton, 1985). This may have been the case with at least two of the participants in my study, the two girls who cried or discussed crying in reference to their wishes to be normal. On the other hand, a discrepancy between the actual self and how individuals think they should or ought to be may lead to "agitation" emotions such as feeling worried or anxious (Higgins, 1991). In turn, these individuals may set goals to act in order to reduce this discrepancy and, consequently, eliminate the related emotions (Bandura, 1997). This change could occur through actual behaviour (such as higher achievement) or through changing perceptions of the real self (i.e., via denial). In the case of the participants in my study, it is unclear whether they used the more adaptive strategy of attempting to reduce any discrepancies between their actual and ideal selves by setting goals for themselves to change. Their "goals" were articulated more as "wishes" or wishful thinking as to how they would like their school life to be, without any actual specific goals for self-improvement. In the next section, their strategies for achieving what they want will be discussed, but these were really not specific goals for self-development or change.

This "longing to be unexceptional" theme may seem somewhat discrepant with the previous theme, "saving face" because the former implies an unhappiness with the self or circumstances while that latter implies viewing the self as adequate. Although some of the participants framed this longing as wanting to be normal, most instead focussed on wanting to be somewhere else (in a different class or a different school). Hence, this latter group were perhaps not actually admitting to any personal discrepancies because they blamed their unhappiness on their placement and external factors. This may have been self-protective because they did not focus on wanting change to themselves (e.g., wanting to be "normal"); this issue will be explored further in the theory presented in the next chapter. It is possible that the children expressing wishes to be normal are unhappy with their actual selves and want to be like their conceptualized ideal selves, whereas those who simply want a placement or school change are reacting to a situation or event which is discrepant with their view of themselves. Their placement in a class or school which results in exclusion and victimization is inconsistent with their "ideal self" view and threatens it. They do not

completely accept their need for extra support, do not wish to be somewhere where they are made to feel inferior because of it, and want to continue to view themselves as "normal" and capable. The children who were actually satisfied with their placements may have either achieved their goals and not let the special education placement threaten their sense of self (Ali and Tom) or, in other cases, accepted the fact that they do need special education help and deal with any teasing through this acceptance. Alternatively, these students may prefer the special education class, or are not unhappy with receiving this assistance, because of reasons found in other studies, including finding the work easier and more fun (Vaughn & Klinger, 1998). This may suggest that they are not being challenged and effectively educated in that setting or they may be working at a level which is appropriate and not too difficult.

In this theme, the participants discussed wishes or things which they desired. Although I referred to these wishes as goals (large, perhaps distant goals), there are conceptual and perhaps practical differences between these two terms. For example, the typical phrase reported by the participants was: "I want to be in the integrated class" instead of "My goal is to be integrated and I will do__ ___ to achieve this goal." Using the words "wish" or "want" in their phrases rather than "goal" might remove some of the personal responsibility for change. That is, having a goal implies that the self needs to act (e.g., "I will complete this math assignment") whereas having a wish does not translate into any specific self-action (e.g., I want to do better in math; I want to be integrated for math). This thinking may then affect actual behaviour because the latter does not necessarily translate into action, but the former does. Consequently, if no action is taken, then change will not occur unless it is decided by someone else (e.g., teacher, school board). In actuality, the children often reported that what they wanted was beyond their control, being in the hands of someone else, and not their responsibility. This is an issue which will be explored in the next chapter. There are other questions which remain in concluding this theme of longing. It would be important to understand how important it is for them to have these wishes and whether they contribute to feelings of longing and dissatisfaction or whether they are productive in the sense that they propel these children to take action and correct what they are not happy about. Furthermore, if children do not have expressed wishes, does this suggest that they have become apathetic and helpless? The wishes expressed by the

participants differed in terms of whether they were practical and perhaps achievable (e.g., to be integrated more) or whether they tended to be more elusive and grand (e.g., to be "smart"). Examining which "wishes" are more useful and adaptive to have, those which are practical and achievable or those which are "dreams", would appear to be fruitful. Other questions involve the frequency and saliency with which they think about their wishes and the role this plays in actual daily behaviour. If students spend a great portion of their time pondering their dissatisfaction and desire for change, are they consumed by this thinking and does it prevent them from functioning adaptively? On the other hand, does this thinking encourage them to take more action to obtain what they want? The latter might be the case if they have developed specific strategies or sub-goals for achieving what they want and if they seek out assistance with these goals. These final issues will be considered in the next section as well as in the final discussion. Obviously, many in the sample of participants held a strong desire for change with respect to their education and were not happy "consumers" who bought into what had been offered to them. Their proposed attempts to change their situations for the better will now be presented and discussed.

## Route to Freedom

As mentioned above, many of the participants expressed a desire for a change to their school or class placement, perhaps seeking to achieve a more ideal view of their "self" than that which was a current reality. What will now be considered are the "strategies" which the participants put forth to achieve the change they desired which would, hopefully, result in more positive feelings and self-perceptions. Goal-setting naturally leads to strategies to achieve the goals which are set out (Johnson & Graham, 1990).

During the course of the interviews, particularly when the topic of a desired change to a class or program was raised, most of the participants provided examples of methods or actions that were needed to achieve their goals or wishes. When coding, I referred to these examples as "Strategies" or, more specifically, "Ways to be Integrated" because they were designed to get the students out of special education and back into the mainstream classroom. Examining the perceptions of these students regarding what they thought they needed to do to achieve their goals is important, particularly because half of them reported clear discontentment with their school or class situation. These strategies can be considered

"sub-goals" needed to achieve the larger goal of increased integration. Eleven participants provided at least some suggestion of what was needed in order for them to be integrated more into the regular classroom. The types of "strategies" that were provided included those related to work habits, behaviour and attention, quality of work, and communication of their feelings. Each type of strategy or "sub-goal" will be discussed in turn.

Seven of the participants reported that improving their work habits was important to getting out of special education. The statements they made included: practise, ask more questions, finish your work faster, do extra work, keep studying, read more, complete all your work, do a lot of work, work better, and do all your homework. Two of the students reasoned that working faster was the key to being integrated, either by showing that you could work faster in your integrated class or by showing that you could complete your special education work quickly. One of these students, Helen, believed that "... if I do my work faster and I get it finished, well then I think my grades will be a lot better". She expressed confidence that she was capable of this. The other student who thought that he should work quickly indicated that this was related to a special strategy which he was using to achieve what he wanted: he would not tell the special education teacher that the work was too easy for him in this class "because the faster I get it done, I might get integrated." Many of the students who discussed improving their work habits often used the word "practise" as an important ingredient to being integrated, as shown by this quote from Mary:

> Because I want to be smart. And someone could say: "How you get smart is you have to practice, practice, and not watch T.V. a lot. And keep - even though you have homework, finish that and keep doing extra stuff that you have. Like, make up your own words. Like, you have school at home. Make your mom give you words. Make you have spelling tests. Read your books more."

Thus, half of the students expressed the belief that if they worked harder and practised their skills, they would no longer require special education support. This suggests that, in essence, they viewed their problems as being partly due to not working hard enough, as opposed to a more stable, inherent problem such as their actual ability.

Six of the participants felt that an improvement in their behaviour or attention span was a key part of the integration formula. They contended that adults were looking for the following behaviours when making decisions about integrating a student: not being rude,

being "good", not getting distracted, asking more questions during a lesson, paying attention/ "not look around the class", not wandering or talking, not talking back, not fighting or fight less, being the best behaved, being fully responsible, getting along with teachers, and cooperating. Showing these behaviours in both the regular class and special education class seemed to be important, possibly in order to cover all of their bases because the children did not seem to know exactly who (their regular grade or special education teacher) would make the decision to integrate them more.

Interestingly, only 8 of the participants actually mentioned the quality of their work as being necessary for full integration or increased integration. Furthermore, most of these students provided vague references to actual achievement:

- "Or sort of improve my grades a little bit" (Helen)
- "I think I didn't need to cause they say I improved so I said that - I said to my mom that I don't think I need to go there no more cause I can read better now. I can read good" (Tom)
- "Because I was doing well upstairs" (Ali)
- "If I could do everything good. Like... I know how to spell everything good" (Eric)
- "... But, I am doing that. Mr. T had a talk with my mom - something about if I improve on my work more and more, but by the time I get to grade 6, if there's a really really high improvement, then I will in grade 7, I will - I can continue this school and get a transfer to go to another school - a nearer school to my house. That's called T - for grade 7." (Nick)
- "I'm reading better and I go to the tutors and we do reading." (Jack)

The terms "improve" and "good"/ "better" were often used by the students without any real definition of what these phrases actually meant. In contrast, Mary dispensed very detailed, specific ideas as to what was needed for her to get out of special education. She described what needed to be done in terms of specific scores on spelling tests, the number of spelling words to be learned, and the need to get perfect or close to perfect on tests. Mary, however, mainly focussed on spelling as being the requisite area, not covering math, reading, or any other subject. It is quite possible that she frequently asked her teachers what she needed to do and this was the advice that they provided in order to appease her.

Finally, only 5 of the children commented on expressing their opinions to an adult in relation to changing their class/school placement. All of these children were from Resource Room programs. Some of the other children may have also expressed their preferences to a parent or teacher, but this did not come up in their interviews. Tom and Ali, two of the students who had expressed their views on their abilities and need for special education to an adult had achieved success in so doing. Tom told his mother he had improved and Ali told her teacher she thought she was doing better. Obviously, in the eyes of Tom and Ali, a chain of events was then instigated whereby they soon achieved what they wanted which was to be integrated. Unfortunately for the other 3 children, expressing their feelings to their mothers or teachers had not proved to be efficacious. One of these students, Helen, was quite upset and began crying after I actually suggested that she talk to her mother about her feelings:

> I do. I do tell my mom I want to be inside of Mrs. J's class and she still - she doesn't listen to me. I don't know. She still sends me inside of Mrs. B's class.

Thus, Helen did not receive a positive response to expressing her wishes to someone "in control." It should be noted that during the second interview with Helen, she reported that her mother was going to try to go to a meeting and talk to the teacher about her feelings, which made her feel a lot better. Helen had also noted that she did not really want to tell her teacher how she felt, as she feared hurting her feelings. Thus, some of the children may not express their feelings and perceptions, fearing the consequences if they do. Another participant, Tim, also reported that, after our first interview, he had talked to his special education teacher, who said that: "...I will be integrated if I be good and all that and if I do all my work."

The children often discussed their strategies in a manner which suggested they could be applied and achieved with ease. Furthermore, many of their methods implied that being integrated was under the student's control:

> I: So, is it up to Mrs. B (special education teacher) only whether you be fully integrated or not?
>
> Tim: No, it's up to me.

I: It's up to you?

Tim: Yeah, it's up to me, too.

I: What do you mean?

Tim: Like - if I be responsible and I get along with all the supply teachers and if I get more responsible then I could go to the integrated class.

I do not know whether it is helpful for these students to believe that everything is "up to" them to achieve their wishes to be integrated more or whether it is more practical for them to believe that certain decisions and actions are under the control of others (e.g., parents, teachers). Intuitively, it might not be adaptive for them to believe that if they are working as hard as they can, are behaving well, and are paying attention, this may still not be enough to allow them to spend their time in their desired setting. They might then conclude that it is their ability which is holding them back and not their effort or behaviour. Yet, most of the students (except for Mary) did not imply that it was their inherent ability which was at fault. Although they may have also believed this, they did not report this perception.

Four of the children provided multiple examples (e.g., work habits, behaviour and attention, quality of work, and expressing their wishes) of what needed to be done to be integrated. These may have been the more determined students among the participants in the sense that they wanted to cover all of their bases in order to integrated. The following excerpt from Mary is particularly interesting and details what she thinks happens every year:

I: Will you be getting special help next year?

Mary: I don't know. What they do is they give you a week - they give you a week of doing the work in the class - in grade 5 - and then they would see if - I'd have all these papers and they would see - like, they would be looking at you because they know that you go to Mr. L (Special education teacher). So, they would actually be looking at you than anybody else in the class - in grade 5. So, they would be seeing if you're wandering, talking to somebody beside you, writing notes or something like that, then see - like, giving more time. And they would give you - in a week, they would see if you have to go to Mr. L or not.

It is difficult to determine from where Mary acquired this idea. However, it implies that the first week of school would have been extremely anxiety-provoking for her if this is what she thought would happen.

It should be noted that the students often observed their peers who had achieved integration and made conclusions as to what those students had done to achieve this:

> Interviewer: Then you said that another student got integrated because he was good.
>
> Tim: Yeah, he was good. Like, he got all of his work done.
>
> I: Is that the reason kids get integrated?
>
> Tim: Yeah. He got all of his work done. And he...he.. And he was always cooperating.
>
> I: Why is that the reason why he got integrated?
>
> Tim: Because the teacher thought he needed to be fully integrated.
>
> I: Why?
>
> Tim: Because he was always good. And he always got his work done.

Tim obviously believed that completing his work and behaving well in terms of cooperation, rather than the quality of this student's work, resulted in successful integration. Thus, the students may have formed their strategies based on their observations of other "successful" students who had achieved integration.

It should be noted that some of the students who indicated that they wanted to be integrated more had difficulty generating ideas as to how this could happen. For example, Nick reported that he did not know how he would be able to be with his integrated class for most of the day, which is what he wanted. At one point, he did say that he felt he deserved to be integrated more because of his behaviour. However, it is not known whether he expressed his viewpoints regarding his improved behaviour to his teacher and what improvement in his behaviour he believed he had achieved.

Analysis of the Results: "Route to Freedom"

This theme follows from the previous theme, "longing to be unexceptional", in that the latter implied a discrepancy between the participants' real and ideal selves which was desired to be reduced (end goal) and the former deals with the methods to actually reduce this discrepancy (process goals). Harter (1999) discussed two ways in which the discrepancy between the real and ideal self can be reduced: by lowering aspirations through *discounting* the importance of succeeding in the area which shows deficiencies or by raising the level of actual competence or adequacy through methods such as skills training. Discounting the importance of academics has not received support from the literature examining the self-perceptions of students with learning disabilities (Harter, 1999). Increasing their competence is problematic for many children, particularly those with learning disabilities, and may not result in improvements in self-esteem given the punishing social comparisons which are used (Harter, 1999). The participants, however, provided some "process" goals or strategies which they thought had let them, or might allow them to, achieve their wish of being integrated. These goals included changing their work habits, behaviour and attention, the quality of their work, and communicating their needs to an adult. The term "route to freedom" embodies the perception that freedom is equivalent to being more "normal". In these students' minds, being integrated signified freedom from the often stigmatizing and exclusionary nature of special education. How they imagined they would achieve this freedom is important to examine.

The emphasis of half of the participants on improving their work habits as a means of achieving increased integration is interesting. It implies that perhaps they truly believed that they were "lazy" and that this was the reason for their placement in special education. As a result, all they needed to do was work harder (i.e., not be lazy) and they would not require special education. This view may actually be preferable to having them believe that they are "stupid" due to their need for special support and that all they need to do to be integrated is "become smarter". Yet, older children may actually equate work habits with intelligence (Stipek & Tannatt, 1984). Stipek and Tannatt (1984) found that older children explained their ratings of their classmates' "smartness" based on their work habits. Hence, if peers are perceived as being hard workers, this is equated with meaning that they are smart. On the other hand, if classmates fool around and do not do their work, this means

the students are less smart (Stipek & Tannatt, 1984). It is possible, therefore, that the participants in my study believed that working harder would make them appear smarter and would make them appear as better candidates for integration.

Most of the 11 participants who shared their ideas as to how they could be integrated used vague terms in so doing. This is not surprising given their level of uncertainty regarding the reasons for their placement in special education ("In the Dark"). Thus, the terms "work harder" and "learn better" are of a similar level of complexity as the phrases "get more help", "catch up", and "learn to work properly." Because the students had or professed a vague, weak understanding of their actual placement in special education, it follows that it would be difficult for them to develop specific goals and strategies for "escaping" special education. In the case of the participants in my study, they did not always have someone with more knowledge and power who would advocate for them, express their opinions, and explain to them what they needed to know. When some of them tried to reach out to an adult who could help them achieve their goal of integration, they were not always successful. Intuitively, it might be thought that it would be helpful if the children had more specific ideas about what they needed to do to achieve their goals in terms of more exact definitions of "improve", "better", and "good". This might have provided them with something more realistic and practical to strive for. It is possible that these students were actually given more detailed information about what they needed to do to be integrated and that they either did not understand this information or did not remember it sufficiently to share it in their interviews. Yet, their lack of knowledge, understanding or recall of information pertaining to their educational goals is concerning because goal-setting can be a powerful tool which motivates and provides information to students on how they are doing (Johnson & Graham, 1990). Furthermore, goals provide direction for focussing students' attention and efforts as well as strategies for achieving goals (Locke et al., 1981).

The literature regarding goal-setting suggests that it is best if goals can be believable (being within reach, challenging, but not impossible), achievable (based on the student's abilities and being possible to attain), controllable, measurable, and desirable, amongst other factors, in order to be successful for exceptional learners (Edelen-Smith, 1995; Johnson & Graham, 1990). The fact that goals should be believable and realistic in order to be effective may be particularly important for children with special learning needs because

these students may instead try to pursue unrealistic goals in order to appear the same as their peers without learning difficulties. Children can be taught to set realistic (challenging, but achievable with sufficient effort) academic goals which sets them up to achieve success, rather than failure (White, Hohn, & Tollefson, 1997). In turn, this may reduce the defensive reactions and distortions engaged in when failure is experienced (Tollefson et al., 1984). Even students with learning disabilities (adolescents) can be taught to set realistic achievement goals, to put forth effort to reach these goals, and to accept responsibility for their achievement outcomes (Tollefson et al., 1984). If goals are unrealistically high, and students are not able to achieve them, this results in failure and low self-efficacy (Schunk, 1985). Thus, it is important that goals be appropriate for the individual for which they are designed, particularly for students with learning difficulties.

As noted earlier, the participants in my study did not typically provide specific goals and requirements for achieving what they wanted. Instead, they discussed vague propositions or intentions to "work harder" or do "better work". Johnson and Graham (1990) suggest that goals which are specific result in better performance than goals which are vaguely stated because specific goals provide a clearer message as to what is required and how the performance will be judged. Goals seem to affect performance most effectively when they are expressed in specific terms or as a specific intention to take action rather than as a vague intention to "work hard" or "try harder" (Locke et al., 1981). Not only were many of the participants' strategies vague, they may have been too distant in terms of being projected into the future. The proposals to pay more attention, be "fully responsible", "do everything good", and be fully integrated may not have been things which could be achieved overnight and were not daily plans for progress. It might have been more advantageous if the goals these students focussed on had been more immediately achievable (e.g., do well on upcoming math tests). In support of this, some research has shown that proximal goals do result in better learning and sense of personal efficacy than distal goals (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Schunk, 1985). It is probably not advantageous, if a Grade 5 student is reading at a Grade 2 level, to be overly focussed on the large goal of needing to read at a Grade 5 level before he or she is integrated because this might be too overwhelming. Instead, focussing on smaller steps and goals may be more helpful and more achievable.

In this section, I presented and discussed the strategies many of the participants offered as to how they could be integrated more. The manner in which most of these examples were described suggested that the students viewed themselves as theoretically having the "control" to elicit change. Some of them suggested that they were capable of doing the things that needed to be done. This control resulted in some success in the case of two of the students who were able to achieve full integration. However, in most cases, if any strategy for change was attempted, the result had yet to be positive. In this situation, it is unclear whether it would be helpful for the students to continue believing they have the control and are at fault for the lack of change, or whether it is more beneficial to place the blame on other people. This issue will be further examined in the next chapter.

In summary, it is beneficial for students, including students with learning disabilities, to have goals and strategies for self-improvement. The participants in this study provided ideas as to how they could achieve their goal of being integrated more, yet many of these ideas were vague and distant. Only two of the students actually found that their strategies for achieving change to their programs were successful and, interestingly, these strategies necessitated the involvement of adults (parents, teachers) to effect this change. Accordingly, the remaining students may need help to make their goals and strategies realistic, achievable, specific, and more proximal in order to achieve some success.

## Cloudy Forecast

This section will discuss the predictions and assumptions that the participants discussed regarding special education. All of the children made statements which provided insight into their beliefs about their current and future educational situation. These beliefs were based on what they did and did not know about what *had* happened and what *would* be happening with respect to their education. Accordingly, these students had heard and understood certain information and had interpreted that information to the best of their ability. Unfortunately, their understanding was often incomplete or inaccurate, perhaps due to insufficient information being imparted to them, which resulted in their often "In the Dark" state. This, as well as their own personal attributes and experiences, led them to form predictions and expectations about their future educational situation. These predictions provide insight into their expectations regarding the likely success of the

strategies discussed in the previous section. It should be noted that, at times, their prognostications were most akin to worries and fears. In this section, I will first address the students' assumptions about the meaning of special education, then will present their predictions regarding their immediate future, and finally will consider some of the participants' fantasy-like expectations of their ability to handle integration, should this occur.

Five of the children discussed the assumptions that they originally made, or currently held, about what it means to be in special education, most of which were negative. For example, two students from Resource Room programs originally thought that they would have to go to another school when they found out they would be in special education. In the case of one student, this assumption was quickly clarified by adults and he no longer believed this would happen. Mary, however, continually worried about being sent to another school and actually opened her original interview by commenting on this worry. Her fear was primarily based on the fact that she had seen this happen to a friend, but also was consistent with her general anxiety regarding school and her academic difficulties. These anxieties included failing, getting a bad report card, having to do Grade 1-2 work if she changed schools, and being continually corrected by her teacher. The following comment illustrates Mary's negative thinking: "I would be scared...that I..keep getting zero. Then I'll get a bad report card and I'll have to go to a different school and I'll fail." Although she admitted that her special education teacher had tried to alleviate her worries and assumptions, this did not assuage her fears and she continued to believe that she would fail and would have to change schools. Mary's beliefs, however, are not unreasonable in light of the fact that half of the participants in this study, as well as many others in the school system, had to change schools in order to attend a special education program. At one time, these affected students may have held the same worries and, obviously, these fears had been realized. One student from the Self-Contained class reported that when he originally found out he would be changing schools, he thought this meant that he was going to a special school, not just a special education class at another school. On the other hand, other students may misconstrue special education, thinking that it means going to a "higher level" or as being better than regular education ("special" = better). One student who believed this was then disappointed when he found out that he was to receive more *help* because he

equated this to not seeing his friends anymore and to not being able to do certain things. This same student also held a grim view of special education, believing that students who remained in such programs would be "pretty old" by the time they finished school and would not be able to "do anything". Not only did some of the students hold negative assumptions about what it meant to be in special education, they may have also personalized some of their special education experiences. To illustrate, one student from a Resource Room program interpreted the fact that he attended two classrooms as signifying that neither of his teachers wanted him: "...they have to take their turn switching me around cause I'm so bad for them."

The participants made predictions about what they thought would be happening the following academic year and where they thought they would be in terms of their class and school placements. The follow-up interviews with the students were conducted later in the year (mid-April to early May), at a time when many might have begun to think and hear about what would be happening the following year. By the time the second interviews took place, most of the IPRC review meeting had occurred or were to be occurring soon and, therefore, many decisions had been made about the students' programs and school placements for the following year. Consistent with the "In the Dark" theme, all of the children from the Self-Contained class and half of the children from the Resource Room programs expressed some degree of uncertainty when asked what they thought would be happening the following year. The students from the former program initially responded with "I don't know" or "I'm not sure" comments regarding their expected school and class placements. Two of the students expressed doubt that they would continue in the Concord Self-Contained class the following year, thinking that they might be integrated more or even completely; in actuality, this did not happen. Another student from this class indicated that he would like to be with his integrated class more, but was uncertain whether this would happen in the future. Furthermore, this student was even uncertain that he would be moving up to the next grade, perhaps due to the confusion of being "integrated" with an age-*inappropriate* class and having failed a grade in the past. Another student from the Concord class stated that "... soon I will be out of...class 101", the special education class, but was not able to explain the basis for this expectation. The remainder of the children from the Self-Contained class indicated that they were uncertain as to what school they would be

attending. Three of these children thought that they might be transferring to a different school with two of them erroneously naming the same school. One of these two pupils, John, believed this would happen because "me and my friend heard it", but did not specifically say that he had heard this from a parent or teacher. Yet, the following comment from John may explain why he thought he would be changing schools: "I just keep on going from school to school. And after this, I don't know. I suppose I'll be going to a different school." Obviously, his past transitions had contributed to his assumptions of continued instability in his school placements. It should be noted that both of the students who thought they would be transferring to the same school corrected this belief in their follow-up interviews, having both discovered that they would be remaining at Concord school.

Among the students from the Resource Room programs, the two pupils who had been fully integrated that year were more certain than the other pupils about what would be happening the following year. Tom reported that he would be going on to an intermediate level school (Grade 7/8), without extra support unless he needed it and Ali expressed confidence that she would be placed in a regular Grade 5 class, only attending the Resource Room if needed. Three of the remaining Resource Room students, Tim, Helen, and Mary, wanted to have the same arrangement as Tom and Ali, but were uncertain what would be occurring the following year(s). Although they had shared their wishes regarding integration with a teacher or parent, they were not confident that anything would be changing in the near future. The final Resource Room student, Eric, seemed resigned and content with the fact that he would continue to receive extra help through this class during his Grade 7 year, but thought that he might not require special education support by the time he reached high school.

The final issue regarding the students' assumptions regarding special education is how they viewed they would actually handle being integrated more. I have repeatedly stated that a portion of the students held strong wishes to be more integrated into their regular education classes in the present and in the future. Yet, in discussing this issue with some of the participants, it was apparent that they held idealistic and somewhat unrealistic expectations about what their lives would be like if this did happen.

- I'd feel a lot better about myself. I would feel confident - like I'm getting a chance and if I really did get a chance, I would really take it up and say "I need to practise this" and stuff. Most of the time, I don't practise. (Helen)

- ...I want to be in Mrs. H's class more cause it's more fun cause you get to do all this work. And I was only integrated one day. And I say if I was integrated, I'd know more. (AND)...I'd be in the other class full-time and I wouldn't have very much problems with all the other kids cause they wouldn't bug me. (Tim)

- John, from the Self-Contained class, expected that he would be able to keep up with the work in a "bigger" (integrated) class if he was to be integrated more, only needing help with "a couple of words."

- Jeremy, from the Self-Contained class, did not think that he would have a hard time if he was integrated for more subjects.

These students believed that they could handle being integrated more (even though it might be hard), that they would not be in trouble as much, and that they would not require much help: "No cause I know a lot already. I might need help on the spelling a little bit." Following their placement in an integrated class, they would know more (because they would be doing harder work), their grades would improve, they would appear "smarter", and they would be asked more questions by other students. Finally, if their wish came true, other children would not look at them "differently" and would not call them derogatory names which would result in increased popularity and "fitting in". Thus, these pupils believed that their experiences and their self-perceptions would be entirely different if they were to be integrated more. This implies that they blame a lot of their difficulties and problems on their placement in special education, or that they want to believe this, instead of believing that their difficulties are inherent and stable. In general, these students did not believe that they would be permitted to be integrated more. Perhaps this allows them to continue to hold the conviction that their problems are caused by their placement in special education and that it is others, and not themselves, who are preventing them from achieving what they want.

Analysis of the Results: "Cloudy Forecast"

The results pertaining to this theme showed that, for the most part, the students held fairly negative expectations and assumptions regarding their placement in special education. Although four of the children expressed positive expectations about their achievement or behaviour should they be integrated more, all four of these students were

negative or uncertain regarding whether they actually expected to be integrated more. Furthermore, many of the participants appeared to have had negative assumptions and predictions about their education. These included dismal views of the meaning of special education, fears of changing schools, and beliefs of having a bleak future (e.g., not being able to get a job). In the case of one student, and perhaps others, even when these assumptions were corrected by someone in authority, these reassurances were not necessarily believed. Only two of the children, who were the only fully integrated pupils, held optimistic and confident expectations regarding their program for the following year. Those students had experienced some success and control over their education through full integration and expressed more certainty about their future and what would happen the following year. Thus, experiences of control and success may have translated into certainty when forecasting their future. Most of the participants, however, were not as sure about what would be happening to them, leading to the title of this theme, "Cloudy Forecast." There appeared to be children who saw their immediate future as being positive and predictable and others who saw their future as predictable and negative or unpredictable. The uncertainty that a portion of the students expressed about their immediate educational future is consistent with the level of uncertainty they held about their understanding of special education and its procedures from the "In the Dark" section. Cognitive research on uncertainty suggests that it is adaptive for people to monitor their uncertainty and to cope with it by escaping or by seeking clarification through additional information (Smith et al., 1997). Yet, most of the participants did not report that they had attempted to reduce the uncertainty and unpredictability of their future (i.e., next year) by seeking clarifying information from people in authority (parents, teachers). Instead, it seemed that some of the information that they did have was acquired through overhearing something or through discussing their possibilities with peers. It is possible that some of the students, particularly those who had experienced multiple school and class transitions, had resigned themselves to the experience of uncertainty and unpredictability of their future. Thus, they may have been certain of uncertainty. In any event, when special education students form predictions about their class and school placements, it would be useful to determine from where they gather their information. In this way, any inaccuracies could be clarified, which may provide more security and stability for these students.

"Cloudy Forecast" also refers to the assumptions and expectations that many of the participants carried about special education which were bleak interpretations of its meaning. For example, that special education means having to leave their school and friends as well as limiting their future potential (e.g., failing a grade, having to stay in school for a long time, having difficulty finding a job as an adult). However, living with such assumptions is probably not absurd given their own experiences with school changes and failures as well as those of other peers with disabilities. Furthermore, their beliefs about special education may have evolved from comments made by their peers. Nevertheless, it is quite concerning that these students live with fear and anxiety about what is happening to them and what might happen at any time. Further exploration as to the basis for their assumptions and expectations would prove fruitful for future research. Unfortunately, when I inquired as to the reason for their beliefs, the usual reply was "I don't know". It is possible that the participants found it difficult to explain their thinking and from where it came, which is sometimes the case with children with learning disabilities (Wong, 1991).

Other research has supported the bleak expectations that children with special needs hold for the future. Palmer and Wehmeyer (1998) found that students with learning disabilities, who received support through resource rooms or inclusive programs, held significantly less adaptive and hopeful expectations for the future than did children without disabilities. The negative expectations involved themselves and the future. It should be noted that children with mental retardation in this study held even less hopeful expectations (Palmer & Wehmeyer, 1998). The authors interpreted these results in the context of the lack of control these children have over their lives in terms of having little opportunity to share their preferences and participate in decisions which impact on their lives. This lack of control and participation would affect their expectations for the future. The authors point out that self-contained classrooms, in the case of the children with mental retardation in that study, limit student control and promote dependence more than do less restrictive educational environments (Palmer & Wehmeyer, 1998). This conviction might also apply to the Self-Contained class students in my study who are in a more controlling environment than other pupils. Also interesting are the findings from a study by Rogers and Saklofske (1985) in which children with learning disabilities who were newly placed in a resource room program had significantly higher expectations for their future academic

performance than children who had been placed in a resource room for at least six months. It was speculated that the children with more experience were discouraged by the slower performances which they experienced in the resource room. Yet, it is also possible that the longer children are placed in special education programs, the more uncertain and negative they become about their future, which includes their future academic performance. Hopelessness and a lack of expectations regarding their future may result from the lack of control and participation in decision-making with regard to class and program changes.

The information related to the four children who held positive expectations of themselves and their achievement, should they be integrated more, is somewhat discrepant with a hopelessness view. Yet, being able to envision a more positive image of themselves, once they were integrated, is consistent with a study regarding "possible selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This study found that when subjects were asked about their expectations of themselves ("possible selves"), almost all participants endorsed positive possible selves (rich, successful, important) whereas almost none endorsed negative possible selves (poor, child abuser) (Markus & Nurius, 1986). It was only when participants admitted to negative past selves (something they had been), that they imagined something negative was possible in their future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Overestimates of future abilities may also reflect a confusion between the real and ideal self (Harter, 1999). That is, the four participants may have been envisioning their ideal self (i.e., what they wanted to be) when they spoke about their ability to handle integration. The positive expectations of these four participants might reflect defensive reactions in the sense that they did not truly believe there was something wrong with themselves and instead believed that the reason for their difficulties related to their special education status. Research has shown that children with learning disabilities do overestimate their ability to be successful at future academic tasks (Alvarez & Adelman, 1986; Loper, 1984). Alvarez and Adelman (1986) explained such overestimates as being defensive in that children may claim to be able to do tasks in order to protect their self-worth or in order to avoid continuing with academic remediation which they do not want. It should be recalled that half of the participants in my study were dissatisfied with their current placement and many would have preferred to not continue with special education. Research with boys who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder also finds that they tend to be optimistic in predictions of their abilities which may enhance their

motivation (Diener & Milich, 1997; Milich, 1994; Milich & Okazaki, 1991). Unfortunately, the optimism may disappear when they are confronted with difficult and challenging tasks (Milich & Okazaki, 1991). Accordingly, when the four participants in my study actually experienced increased integration and its challenges, their optimism regarding their abilities may not have maintained itself. It is also important to point out that these students expected an improvement in their behaviour and achievement should they be *integrated* and not should they remain in special education. Furthermore, they did not actually expect that they would be integrated, which is consistent with the more hopeless, uncertain view which has been the focus of this theme.

In summary, the participants held inaccurate, and at times negative, assumptions and expectations about special education. Most were not certain what would be happening to them the following academic year which relates to the issues of control and involvement. The next chapter will present the core category, ***Self-Protective Manoeuvring***, which is the central phenomenon around which the other categories, or themes, are related.

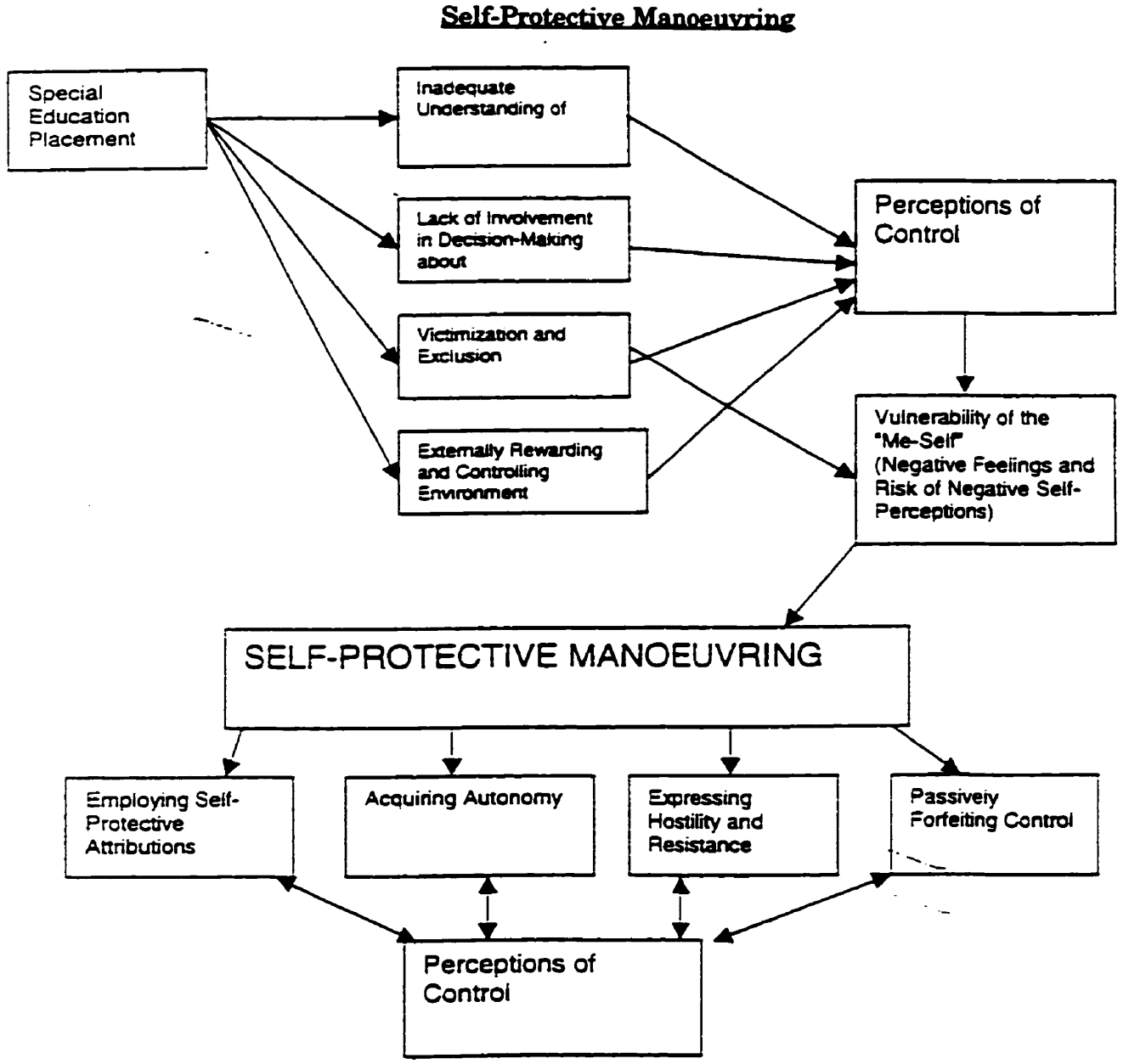
# CHAPTER IV

## Discussion

The previous chapter presented and discussed results which found that many of the participants in this study were not satisfied with their educational placements and the ramifications of such placements. Their dissatisfaction related to feeling excluded and victimized because of being in special education. More specifically, many felt that they had been evicted from their schools or classes and all felt that they had been excluded from regular education programs in some manner. In addition, the participants were not able to show a reasonable understanding of why and how they were placed in special education and why other transitions and changes had occurred. Their knowledge, or lack thereof, was expressed with a great deal of uncertainty. Due to their negative experiences, many of the participants expressed a longing for their school lives to be different in terms of their educational placement and, in some cases, they wished that they themselves could be different ("be normal"). To achieve these changes, the students spoke of goals and strategies which they could execute, but, for the most part, they had not been successful and nothing had yet changed for them. Some students, however, had been successful in achieving a change to their program or expected that their situation would soon be improving.

The question which follows from this, in addition to why were some children successful and others not, is how did these students cope with their situation in light of the negative messages which they perceived? More specifically, what were the different paths followed by these students and the different techniques used to handle their dissatisfaction, lack of knowledge, and perceptions of being stigmatized? In examining the eight themes presented in the previous chapter and the issues which they brought forth, it became clear that the central concept tying many of the important issues together was that of *control* and its relationship to the *self*. This key relationship was developed into the core category, *Self-Protective Manoeuvring*, which is the central phenomenon around which the other categories, or themes, are related. The reader should refer to Figure 4 as an introduction to this theory. Control is critical to the issue of the self in that people's beliefs about it influence their own development (Skinner, 1991). *Self-Protective Manoeuvring* deals with the relationship among the themes presented in the previous chapter and, more

Figure 4


Self-Protective Manoeuvring
Special Education Placement
Inadequate Understanding of
Lack of Involvement in Decision-Making about
Victimization and Exclusion
Externally Rewarding and Controlling Environment
Perceptions of Control
Vulnerability of the "Me-Self" (Negative Feelings and Risk of Negative Self-Perceptions)
SELF-PROTECTIVE MANOEUVRING
Employing Self-Protective Attributions
Acquiring Autonomy
Expressing Hostility and Resistance
Passively Forfeiting Control
Perceptions of Control

importantly, the relationship between *control* and the *self*. It refers to the techniques that the students employed in dealing with their negative, potentially shame-inducing, experiences as well as the lack of control that most of them had regarding their situations. These manoeuvres include using self-protective attributions to explain the cause of negative events, engaging in resistant behaviour and expressing hostility, attempting to acquire autonomy and control, and, finally, passively forfeiting control. Some children may, at one time or another, use all of the above manoeuvres whereas others may primarily rely on one or two.

The present chapter will discuss this theory, concentrating on the key concept of the *self* and its relationship to control. This theory has developed from the perceptions of the students in this study as expressed in their interviews. In addition, I will use other research and theories to support my concepts and connections. As an introduction, a brief overview will now be presented. The beginning point of this theory, as seen in Figure 4, is the students' placements in a special education program. Many events and situations, such as academic failures, negative and positive experiences, would have occurred before this point. I am proposing that the students may have perceived their placement in special education as being punishment for their failures and as an indication that they may lack the ability to be successful. This is compounded by the fact that they also had inadequate knowledge and understanding of, preparation for, and involvement in deciding their special education placement. As a result, this may have led to perceptions of uncertainty about their present, past, and future school lives. As discussed in Chapter III, the children perceived that their placement in special education was a segregating event which caused them to be further victimized and excluded. These stigmatizing experiences, the uncertainty they had about their education, and other experiences (e.g., highly controlling and reward-based classrooms) are presumed to have led to a reduction in their perceptions of control over their school lives. In addition, these same experiences and events suggested to the students that they were inferior and inadequate, perceptions which typically trigger feelings of shame. However, shame is an uncomfortable state for the self, necessitating self-processes to manage this situation. In this study, four "manoeuvres", which were introduced above, were used to protect the students from truly perceiving themselves as inferior. One of the manoeuvres, acquiring autonomy, has the students becoming involved

in contributing to educational decisions and, in some cases, successfully changing their situation for the better. Unfortunately, many of the manoeuvres are not, in the long-run, adaptive and may affect the students' motivation, academic effort, emotional functioning, and academic performance. In addition, they may not change the balance of power nor the continuation of negative, shame-inducing experiences and, in some cases, may negatively affect the child's perception of control. At this point, the student may choose to give up (failure of manoeuvres) or continue to employ the other self-protective manoeuvres. Giving up implies a complete disengagement with their education and possibly depression.

As can be deduced, this theory is cyclical and allows for changes in manoeuvres and consequences. It is possible that, within an individual student, more than one manoeuvre is utilized: they want to and try to achieve change and have some autonomy, but at the same time continue to need to defend the self against shameful feelings. The key issue for them is protecting their self-images and how others view them. In doing this, the balance of power between them and others (teachers, peers) may change. I will first discuss the factors which have potentially contributed to reduced perceptions of control. Subsequently, I will address the risk of shameful feelings which the students' circumstances have entailed. Finally, the strategies used to protect themselves from perceiving that they are worthless and incapable will be presented and analysed.

## Contributions to Reduced Control

Control refers to the belief that individuals are able to choose among courses of action and have an influence over outcomes (Deci, 1980). In addition to whether a particular outcome happens, it is important that people *believe* they have control over outcomes (Langer, 1983). Perceived control refers to the "degree of freedom one expects to have over the processes that one believes must be pursued in order to accomplish particular outcomes" (Taylor, Adelman, Nelson, Smith, & Phares, 1989, p. 439). It involves the causes which people believe are responsible for outcomes in their lives, the role that people believe they have in influencing events, and the resources which people perceive that they have at their disposal to reach their goals (Skinner, 1991). To this end, "individuals who believe they have control act in ways that maximize control and individuals who believe that they

cannot influence outcomes act in ways that forfeit potential control" (Skinner, 1991, p. 168). Furthermore, experiences and feedback can confirm high perceptions of control or undermine expectations of control. There is a difference between *perceived control* and *locus of control*, which refers to whether causes are perceived to be internal or external. Individuals can have an internal locus of control and take personal responsibility for outcomes, but still have low perceived control (Bandura, 1997). For example, blaming their ability would be an internal locus of control, but something which is thought to be uncontrollable, suggesting low perceived control. However, repeatedly attributing causes to external factors, which implies uncontrollability, would contribute to low perceived control over events and outcomes. If individuals persistently attribute causes to external factors, this would imply that they have low perceived control with regard to events and outcomes. Some research supports the view that students receiving special education support have lower levels of perceived control than pupils in regular education (Adelman, Smith, Nelson, Taylor, & Phares, 1986).

In this study, the students' transitions to special education, whether this was in a Resource Room or Self-Contained setting, were not described as having been positive events. These placements would have occurred after a period of failures and, in many cases, after a history of behaviour problems. Thus, at the point when the students were officially placed in an "official" special education program, they would have already had negative academic and social experiences. The students, however, may have perceived their special education placement as being a punishment for their academic or behavioural difficulties. This placement may have also suggested to the students that they lacked the ability to achieve in the same setting as the majority of their peers, a perception which they would try to protect themselves from truly believing. Children with low perceived competence have a history of being held responsible for failures, receiving punishment for failures, and having excessive demands placed on them. Not surprisingly, children with specific learning difficulties or emotional/behavioural problems have more problems with perceived competence than students with other needs (Kunnen & Steenbeek, 1999). They see any failures as being proof of their lack of competence and a threat to their self-esteem which generates negative emotion (e.g., fear, sadness, anger) and is associated with low perceived control. If their placement in special education is also viewed as punishment for their difficulties and

failures, this would further contribute to low competence, low perceived control, low motivation, and, as a result, low achievement. Exclusion, stigma, and victimization related to their placement in special education may also be viewed as punishments for their school difficulties.

The context in which children live is an important contribution to their perceptions of control over what happens to them. This context might include parent and teacher expectations, the level of contingency in the environment, and feedback that is received about their performance. The theory discussed below, which involves students' perceptions of special education, will focus on the inadequate understanding they had of special education procedures, their lack of involvement in decision-making, the victimization and exclusion that they experienced, and the overreliance on external rewards to motivate them as factors which would contribute to reduced perceptions of control.

Inadequate Understanding of Special Education

In the last chapter, I discussed the fact that the children were not adequately knowledgable about their need for special education support and the procedures through which this support was provided to them. All of the students had undergone at least one major psychological assessment of their learning and behavioural needs which they did not realize had such a major role in determining their school or program placements. Thus, these assessments may have occurred without their true understanding, control, or consent. In general, the students expressed a great deal of uncertainty about what had occurred and what might be occurring in the future with regard to their education. Feeling uncertain and not knowledgeable undermines control and prevents children from taking action. That these events and experiences would leave them feeling at least somewhat powerless over a major part of their life (their education) is unquestionable.

Lack of Involvement in Decision-Making

The participants appeared to be well-aware of the fact that adults have the power regarding their education and they provided many examples of this power. All of the students knew that at least one adult was responsible for their placement in special education (e.g., a teacher, principal, parent, Board of Education personnel). Although some

students identified the "Board of Education" as being at least partly responsible, none knew exactly who in the Board made the decision. In actuality, the principal, teachers, and certain support personnel (e.g., Psychoeducational Consultants) have a supporting role in making decisions about a student requiring formal special education support in this Board. In the end, it is up to a committee of adults unknown to the students to make the decision as to whether they have exceptional learning needs and what form of support they require, with the students' parents having a major say. The children were not aware of this process, but were aware that the decision was up to an adult or a group of adults.

During the course of their interviews, the participants provided other examples of the control that adults have with respect to their education, some more than others. They reported that various adults were responsible for other changes to their program. For example, some of the students reported that they were "not allowed" to do certain things, such as regular class work. In addition, the students from the Self-Contained class blamed their teachers for not being able to attend their integrated classes any longer (e.g., special education teacher, regular education teacher, Educational Assistant). The participants often expressed the power that they perceived adults hold in terms of being something that the adult "wants", as shown in the following examples:

- They didn't *want* to tell her.
- My mom and the doctor *wants* me to go to that class.
- The teacher *wants* me to go back for science.
- But, she *wants* me to visit a school.
- They *want* me to go back to my old school.
- Cause they didn't *want* me to go to French.
- She kind of thinks it's a bad idea because she *wants* me to be with the other classroom more.
- It's up to my mom. She has to talk to (the teacher and the principal) to see if I could be there all day. If my mom *wants* me to be in more subjects with them, she has to go in to say.
- Because Mrs. B (special education teacher) doesn't *want* to put me fully integrated.

I examined all of the examples of the adult "wants" for the resulting consequences. In most cases, the consequence was not readily obvious, either because the participant did not provide this information or because it had not yet happened. There were three cases in which the consequence was discussed and in all three, the adult successfully achieved what they wanted, implying that they had the power to effect change (e.g., having their child be integrated more). In contrast to the influence of adults, the children tended to be less successful in achieving what they wanted, which will be examined below.

Another interesting choice of words that the students used in talking about the power of adults was the pronoun "they" without being closely preceded with an obvious noun. Because the children provided no clear referent or context for the "they", it was often unclear about whom they were talking. This general "they" was often used when referring to the adults who had made decisions about various aspects of the student's education. Such "they"s were used 35 times by 9 of the participants. One student used it 11 times and another 8 times. Examples include:

- And I think that I could probably handle it if *they* just give me a week. But, I don't think that would work out. Because I don't think *they* would give me a week inside of Mrs J's class (integrated class).
- But, this year, I'm not because I was very good there and *they* thought - I'm almost like a normal grade 3 there. So, I should come back to my old school.
- I don't know. Some school - *they* kept it from her. *They* didn't want to tell her.
- In A.B. school, *they* had to have a meeting
- ....and *they* had a big conference about it. And *they* just decided that.
- Well, I don't do it no more because *they* had some kind of meeting or something, so now I don't go to French or Math or Science.
- I left because *they* switched me to a different school.
- Yeah, cause I just want to be integrated but *they* won't let me.

It is quite possible that the use of "they" in this manner partly reflects the students' communication difficulties in that children with language learning disabilities often do not provide complete background information (Wong, 1991). As a result, the listener has to fill

in missing information or has to clarify the message using probing questions. It is also likely that the participants used "they" because they did not truly know to whom they were referring. In essence, in their minds, "they" was just a vague, unknown adult or collection of adults who had made a decision about the child or had influenced something which had happened to the child, such as changing schools.

In contrast to the power that adults were perceived to hold over educational decisions and changes, the participants described themselves as having had little control over the major school changes which they had undergone. They did not specifically say "I have no control over decisions", but this was inferred from their statements regarding their lack of involvement in decision-making. Only four of the children reported that they were asked, either by a teacher or a parent, how they felt about potential changes to their program. One of these students indicated that his mother did listen to his feelings, but that the final decision was up to her. Two of these four students were successful in exerting influence over decisions made about their class placements. One indicated that her parents did consult and inform her and she expressed satisfaction with her level of involvement. The other student described the influence he was able to exert when the decision was made to fully integrate him. However, most of the participants were not involved in any decision-making regarding their placement in special education. Eight of them directly stated or affirmed that nobody asked them about their feelings and preferences. When one girl was asked if anyone other than her mother and the teachers made the decision regarding her placement in special education, she replied: "I don't know. The principal or something. I don't know. But, I don't get no say of what class I should be inside of." Similarly, a study by Armstrong (1993) also found that many children whom they had interviewed believed that they were not involved in decision-making procedures and were not given an opportunity to discuss their needs during assessment procedures used to determine their special education placement.

In summary, most of the participants perceived that they had little control over what had happened to them with regard to their own education. While this may be true for most children, not just children with learning problems, there is a difference. Exceptional children, like the children in my study, often have experienced many major changes, usually without their control, involvement, and complete understanding. The participants in my

study had undergone school and class relocations, with some of the school moves requiring them to take a bus to a new location. Furthermore, these moves were sometimes continual, occurring year after year, which may have precluded any opportunity to adapt to the school, class, teacher(s), and peers. Undergoing such major changes without adequate forewarning, knowledge, and involvement undermines perceptions of control because it indicates that they have little influence over important school decisions.

Victimization and Exclusion

Figure 4 also identifies the exclusion and victimization that the students had experienced in relation to their special education placement as affecting their perceptions of control. Those who are able to exclude and victimize clearly have the power to do so. Those who are in the position of being excluded and bullied tend to be powerless, helpless, and unable to change what is happening. This is the case when being excluded from places, from doing work, and, particularly, from participating in decision-making about their education, as discussed above. In terms of what caused the exclusion and victimization, in most cases the participants reported that it was their placement in special education or identification as a child with special learning needs. They claimed that being segregated through a special education class, and especially one in a different school, invites victimization directly or indirectly possibly because it suggests to peers that these students lack ability and skills (Bak et al., 1987). In turn, the victimization serves to place the students in a powerless position because it undermines their perceptions of their ability. A vicious circle may occur whereby students with special needs may lack control and assertion which invites victimization and the victimization further contributes to their powerlessness and lack of assertive behaviour required to ward off the bullying. The root of these problems may be low self-regard which has been found to contribute to victimization because these children do not assert themselves and exhibit behaviour (e.g., sadness, fear, social withdrawal) which signals to bullies that they are easy targets (Egan & Perry, 1998). Interestingly, there appeared to be a relationship between the degree of exclusion the students in my study reported and their level of involvement in decision-making. The children who felt the most excluded also seemed to have little control and involvement in special education decisions. On the other hand, the children who did not report as many

victimization experiences described a greater involvement in making educational decisions. Perhaps the (few) children who were more involved had higher self-regard and displayed more assertive behaviours. In turn, this assertive behaviour might have protected them from being victimized and allowed them to be more included in their classes and schools.

Overreliance on External Rewards

Another contribution to the reduced control and power of students with exceptional learning needs is the rewards used to manage their behaviour and academic performance. Although rewards appeared to be a strong enticement for these students to do their work and behave appropriately, their overuse may impact on the students' tendencies to be mastery-oriented. The overuse of rewards and external controls may be detrimental to the development of children's own internal controls and desire to learn (Deci et al., 1999; Lawrence & Winschel, 1975; Lytton, 1986). The students may believe that they work to achieve an external reward rather than to achieve learning goals, which decreases their sense of control and internal motivation for learning. This poor internal motivation may make it necessary for teachers to provide more control over their learning (Clark, 1997; Grolnick & Ryan, 1990). As a result, students with learning disabilities, more so than children without, will view the control of their successes and failures as being in the hands of "powerful others" (Grolnick & Ryan, 1990) and view their classrooms as more controlling in general than do students without disabilities (Wehmeyer & Kelcher, 1996). This then leads to a cycle in which these children depend on teachers for their source of motivation and control over learning and in which it is then provided by these teachers in order to get these children to perform (Grolnick & Ryan, 1990).

Another consequence of providing concrete rewards to children with learning difficulties may be the effect that it has on their perceptions of their ability. Students receive information about their ability and competence partly from messages in their classrooms. Clark (1997) found that, following negative achievement outcomes, teachers provided more rewards and less punishment and expressed less anger and more pity to their male students with learning disabilities than they did to boys without learning disabilities. The pity may result from believing that the disabled boys have little control over their failures. However, the pity and the rewards given for their failures potentially send a

message to the students with learning disabilities that they have low ability and little control over their achievement. In turn, this would affect their self-competence and achievement motivation (Clark, 1997). According to Weiner (1994), when people sympathize or express pity after someone has failed, because they attribute the failure to something uncontrollable, this results in the person who has failed feeling shame and embarrassment. In addition, their performance will decline because the message has been sent to them that they have no personal responsibility over their failures which means they should not bother trying (Weiner, 1994).

Summary

The students' inadequate understanding of special education, their lack of involvement in decision-making, being excluded and victimized, and relying on external rewards to motivate them all contributed to reduced perceptions of control related to school. This reduced control is important to the self because it affects the processes which are used to cope with potentially harmful experiences. This will be explored further in later sections when the self-protective manoeuvres are presented. First, I will discuss the feeling of shame and the need it prompts for protective manoeuvring.

## Vulnerability of the "Me-Self"

> Few strivings are as compelling as is our need to identify with someone, to feel a part of something, to belong somewhere...So powerful is that striving that we might feel obliged to do most anything in order to secure our place. Yet equally powerful is the alienating affect. For shame can generate, can even altogether sever one's essential human ties, that we might either feel barred from entry forever or forced to renounce the very striving to belong itself and resignedly accept an alienated existence. (Kaufman, 1985, p. 27).

In Figure 4, negative feelings and perceptions result from the exclusion and victimization experiences related to the students' placements in special education. As discussed in the previous chapter, the participants reported feelings of sadness and anger when they were victimized and excluded from places and happenings. I postulated that the sadness and anger actually signified the shame that these students felt, or were trying not

to feel, when they were stigmatized. Such messages and experiences that children with learning disabilities deal with would undoubtedly be potential sources of shame because they suggest that the students have inadequate ability, are inferior, or are unable to do the work that most other students do. Shame is a dejection-based emotion involving feelings of helplessness, sadness, and depression, as well as anger (Higgins, 1991). At times, sadness or anger act as emotional substitutes for shame (Lewis, 1992). In the case of the participants in this study, they may actually have *felt* angry or sad at the time of the incidents, but it is impossible to truly ascertain how they were feeling and what they were experiencing at the time. What seems likely, however, is that underneath the basic emotions of anger and sadness was shame, perhaps unexpressed and unacknowledged because it may be difficult for children, especially those who have disabilities, to admit feeling ashamed. In Galambos' (1998) study of adults with learning disabilities and disclosure, she found that her participants rejected the idea of shame being related to disclosing about their LD despite the fact that most of them discussed the issue of stupidity and shame in reference to having a learning disability. It seems that people will, at all costs, try to avoid believing that they are inadequate, not *normal*, or inferior.

In more specific terms, shame results when the self appraises a situation and determines that events have violated the important concerns of maintaining the respect of others and preserving a positive self-regard (Barrett, 1995; Mascolo & Fischer, 1995). For example, when students are told by peers that they are inferior ("stupid") and this is combined with their own experiences of academic failures, it would be likely that they would feel shame. Harter (1999) theorized that shame focuses on the inadequacy and worthlessness of the "me-self." The "me-self" is the self as an object of one's knowledge and evaluation whereas the "I-self" is the self as a subject which uses cognitive processes (Harter, 1999). As children develop, the "me-self" is the self-theory that is being constructed through the changes of the "I-self" processes (Harter, 1999). Developmentally, Mascolo and Fischer (1995) theorize that by 10-12 years of age (the age of most of the participants in my study), children are able to feel shame about a general personality characteristic. They are able to perceive inferiority, having failed to live up to the standards of others with regard to a particular trait.

In the moment that a shame-inducing experience occurs, a person may hide or try to escape or may actually respond with rage (Lindsay-Hartz, De Rivera, & Mascolo, 1995). Although individual negative experiences may elicit feelings of shame or substitute emotions, this does not mean that such a person will feel pervasively or permanently shameful. In addition, feeling stigmatized on one occasion does not translate into a lasting perception of being stigmatized. Perhaps there is a temporary feeling of shame, specifically related to an event or experience, and a more pervasive feeling of shame which people try to avoid. In the case of the students in my study, this more pervasive feeling of shame may signify a fundamental personal inadequacy which is to be defended against. This is similar to Ferguson and Stegge's (1995) "state" versus "trait" shame which refers to shame in the immediate situation versus a daily existence of shame. If these experiences occur frequently, children may come to perceive themselves as incompetent, bad, and they may become "shame-prone", internalizing how they believe others see them (Tangney, Burggraf, & Wagner, 1995). Accumulated experiences may prompt children to develop a predisposition to an affective style which, in turn, influences their perceptions, interpretations of future situations, and behaviour (Ferguson & Stegge, 1995). Thus, incessant stigmatizing experiences will have a great impact on children's sense of self, something which the "I-self" would guard against happening. "...Because shame is such a painful emotion, it is likely to motivate subsequent defensive manoeuvres" (Barrett, 1995, p. 130). It is this issue which arose as being the most significant in analyzing my results. How do these students endure these experiences and, yet, prevent them from permanently affecting their "me-selves"? Further, how do their "I-self" processes handle this situation and how effective are they, particularly in light of the students' reduced perceptions of control? How do children not *feel* stupid when they are repeatedly referred to as such, when they are told that they cannot do the same work as their peers, and when they repeatedly experience failures which support that identity? The next section will discuss the manoeuvres the students used to protect their "me-self" from feeling stupid and perpetually shameful.

## Protection of the "Me-Self"

In light of experiences which pose a risk to their self-perceptions, it would be necessary for these children to have coping mechanisms, or self-protective mechanisms, to handle them and the perceptions they generate. It is relevant to examine how they cope with experiences and perceptions which jeopardize their "me-selves" and which contribute to reduced perceptions of control given the contribution that this coping makes to their development, particularly emotional and academic. These coping strategies are framed as being manoeuvres geared to protecting their self-images despite experiences and situations which suggest they are inadequate, vulnerable, and lack sufficient power. Many of these children are placed in such a defensive position because they may lack sufficient power and self-assurance to adaptively handle negative situations and events. These defensive actions may be immediate, at the time of the event, or they may be more enduring protective techniques whose purpose is to prevent further occurrences from happening or from eliciting self-conscious emotions and permanently impacting the "me-self." This forms the focus of my theory regarding the participants' experiences with, and perceptions of, special education. The self-protective manoeuvring which is the basis of my theory involves the students protecting themselves from feeling permanent shame, inadequacy, and worthlessness which would be a very maladaptive state. Their level of control may affect which manoeuvres they choose to, or need to, employ. Prior to presenting my theory of how this is handled, I will summarize some of the existing research on the self-protective processes which have been suggested as being used by children with learning disabilities.

### Prior Research and Theory

#### Learning disabilities and self-protection.

Research has consistently shown that pupils with learning disabilities have lower academic self-concepts than their peers without disabilities, but studies examining their global self-concepts have not been as consistent (Bender & Wall, 1994). Many studies have not found a significant difference in the global self-concept or self-worth of children with learning disabilities compared to children without learning disabilities (Bear & Minke, 1996; Clever, Bear, & Juvonen, 1992; Sabornie, 1994; Smith & Nagle, 1995). Explanations for how they experience academic failure and do not feel negatively about themselves

overall include the relationship between self-concept and the severity of the learning disability (Rothman & Cosden, 1995), perceptions of the learning disability (Cosden et al., 1998; Heyman, 1990), social comparisons (Renick & Harter, 1989), self-protective mechanisms (Clever, Bear, & Juvonen, 1992; Kloomok & Cosden, 1994), class placement (Yauman, 1980), social support (Kloomok & Cosden, 1994), and teacher feedback (Bear & Minke, 1996; Bear et al., 1998). Some research has specifically focussed on the possible mechanisms by which children with learning disabilities maintain adequate self-concepts or self-worth in light of their academic difficulties and failures. This line of research has argued that "self-protective" processes are engaged in order to protect these children's feelings and attitudes about their abilities and overall worth. These processes may include selective choice of a reference group, conscious distortion, unconscious denial, confusion between the real and ideal self, and healthy adjustment of self-standards (Harter, 1999). These processes, alone or in combination, may serve to protect the self-concepts of children with learning disabilities. *Discounting*, which has actually not received strong support, involves undermining the value or importance of a particular domain in which a person has been unsuccessful in order to maintain a positive self-concept (Clever, Bear, & Juvonen, 1992; Harter, 1999; Harter, Whitesell, & Junkin, 1998; Kloomok & Cosden, 1994; Smith & Nagle, 1995). Cognitive distortion is another self-protective mechanism and, accordingly, studies have ascertained that children with learning disabilities may overestimate their ability to do future academic tasks (Alvarez & Adelman, 1986; Loper, 1984) and may have unrealistically positive perceptions of their academic abilities in order to protect themselves from depression (Heath, 1995). Heath (1995) argued that the students with learning disabilities in her sample who were not depressed showed resilience in having unrealistic academic perceptions and that this served as "affect regulation" in order to maintain healthy functioning and protect against depression. Support for cognitive distortion has also been found with children who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in terms of their perceptions of their behaviour (Hoza et al., 1993) and responsibility in social situations (Diener & Milich, 1997). This may be a form of "self-enhancement bias" which serves an ego-protective function, in a sense "saving face" when confronted with failures (Hoza et al., 1993). Thus, these biases may be adaptive, given the amount of academic and social failure these children have undoubtedly experienced (Diener & Milich, 1997).

In summary, other research has looked at the self-protective mechanisms (e.g., distortion, discounting) which children with learning disabilities may use to protect their overall self-worth from being damaged by academic and social failures. My theory focuses less on the "failures" and more on the stigma and shame which they experienced because of their difficulties and need for separate instruction and support. Prior to presenting this theory in more detail, I will discuss other theories of managing shame and stigma.

Management of shame and stigma.

> In a culture which esteems popularity and conformity, individuality is neither recognized nor valued. Being *different* from others becomes shameful. To avoid shame, one must avoid being different, or *seen* as different. The awareness of difference translates into feeling lesser, deficient. (Kaufman, 1985, p. 29).

Children with learning disabilities learn that they are different and academically less able than others their age as indicated by their peers, schools, and academic failures. The results of this study found that the participants were made to feel less able by peers who victimized them and by a school system which excluded them from mainstream experiences and work. It is a challenge for these students to not feel deficient in light of the fact that they typically have skills and abilities which are different from the norm: "To be differently-abled and not experience oneself as deficiently-abled - therefore shameful - is a monumental challenge" (Kaufman, 1992, p. 199). The participants in this study did report stigmatizing experiences which, according to my theory, elicit feelings of shame and perceptions of inadequacy. Because shame is an uncomfortable state and implies inferiority, people would try to avoid it and, at a certain point in development, defending strategies become necessary in order for individuals to survive emotionally (Kaufman, 1985). Referring to the literature on shame and stigma assisted in providing a framework for understanding how these students may have coped with these issues.

Although the feeling of shame can be adaptive if it motivates a person to change any negative behaviour, it is maladaptive when the individual cannot change something "negative" yet accepts the view of others that a particular trait or behaviour is unacceptable (Lindsay-Hartz et al., 1995). It is more adaptive to accept that a particular trait is not up to one's ideals, but to not infer this to mean that one is entirely unworthy. There are also

other techniques which can be used to handle shame-provoking experiences, including denial, laughter, emotional substitution, or confession to handle the predicament (Lewis, 1992). Denial may actually prevent the feeling of shame from happening because it blocks the internal attribution of blame. Specifically, it blocks children from taking personal responsibility for something negative or it blocks them from believing that there is a discrepancy between their real and ideal selves. Denial is difficult because it involves denying any reality, including experiences, statements, and actions by others which contradict the desired perceptions (Higgins, 1991). The more important limitation of denial, and the other aforementioned mechanisms, however, is that they will not successfully cope with persistent humiliation. Continually being shamed can occur if individuals are "shame-prone" or if they live in a social context in which they are repeatedly made to feel inferior. The failure of the mechanisms results in symptoms, such as depression and rage, which are thought to prevent the deterioration of the self system (Lewis, 1992). According to Lewis (1992), anger can occur after a particular shaming event, but the response to persistent humiliation is rage, either expressed toward the person(s) causing the shaming or expressed to others because the shaming person is too powerful. Kaufman (1985) expands the techniques used to protect against repeated shaming to include contempt, striving for power, striving for perfection, transferring blame, and internal withdrawal in addition to rage. Transferring blame, through putting another person down, may repair the shamed individual's poor self-worth. The above techniques may be conceptualized as "I-self" actions used to protect against a negative perception of the "me-self." In so doing, these self-processes act to maintain a favourable impression of people's attributes (Harter, 1999).

Similar to the methods used to guard against shame, stigmatized people may use a variety of means to come to terms with their situations, including denial, avoidance, self-acceptance, and compensation (Goffman, 1963). For example, individuals might accept that a stigmatized trait implies inferiority, but argue that they do not have this particular trait. Thus, they try to neutralize the label through "passing" or controlling the information about their discrediting attribute (Page, 1985). In the case of a learning disability, there may be attempts to hide this label from other people, but this would be difficult if special education support is being provided. Another method of dealing with a stigma is when a person chooses to believe that the stigmatizers are the problem in that they are being unfair,

malicious, inaccurate, or have unrealistic standards (Page, 1985). Although this may be difficult for children to do, it may be accomplished by blaming others for their problems, such as feeling that adults are being unfair. This was actually something that some of the participants in my study did. It should be noted that there are constructive methods of dealing with shame and stigma, including solving problems, improving self-images, and altering behaviour so that it is more acceptable (Miller, 1985; Page, 1985). In essence, people can set goals for self-improvement in order to reduce the discrepancy between their actual self and ideal self (Bandura, 1997). For example, in the case of students with learning disabilities, they can set goals to improve their skills in order to perform better academically. This might be likened to the "Route to Freedom" strategies that the participants discussed as being things they could do to get out of special education. However, in most cases it was not clear whether they were actually *doing* these things (e.g., working harder, practising more).

The next section presents the theory developed from the participants in this study regarding their methods of handling their negative feelings and experiences. The theories regarding techniques used to deal with shame and stigma assisted in developing this theory, however, the data came from the participants regarding their manoeuvres for coping. They never did say "these are the ways I manage feeling badly about being in special education", therefore, the actual manoeuvres were inferred from the data.

## Self-Protective Manoeuvring

In proposing a theory of "Self-Protective Manoeuvring", I assume that the students in my study have used a range of coping strategies to control their feelings and guard their "me-selves." It is relevant to discuss how the participants dealt with issues of stigma and potential shame, in their minds and in their actual behaviour, given the role that this may have played in their academic and behavioural development. The self-protective manoeuvres, geared to protecting and preserving the self, include employing self-protective attributions, acquiring autonomy, expressing hostility and resistance, and passively forfeiting control. The manoeuvres are processes, attitudes, and demeanours that may serve a self-protective function in terms of preserving the self, the self's needs, and others' views of themselves in addition to potentially regaining some control over their school life.

Some of the techniques discussed in the previous section, particularly rage and transferring blame, appeared to have been used by the participants in my study to guard against the implications of their school experiences and these concepts have been incorporated into the manoeuvres. Each student did not necessarily use, or need to use, all of the strategies. Some may have depended on these manoeuvres and their self-protective function more than others, either because they experienced more victimization and exclusion, responded more poorly to these experiences, or because they felt more powerless. Furthermore, it is also possible that some students were not rendered as powerless as others from the beginning (e.g., because they have had more involvement in and knowledge about special education decisions or had not been victimized to the same degree as others) which reduced their need for these protective strategies. In addition, other factors would undoubtedly impact on their need for protection and the type of protection chosen, including the child's temperament, personality, family support, social competence, and intelligence. For example, some students may make the best of a situation which others view as negative, may assert themselves better when confronted with negative events, may be more motivated, and may not respond to certain situations as personally as others (e.g., not receiving regular class work). The next section will introduce the self-protective manoeuvres which are the core of the theory.

Employing self-protective attributions.

Most of the students' placements in special education were reported to have occurred without their knowledge and involvement which, along with being excluded, victimized, and placed in highly externally rewarding environments, led to reduced perceptions of control with regard to their school lives. Using self-protective attributions and thoughts to protect themselves from the negative implications of special education and having learning problems is one avenue that, according to the theory, the students may have used to deal with their potential shame and discomfort. It is important to note that this manoeuvre was not necessarily used by all participants nor would it apply to all children with learning disabilities in special education.

In order to make sense of what happens to them, people tend to make attributions, or explanations, for these events, experiences, feelings, and perceptions (Hewstone, 1989).

Children are no different and have a need to make sense of their world. According to Hewstone (1989), attributions serve three main functions: a motivational function which helps control past and present events and predict future events, a self-esteem function in order to protect, validate, or enhance feelings of personal worth and efficacy, and a self-presentation function in order to control the perceptions of others. The latter is accomplished by communicating attributions which will gain public approval and avoid embarrassment. Attributions can be assessed according to their "locus of control" (external versus internal), stability (stable versus unstable), range (global versus specific), and controllability (uncontrollable versus controllable) (Bandura, 1997). Internal attributions imply that causes stem from the person whereas external causes stem from the situation or the environment and include fate, chance or the actions of powerful others (Lewis & Lawrence-Patterson, 1989). The participants in this study often communicated attributions or explanations for events, happenings, and changes, including school, class, or program changes, any problems that they had experienced (e.g., academic, behaviour, social), and special education in general. In so doing, most of the participants (10) provided many external attributions for the changes, their self-perceptions, and their experiences of exclusion. For example, comments were made about being distracted because the teacher is boring, not knowing how to do certain work because it had not been taught to them, losing integrated classes because of the teacher or the behaviour of other students, changing schools because of not being wanted by a teacher, getting into fights because of being teased and not being liked because of "hanging out with a girl and a lice person." In making such attributions, responsibility was not taken for any negative behaviour. For example, the students from the Self-Contained class transferred the blame for losing their integrated classes to one another (the behaviour of others). Whether this was a conscious distortion of what had occurred or was how they truly perceived the event is difficult to know. Distortion was discussed in a previous section as a technique used by students with learning disabilities and ADHD to protect themselves from internalizing negative information. It should also be noted that some of the participants also attributed negative experiences such as being excluded and having difficulty learning to internal reasons, but these reasons were often unstable factors that did not imply a lack of ability (e.g., effort, desire, motivation). For example, one student indicated that the reason he had difficulty learning math and

spelling was "Cause I don't want to work", suggesting a lack of interest and motivation to work and not low ability. Three other students also reported that they found a particular academic subject difficult due to the effort they put forth. That is, the reason they had trouble in a subject was because they did not practise or work sufficiently.

In total, eleven of the participants relied on external and unstable internal attributions for explaining the causes of many negative events and factors. Further analysis suggested that this may have served a self-protective function. Although blaming external factors may have been related to their level of knowledge (e.g., they truly believed a certain person was responsible because that was the extent of their knowledge), this does not explain the above results. There were many cases in which the students could have attributed a negative event, such as transferring schools, to their own misbehaviour or learning problems, but did not. On the other hand, "positive events", such as being integrated or thinking that they should be, were frequently attributed to internal factors. Six of the students indicated that behaviours such as "better work", "doing well", paying attention, and "being good" made them good candidates for integration. One girl was asked about returning to her home school after having been in a Self-Contained class at another school and she reported that: "...Usually, at my other school, I'd be there. But, this year, I'm not because (I) was very good there and they thought I'm like almost like a normal grade 3 there. So, I should go back to my old school". Although this is likely true, it appeared that, in general, the participants were more eager to blame themselves for positive events than for negative events. The above "self-serving attributions" may play a self-presentation role in terms of avoiding embarrassment or gaining approval (Weary, 1980), an underlying motive that many of the participants in my study may have had during their interviews.

Three of the participants did not appear to make self-protective attributions for any negative events and experiences. Two of these students were the pupils who had been fully integrated at the time of the interview and who may not have needed to protect their self-images to the same extent as the other participants did. The other student, the only girl from the Self-Contained class, appeared to have had some awareness of her needs and difficulties. She took personal responsibility for her learning problems, having reported that she had trouble learning French, did not listen well, and did need a smaller class. Although she discussed being excluded and teased, she did not report that these experiences triggered

negative emotions. It is possible that she did not feel a need to provide self-protective attributions, either because her "me-self" was not as developed as the other students, or because it was well-developed and was not put at risk by negative experiences. It is also possible that this girl had trouble clearly expressing her past experiences, thoughts, and feelings. In support of this, it was extremely difficult to interview her because she often strayed off-topic and often had trouble responding to more abstract questions ("How did you feel?").

As reported above, most of the participants made "self-protective" attributions in explaining the causes of negative events and experiences. Attributing cause or blame to external factors (features of the situation or of another person involved) can be referred to as externalizing blame (Tangney, 1995). The fact that many of these students felt anger and blamed others for their special education placement and related stigmatization may preclude them from feeling shame or recognizing shame and worthlessness. These self-protective attributions can be likened to "self-serving biases", which are the tendencies people have to attribute their successes to internal factors such as ability (self-enhancing bias) and their failures to external factors such as task difficulty (self-protecting bias) in order to maintain their self-esteem (Hewstone, 1989). According to Weiner (1980), it "seems reasonable to pursue the idea that causal ascriptions influence emotions, and that emotional reactions play a role in motivated behaviour" (p. 559). Subsequent to event outcomes, there is a primitive emotion, which is positive or negative in valence based on whether the outcome is perceived to be successful or not. Emotions such as "happy", "sad", and "frustrated" are dependent on the outcome, but not on attributions assigned to the outcome. On the other hand, a different set of emotions is generated when the *cause* of the outcome is determined. For example, shame results from attributing failure to the self instead of external factors (Lewis, 1992; Miller, 1985). Following this, internal attributions affect feelings about the self, but external attributions do not (Weiner, 1980), suggesting they can be self-protective. Externalizing blame protects individuals from believing that they, or more importantly, their intelligence is responsible for something negative. "By taking credit for good acts and denying blame for bad outcomes, the individual presumably may be able to enhance or protect his or her self-esteem" (Harvey & Weary, 1981, p. 33 c.f. Weiner, 1980). The stigmatizing experiences may have put these students at risk for feeling

shameful; however, if they place the blame on being in special education and this, in turn, is blamed on other people and factors, the students are protected against feeling inadequate. Attributing the causes of negative factors and events to something external or to something internal yet unstable may be the "I-self"s way of taking attention away from the inadequacy of the "me-self" or its way of protecting the "me-self" from even being inadequate. Similarly, it may be a method for reducing the self's part in the experience of shame (Lewis, 1992). Externalizing blame may also be a defensive attempt to turn the situation around and gain back power through placing the focus of the cause of a negative situation outside of the self (Tangney, 1995). The same might be said for blaming effort or motivation because these are factors which, presumably, individuals have control over.

Self-protective attributions might be likened to an "affect regulation" system which functions to maintain healthy functioning and protect against depression (Heath, 1995). These attributions may actually be a form of cognitive distortion. There were other examples of cognitive distortion in the interviews such as one student reporting that he treated his Self-Contained special education class as a "regular class" so that he would not feel badly about himself. Yet, it is difficult to conclude that the self-protective attributions are examples of distortion without information to support or refute what they are saying. Some of the perceptions of external factors may have been accurate, such as reporting that their placement in special education was a primary reason for being victimized. It should also be noted that their self-protective attributions did not preclude them having an awareness of their academic needs (i.e., many were aware that they needed "help"). However, it is relevant that the students left out their own behaviour or learning problems as contributing to their negative circumstances. The important factor is that many of the students viewed their circumstances in this manner, perhaps in order to maintain a healthy image of themselves and protect against shameful feelings and an unhealthy image. In addition, their awareness of needing help did not mean that they were aware of their difficulties, or having a learning disability. This may reflect them having "possible selves" which are the selves that we would like to become, such as being academically successful, could become, or are afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves function as incentives for future behaviour and internal resources for thwarting any threats to the self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Conceivably, the ability to "distort" may depend on how much

academic and social failure has been experienced by children with learning disabilities and whether they are still able to maintain a positive "possible self" for the future in light of this failure (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

There is other research involving the attributions of pupils with learning disabilities which supports the possibility of self-protective attributions and their lack of perceived control over outcomes. Other research has found that children with learning disabilities and children with ADHD attribute causes more to external factors than do children without disabilities, particularly academic failures (Bendell, Tollefson, & Fine, 1980; Friedman & Medway, 1987; Licht, 1985; Linn & Hodge, 1982; Rogers & Saklofske, 1985; Tarnowski & Nay, 1989). Children who have both LD and ADHD or LD and externalizing emotional problems may be the most "external" in attributing the causes of outcomes (Durrant, 1993; Tarnowski & Nay, 1989). In contrast to the aforementioned studies, other studies have found that children with learning disabilities take less responsibility for *success* outcomes than for failure outcomes (Lewis & Lawrence-Patterson, 1989) or they actually do not differ from children without disabilities in that, if they do not have behaviour problems, they show adaptive attributions and do take responsibility for success outcomes (Durrant, 1993). The inconsistency of the above studies may be due to heterogeneity of the samples or different formats used to gain access to the students' attributions. It may also be that different children with learning disabilities use different self-protective processes to deal with their experiences or that some have less of a need to be protective of their feelings and self-perceptions. It should be noted that people in general, with or without learning disabilities, have a tendency to take more personal responsibility for positive outcomes than for negative outcomes, especially when they are being observed by another person (Nurmi, 1991; Weary, 1980). In a sense, this may be adaptive (Nurmi, 1991). However, it appears that vulnerable children, like those with learning disabilities, may have *more* of a need to make self-protective attributions for outcomes and may do so to a greater extent.

Despite the self-protective purpose that making external attributions for negative experiences and situations may serve, these attributions also reflect the lack of control that the participants expressed about their education. Individuals who attribute the causes of negative outcomes and situations to others do not take ownership for them, which may further decrease their perceptions of control (Tollefson et al., 1984). In addition, repeatedly

making external attributions for events is a "helpless" pattern because it implies that these individuals do not think they can prevent similar negative events or circumstances in the future. Therefore, although making external attributions for negative events may avert shameful feelings, these attributions may also contribute to feelings of powerlessness. In turn, this powerlessness can lead to discontent, negative behaviour, learned helplessness behaviour, decreased motivation, and depressive affect. With regard to failures, self-protecting attributions may act to lessen negative self-affect such as shame but, due to the reduced perceptions of control, do not necessarily encourage an individual to keep working (Licht et al., 1985; Weary, 1980). In the case of the participants in my study, externalizing the causes of failures and negative experiences may not encourage them to actually work towards their goals and wishes to be integrated. On the other hand, self-enhancing attributions, which were made by a few of the participants in reference to being integrated, act to maintain high levels of positive self-affect (pride) and task behaviour.

Another consequence of externalizing blame, if it is transferred to others and this is made known to them, is that it may damage interpersonal relationships. Blame may be expressed with open hostility and anger, or if it is not expressed, it may result in withdrawing from others (Barrett, 1995). The issue of expressed hostility will be discussed in a subsequent section.

Some of the participants identified internal factors, such as motivation, interest, and effort, as being related to their learning difficulties. Similarly, other studies have found that children with learning disabilities are more likely to attribute their failures to insufficient motivation or effort than children without disabilities (Durrant, 1993; Jacobsen et al., 1986). Making these internal attributions may protect against the negative self-affect potentially triggered by failure or negative outcomes in that, unlike ability, they are believed to be controllable factors (Hayamizu & Weiner, 1991). Individuals can maintain the assumption that they *would be* successful if they put forth greater effort or had more motivation and interest (Hewstone, 1989). Thus, if they believe that they do have some control over what happens to them or that it is by choice, this may allow them to maintain the impression that they have adequate ability. Although attributing failures to insufficient effort, not ability, has been associated with greater academic progress and more favourable teacher ratings of behaviour for children with learning disabilities (Kistner, Osborne, &

LeVerrier, 1988), emphasizing lack of effort as causing their failures may not always be helpful. Tollefson et al. (1984) suggested that attributing failure to effort reduces shameful feelings, but it may be risky to train children to make these attributions because this can negatively affect their self-esteem. For example, if students, especially those with learning difficulties, are working as hard as they can and are taught to attribute failures to a lack of effort, this may result in perceptions of weak personal competency ("I'm working hard, but I still cannot achieve success - I must not be competent"). In support of this, children with learning disabilities may be less likely than other children to see their efforts as leading to achievement outcomes (Butkowsky & Willows, 1980; Friedman & Medway, 1987). Just as with external attributions, attributing difficulties to unstable internal factors may allow children with learning disabilities to protect their self-image and, at the same time, maintain some semblance of control over their actions and experiences.

Acquiring autonomy.

> Children are not regarded as autonomous but engaged in a process of becoming independent. Hence the partnership in education is understood to be with the parent and not with the child. (Marshall, 1996, p. 101).

Autonomy refers to the perception that one has a choice in the initiation, maintenance, and regulation of school activities (Connell & Wellborn, 1990), an important self-system process fundamental to learning. For the participants in my study, autonomy would allow them to feel that they have self-determination and can achieve what they want, including not being different and stigmatized, being heard, and having predictability. Autonomy involves having control which is important insofar as it increases the probability of individuals achieving what they desire and avoiding what they do not want and what makes them feel inferior or inadequate. By exerting influence in areas in which they can command some control, individuals are better able to realize desired futures and prevent undesirable ones (Bandura, 1997). If people are able to help bring about important outcomes, they are better able to predict them. Bandura (1997) claims that control is not sought as an end in itself, but that the exercise of control that secures desired outcomes and helps prevent undesirable ones has great functional value and provides a deep source of

incentive motivation. "In social cognitive theory, people exercise control for the benefits they gain by it" (Bandura, 1997, p. 16).

The "Longing to be Unexceptional" section in Chapter III discussed the changes the participants wanted with regard to their education. Over half of the participants expressed a preference to be in a different class or school. In addition, a few of the participants indicated that they wanted to be *normal*, suggesting that these individuals accepted being inferior. It was postulated that the participants who expressed a desire for change wanted to escape the negative feelings, uncertainty, and lack of control elicited by their placement in special education. They wanted to have a happier school life which did not make them feel ashamed. Factors which influenced the children's wishes for change included wanting to be included, wanting to belong, and wanting to be with their friends.

Although the participants expressed their wishes, wants, and preferences to me, and they described strategies for achieving them, this does not mean that they were realized. Being allowed to participate in decision-making was discussed as one method to help improve their situation. When most of the participants (10) were asked whether they believed that they *should* have a say in determining their class placement, eight expressed a desire to be asked what class and school they would prefer or to have some involvement in the decision. One participant suggested that students should be invited to meetings so they can express their feelings and be certain that they are heard (self-determination) and another reported that she liked knowing what would be happening with regard to her education (predictability). Similarly, another participant indicated that predictability was important and that he would like to be asked where he wants to go to school so "Then I know where I'm going."

A series of studies by Taylor, Adelman, and Kaser-Boyd (e.g., 1983, 1985) found analogous results when they examined the desire of children with learning and behavioural difficulties to participate in procedures regarding their education. These researchers found that most of their participants wanted to be involved in decision-making regarding school placements and programs, that they did follow through on participating, and that they were interested in learning how to participate more effectively. Among other reasons, the students indicated that participating was important because of a desire for self-determination (e.g., wanting a say, wanting to get what they want) and a desire for

information in terms of knowing what is going to happen (Taylor et al., 1983, 1985). The students were able to participate positively and effectively in meetings. Although the participants in my study wanted to have a say in making decisions about their education, most stated that they were not involved.

It is relevant to consider the expectations that the participants held regarding whether they *would* be involved in decision-making and whether they *would* achieve what they desired. Future intentions are affected by the attributions made of past events (Weiner, 1980). The students' past experiences of not getting what they wanted would have influenced their future predictions of achieving what they wanted. Although some students described methods of achieving their goals and being involved, they did not expect that this would happen. For example, one student affirmed that he should have a role in deciding whether he should be in special education, but did not expect that his opinion would be sought. Four of the pupils believed that they would be able to improve their behaviour or achievement if they were integrated more, but held negative or uncertain expectations that this would happen. It is possible that the participants' perceptions of control mediated their expectations regarding achieving their desired outcomes and being involved. These expectations might undermine or promote active engagement in tasks necessary to achieve the desired outcomes (Skinner, 1991). Having low expectations about obtaining autonomy and control, however, may be protective in the sense that expecting that they would not be involved and would not achieve their wishes saved them from disappointment when these outcomes did not happen.

Success in being heard and achieving what they wanted would feed into the students' perceptions of autonomy and control. This success may result from a combination of factors including parental support and involvement, parent-school communication, children's own expectations and behaviour, and their past experiences. However, examining the interview data revealed that, in most cases, the participants had not yet been successful in attaining their goals. For example, one student expressed her desire to go to the regular classroom "full-time" to her mother, but reported that her mother did not listen to her. Another student wanted to do regular classroom work, but was not allowed to do so. Other students also expressed wishes to be in an integrated class or out of special education, but reported that this had not happened or that they did not expect it would happen. These are all

examples of pupils who had tried to be heard, but were not successful and had not achieved any change. This would further contribute to a sense of powerlessness in terms of what they did not being effective. Figure 4 depicts this reciprocity between "Acquiring Autonomy" and the "Perceptions of Control." Feeling that they have little control over what happens in their education may affect how hard children with LD try in the future and may lead to anger, antagonism, and hostility, particularly towards those individuals who are perceived to be obstructing the student's goals. Additionally, or alternatively, not being listened to and not achieving their goals may lead to an apathetic, passive, and helpless attitude to school and learning. These issues will be discussed further in the "Passively Forfeiting Control" section. Although many of the participants were not successful, some of the pupils did gain some autonomy by improving their academic performance, expressing their observations and opinions to adults, and being listened to. Two students in particular had attained full integration during the time of this study. The severity of their learning and behaviour problems may have played a role because children with less severe learning and behaviour problems may make faster progress with special education support and cope better with integrated classes than would children with more severe problems. The participants themselves, however, did not report this as being a factor. Instead, they implicated the involvement of their parents in their education as being related to achieving what they wanted in addition to their own improvement. Notably, both of the pupils who achieved full integration and another who achieved increased integration over the course of the school year appeared to have had involved parents who considered their children's opinions and academic progress and communicated this to school staff.

Maternal involvement, in particular, has been associated with academic achievement and some aspects of behavioural adjustment in school (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Furthermore, adults with learning disabilities who became successful reported that parental support and advocacy, including involvement in the school, was important to their success (Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1997). Parents who are supportive and involved may encourage autonomy in their children. Although all of the participants in my study indicated that their parents, or mother alone, was involved in the decision to place them in special education, according to the students, many of the parents were either not aware of their children's feelings about special education or were aware, but believed that they could

not influence a change. In addition, in some cases, the parental involvement was reported to simply consist of signing forms, rather than attending meetings. Only a few of the participants described involved parents and school staff who were willing to listen and help them achieve their wishes. In these cases, heightened perceptions of autonomy and control might have been experienced by the pupils.

Successfully being involved in decision making has other benefits, shown by the following quote from one student:

> Jeremy: I don't have to, if I don't want to (go to another school). She (mother) makes my decisions, but asks me.
>
> I: How does that make you feel - that it's your decision? You think it should be your decision (which school to go to)?
>
> Jeremy: Yeah. Cause it's where I'll be happier.
>
> I: If you're happier where you are, does that make a difference?
>
> Jeremy: Yeah. It's harder when you're not.

This student was fairly confident that, consistent with his wishes, he would not be going to another school and he felt that he had some control over this because his mother consulted with him. To him, it was important to be where he was happier which may have resulted in more academic success.

Providing students with choice and involving them in important decisions may encourage them to work harder, feel better about themselves, and achieve their goals, resulting in better progress, improved academic achievement, and a lower drop-out rate (De Charms, 1976; Stipek & Weisz, 1981; Taylor et al., 1985a). Despite the fact that there are risks and benefits to involving children in decision-making about their education or psychological treatment, having them participate in decisions, setting goals, and strategies for achieving goals should relate to a stronger commitment to any treatment and reduced reactance (Deci, 1980). Participation may increase students' sense of responsibility in terms of changing their behaviour and may discourage learned helplessness behaviour (Croghan & Frutiger, 1977). Support for this view also comes from research on autonomy-supportive families which finds that this is related to higher academic performance, children's self-

reports of autonomous self-regulation, teacher-rated competence and adjustment, and school grades and achievement (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Autonomy-supportive schools also have achievement and motivational benefits (Guay & Vallerand, 1997). Even if students, like those in my study, do not achieve what they want (e.g, full integration), just being involved and being heard may increase their perceptions of autonomy and have benefits. The concern is that if children participate in such decisions, it may have negative consequences such as them being overburdened with information, having difficulty making important choices, increased awareness of their problems and labels, and resistance from adults who do not want them involved (Taylor et al., 1983). In addition, before the age of about 12 years, most children have not yet attained the stage of cognitive development thought to be necessary to provide intelligent consent (e.g., paying attention to the task, reflecting on the issues, weighing the alternatives and risks, and using inductive and deductive reasoning) as discussed in a review by Grisso and Vierling (1978). Yet, if information is tailored to their developmental level and learning ability and their consent is supported by that of an adult, it may be beneficial for them to be involved.

Individuals and their social environments create each other in that they are reciprocally deterministic and not independent (Bandura, 1997). Human transactions produce changing levels of reciprocity and balances of power. If students in special education are involved in making decisions, this might increase their perceptions of autonomy and control, particularly if some success in getting what they want is achieved. This is reflected in Figure 4 in the link between "Acquiring Autonomy" and "Perceptions of Control." In turn, this increase in perceived control may improve their self-efficacy and motivation for learning, self-competence, and self-worth. Self-efficacy refers to the perceptions individuals have about their capabilities to organize and carry out actions which are necessary to attain certain levels of performance (Bandura, 1997). It is for this reason that "Acquiring Autonomy" is presented as a self-protective manoeuvre. If personal actions are believed to determine outcomes, this gives rise to a sense of efficacy and power; believing that outcomes occur despite what one does, however, creates apathy (Bandura, 1997). In addition, heightened perceptions of autonomy and control may reduce the need for defensiveness in dealing with negative events such as victimization and the need for the other self-protective manoeuvres described in the present theory. These students may

perceive that they have more power and control in determining their education which may translate into greater perceptions of power in dealing with bullies and reductions in victimization. In terms of the theory and Figure 4, the heightened perceptions of control and reduced victimization would mean less vulnerability of the self and, thus, less of a need to engage in Self-Protective Manoeuvring. If victimization and other experiences which make them feel inadequate continue, however, there would still be a need to employ other self-protective mechanisms. In addition, in many situations, the exercise of personal control carries responsibilities and risks in terms of taking personal responsibility for the effects of decisions and actions, which may have repercussions (Bandura, 1997). If students involve themselves in decisions which do not turn out to be in their best interest, it is unclear how they would handle this situation.

Expressing hostility and resistance.

> It is through children's capacity to exercise power that they are also able to resist. (Marshall, 1996, p. 101)

The phenomenological experience of shame is feeling small, worthless, and powerless. This can motivate people to escape or to want to "strike back" in a defensive, retaliative anger (Tangney, 1995). If placed in a situation in which they are humiliated and stigmatized and perceive that they have little power to change this, students may respond with hostility. This anger may be directed toward the self or toward the real or imagined disapproving other who may be held partly responsible for the shameful feelings (Tangney, 1995). Redirecting anger to others, away from the self, is defensive and self-protective because a sense of agency and control can be regained and focus can be shifted away from the self (Kaufman, 1985; Tangney, 1995). This may be an "I-self" process used to protect the "me-self" from being perceived as inferior. As reported in the last chapter, eight of the participants reported angry or aggressive feelings in responding to situations which excluded, isolated, and victimized them. This anger may have allowed them, in their minds, to transfer any shameful feelings to the other person. They may have also acted out these feelings in terms of aggressing against the bully or another victim. Hence, some of these students, particularly those who discussed incidents of aggression, may have been bully-victims. For example, one boy, when he was teased and called "special ed boy" or "the boy

that doesn't know that much" reported that "It's okay. I got them back." Aggressing or expressing their anger to the person who triggered shame may have also been a way to punish those individuals and distract themselves from feeling bad about any negative information or experiences. Repeated and continued humiliation, however, goes beyond anger and can turn into *rage* (Kaufman, 1985; Lewis, 1992; Tangney, 1995). If rage is used as a common strategy to defend, it may become part of the child's character, showing itself as hostility or bitterness. Yet, hostility can serve a more long-term purpose of protecting the self against further shame episodes. It may act as a protective shell that prevents others from verbally or physically attacking the individual, and if these attacks continue, it may protect from the pain of humiliation.

In my study, a few of the participants presented as being particularly unhappy, hostile, and angry about their situation. They were antagonistic to answering questions and presented with a hostile demeanor. Although there were probably other factors influencing them to be this way, including home factors, peer relations, and temperament, their experiences with multiple changes over which they had little control, uncertainty, and exclusion and victimization are thought to have contributed to their hostility. Repeated exposure to decreased control may result in anger and hostility (Dweck & Wortman, 1982), especially when it consists of lacking the power to manage negative circumstances. In addition, hostility may be a method used by children experiencing difficulties to draw attention away from their weak performances (Kos, 1991). They may engage in inappropriate behaviour to avoid being exposed, ridiculed, and to avoid experiencing further failures. Qvortrup (1990, c.f. Marshall, 1996) suggests that children who challenge teachers or parents may be exercising the only way available to them of expressing their dissatisfaction. Over half of the participants in my study were unhappy with their school or class placements and lacked the power to rectify this dissatisfaction. Consequently, when students do not have adaptive coping mechanisms to deal with their dissatisfaction, the result may be the self-protective manoeuvre of hostility and resistance. As reported above, this resistance was shown with a few of the participants who were reluctant to share information in their interviews and did not appear happy with the topic of their education. Although resistance and hostility is maladaptive, it may allow them to feel powerful. Thus, I do not believe that, in these circumstances, oppositional behaviour should be considered

pathological because they are responding to the situation they have been placed in to the best of their ability and to the best of their coping skills. Children who feel humiliated and powerless to change this might not verbalize it in a way that we can understand their feelings; instead, they might protest their frustrations and unhappiness by acting out and being oppositional. In addition, they may try to exert control through other means, which some of the participants described. For example, one student implied that he was purposely sabotaging any chance that he might return to a former school by not improving his behaviour. Even though she was told not to, another participant did the "hard work" that she wanted to do by pretending that she was a regular education student. This student, therefore, actively resisted not having control over the work she was excluded from doing. Although doing this work might have been counterproductive if it was too difficult for her, it may have allowed her to perceive that she was "normal" and to have some control over her actions.

In students with learning difficulties, hostility and resistance may also take the form of actually not doing the work they are expected to do, such as the work that has been assigned in the special education class. The following excerpts from the interviews of three of the participants illustrate their own personal theories about the impact of feeling powerless, stigmatized, and unhappy with their circumstances.

1) Helen: What I think is that - what I think about the meetings is I think kids should be invited so they'll feel much better about what class they're gonna be inside of. And they won't have to worry about what the teacher said or anything. And sometimes my mom comes home from meetings, they don't really tell you everything that happened because - well, sometimes my mom says "It's for teachers only". But, I think kids should have some sort of say in which class they're gonna be in. Cause if you put a kid inside of a class where they don't really like, *they're not going to finish their work and they're not going to really want to participate in everything the kids are doing* - one of the kids who like that class and want to do the stuff that's in there. They're not going to want to do it, they're just going to want to *don't do their work*.So-

Interviewer: Why won't they want to do their work?

Helen: *Cause they're not feeling happy about where they are and they're thinking "Why do I have to be inside this class when I don't want to be in this classroom"* and stuff. And they're gonna want to be inside a different class or something. And I think that kids should be able to say what they feel about each class and decide which class they should be inside of. More than all the teachers. All of them should decide.

2) Interviewer: Do you think kids should be asked how they feel about it (special education)?

Tom: Yeah.... Cause they have feelings too. Like, they should have a right to say if they want to go in or not to cause they maybe just don't like. If they need help, they can - they should say to them that they can do it on their own.

I: Why should kids have a right? Why should kids have a say?

Tom: Cause, like, the teachers - they can't just put you in a class. They have to know what you feel about it first too.

I: Why would that be better?

Tom: Cause they shouldn't put you in a class that you don't like. Then after, you'll be mad at them and stuff.

I: What would happen if you were in a class that you didn't like?

Tom: *You wouldn't, like, do your work and stuff cause you'll be mad at them* and all that.

3) I: Should they be asking you what you think?

Nick: Because it's like you just can't ask a parent. Like, I have to be comfortable with it myself, knowing that you asked me "Do you want to do that?" instead of she saying "Yeah. Go ahead" and then after I don't - *I always get in trouble, don't do my work* and stuff like that.

I: Why should you be comfortable with where you are?

Nick: So, I can at least know that I feel I like where I am and can do my work.

These students believed that there would be academic and behavioural consequences to not having students contribute to their own educational plans and placing them in unhappy circumstances. Not doing their work is a form of resistance and hostility, perhaps not direct and open, but clear resistance. It should be noted that none of these participants reported that *they* themselves had purposely not done their work. However, one of them, Tom, provided an example of a resistant student: "That's happened to a kid when I used to be in the (Resource Room) class. He used to didn't do his work cause he didn't like to be in that class." These students focussed on the aspect of not being involved and getting what

they want, which is critical. However, although they did not directly refer to it, the negative associations of being in special education and the view that regular education classes do not have the same, shame-inducing associations is implicit in their comments. In their minds, as discussed before, special education is to blame for being excluded and victimized and placement in a regular education class might not be as stigmatizing.

Other studies have also found that children who perceive that they are coerced into treatment or educational programs show negative reactions. A study which interviewed adults with learning disabilities reported that one participant recalled that she was mad about repeating a grade and "just sat back because I was so angry" (Reis, Neu, & McGuire, 1997). This student figured that people thought she was dumb, so, as a result, she would just act and appear dumb. Another study found that, in a sample of children receiving psychotherapy, 79% exhibited some degree of reluctance or dissatisfaction with regard to the treatment, including refusing to participate, feeling ambivalent, complaining of coercion, avoidance behaviours, and dropping out (Taylor, Adelman, & Kaser-Boyd, 1985a). Some of these dissatisfied participants attributed their unhappiness to not having had the choice about the decision for treatment. In a similar study, most students with learning difficulties expressed reluctance to participate in treatments when they were not part of the decision-making process (Adelman & Taylor, 1986). Adelman and Taylor (1986) argued that this reluctance may be well-founded in the sense that it is a reaction to actions geared to pressure them to participate or it follows from accurate perceptions of the negative factors involved in treatment (e.g., stigma). Further, they contend that reluctance to participate in treatment is actually a likely reaction when students perceive that they have been forced into treatment. In terms of consequences, Wilson (1979) found that those who perceive their participation in treatment as not being under their volitional control make poorer progress in treatment.

Resistant behaviour might also be referred to as *reactance*. Brehm's (1966) theory of reactance asserts that if important free behaviours are eliminated or threatened to be eliminated, this will result in reactance. Elimination of free behaviours means that a person cannot, or is not allowed to, continue to engage in a particular behaviour or set of behaviours. With regard to the participants in this study, reactance might involve not being allowed to do certain work and not being placed in a desired classroom. "Psychological

reactance is conceived as a motivational state directed toward the re-establishment of the free behaviours which have been eliminated or threatened with elimination" (Brehm, 1966, p. 9). A person in this position will be motivated to try to regain the lost freedoms through available means, either engaging in the behaviours that he or she has been told not to (e.g, regular class work) or engaging in similar behaviours. According to Brehm (1966), reactance is not an unpleasant tension but is a motivational state that has a specific direction to recover the freedom that was eliminated. However, in the case of the participants in my study, their resistance was not just related to recovering freedom, but was also related to wanting to avoid circumstances which made them feel inferior. For example, the student who discussed her desire to do regular class assignments may have felt inadequate and ashamed that she was not allowed do this work. Consequently, "completing" it proved to her, and perhaps to others, that she was capable.

Being in the position of feeling inadequate and being unable to change this may lead to hostility, which has self-defeating and interpersonal consequences. The self-protective externalizing attributions that were described in the first manoeuvre may have led some participants to blame others for their negative experiences, also justifying their anger and hostility. Attributing events and experiences to factors outside of themselves, however, may generalize to other situations, including achievement situations. Hostile and aggressive reactions may be particularly likely when failures are attributed to others (Durrant, 1993; Weiner, 1980). If achievement outcomes are not believed to be under their control, this may be associated with helpless perceptions ("Why bother trying?"), not doing their work, and a lack of academic progress. In addition, directing anger and hostility to others, particularly if it is persistent, can impact on interpersonal relationships (Tangney, 1995). It can also interfere with empathic responses because such individuals are over-focussed on protecting their self-images and are not attuned to the effect their emotions and reactions have on others (Tangney, Burggraf, & Wagner, 1995). Hostile people may come to react to many situations in a bitter manner, even when they are not threatening. Although it can serve a more long-term purpose of protecting the self against further humiliation, hostility may become too generalized and may interfere with interpersonal relationships and self-development. It may also be associated with resistance, not wanting to risk new challenges,

and not putting sufficient effort into work. Hence, behaviour, academic, social and emotional development may be affected by hostility and resistance.

Passively forfeiting control.

> The belief that the person cannot change his or her shameful identity sets up a defence of passivity and helplessness. (Lindsay-Hartz et al., 1995, p. 297)

Many of the students in this study described experiences and situations which would contribute to feelings of powerlessness. More than half were dissatisfied with their classes or schools and were not able to change this situation. All of the participants reported situations that stigmatized them for requiring special help, with many reporting this as a serious issue. With excessive shame and powerlessness, internal withdrawal or passivity may be a means of coping in which the self withdraws deeply to escape further shaming (Dweck & Wortman, 1982; Kaufman, 1985). If individuals are unable to exert influence over things which adversely affect their life, they will feel apprehension, apathy, or despair (Bandura, 1997). They may perceive that nothing can be done to change what is making them feel inadequate because of their powerlessness. Consequently, they may believe that it is best to act passive, not be committed, and allow others to continue to control. In terms of the participants in my study, this withdrawal and passive behaviour may become a more permanent aspect of their behaviour if the other protective mechanisms (e.g., making self-protective attributions, acquiring autonomy) fail. The only way to handle feelings of shame and inadequacy is to hide. This passivity was shown by some of the students and was expressed as being indifferent to what and who made the decisions about their placement. These participants made statements which implied that they were content with adults having control over decisions about their education. For example, one student reported that "..I don't really care. Like, my parents know what's best for me.", suggesting that he feels comfortable that his parents will make appropriate choices for him. This student often used the phrase "my mother wants..." in his interviews. Another student indicated that he should *not* be asked his opinion regarding his class placement, appearing to be content with how the decision was made and would continue to be made. One boy denied any negative feelings and just wanted to do what he was told, but clearly did not like the special education class as he *avoided* attending it. Three other students acted in a manner which

suggested they did not care what happened to them and what the adults would decide about their education. One of these students stated that he did not care if he did not get his way and acted indifferent about whether he should be integrated more and what school he should attend. Yet, he did not appear to be happy about his school situation. This student and another also spoke at length about special education, their classes, and the work they have been given being "boring". Expressing boredom is devaluing a task which can be a defensive mechanism (i.e., "I didn't do well on this task because it was too boring). Neither of these two students said anything positive during their interviews about school (other than about the free time they liked) and, thus, did not appear to be invested in their education.

The lack of desired involvement in decision-making shown by some of the participants was also found in a study by Taylor et al. (1983) regarding students with learning disabilities and psychoeducational decisions. A small group of participants in the Taylor et al. (1983) study showed a lack of desire for self-determination and felt that they should be told what to do ("Kids should be told what to do" or "I'm not the one to do it"). It was suggested that this might have been a defence against anxiety related to making decisions or a protective reaction against adult interventions (Taylor et al., 1983). Furthermore, perhaps those who are not motivated to participate in meetings dealing with their problems have had negative experiences with such activities and feel forced to attend something which they will not, in the end, have any control over (Adelman et al., 1990). It appears, therefore, that some students with learning disabilities are "happy" to not have a role in making decisions about their education. This *relinquishing of control,* however, may have served a self-protective purpose. For example, it is possible that the indifference is a response to a view that what they feel or think has no effect on what actually happens and that it is then better to adopt an apathetic demeanor. Perhaps these students protect themselves from disappointments and further confirmations that what they want has no bearing on what actually occurs. Alternatively, such decisions may require taking responsibility which these students do not want to deal with. According to Bandura (1997), "people are often willing to relinquish control over events that affect their lives in order to free themselves of the performance demands and hazards that exercising control entails" (p. 17). As a result, they will use *proxy control* to elicit those people who have influence and

power to act on their behalf in order to effect the changes they desire. This may be easier to do when they do not feel competent to cope with certain task demands and decisions. However, there are also many situations in which people do not have direct control over institutional mechanisms of change and have no choice but to use proxy control to alter their lives for the better (Bandura, 1997). This also places these individuals in a vulnerable position because they must rely on the competence, power, and favours of others. Furthermore, in acquiescing to environmental demands and relinquishing power, people make the institutional environment more powerful (Bandura, 1997). Hence, in passively allowing adults to take control, such students are contributing to the social environment and balance of power even without intending to do so.

Despite "contributing to the balance of power", those who believe they have no control over what happens to them may feel helpless to change anything. Yet, when individuals perceive that they are helpless and allow others to control aspects of their life with which they are unhappy, this further precludes them involving themselves and trying to change what is causing their dissatisfaction. Thus, this cycle appears to persistently feed into itself. Helpless behaviours were described in some of the interviews. For example, one student was asked what he does when he is teased about being in special education and he stated: "I just walk away and they keep on, like, sometimes they keep on saying it. So, I can't really do anything about that." This manner of dealing with victimization was echoed by other participants. In terms of affecting their class placements, another student assumed that he would be in the Resource Room program the following year, even though this is not what he wanted, and appeared to be helpless to do anything about this. This helplessness, as well as disappointment, discouragement, and sadness, also applies to not achieving the ideal self (Higgins, 1991). The following quote exemplifies this situation:

> Mary: If I keep studying and every day I write stories and read a chapter book and learn new words. If I read a book and I don't know a word - mark it and then write on a piece of paper and put it on the fridge and every day read - practise reading that. And keep finding new words I have to read and studying them. And one day, you might be - you might be in Mr. R's (regular education) class because you might do a test in Mr. L (special education class). And, say, if you do it for a long time or something like that, he might see you know it already. And keep getting perfect. So, since you're doing that so well, I would see if you could do a harder spelling test in Mr. R's class or something like that.

I: What if you worked and worked and worked and practised and practised, but you still had a hard time with some of the things in Mr. R's class? Then what?

Mary: Then, *I'd still be sad.* I would...um..*I would feel like to give up,* but I wouldn't. *Cause, it's like it's no use, because it - that won't do nothing.*

"Learned helplessness" is the pervasive perception that there is independence between one's responses and the onset or termination of aversive events and they are expected to continue (Garber & Seligman, 1980). Learned helplessness goes beyond making helpless comments and suggests a more debilitating view of all negative events. For example, students viewing their placement in special education as causing victimization and believing that this cause will continue and cannot be changed implies learned helplessness. Learned helplessness or helpless behaviour can result from perceptions of inadequacy. The shame experiences the participants had gone through may have contributed to any helpless thinking and behaviour. In addition, helpless thinking was described in the first manoeuvre when many of the participants reported external factors as controlling situations. Learned helplessness behaviour has been shown in children with learning disabilities and ADHD (Chapman, 1988b; Kos, 1991; Milich & Okazaki, 1991; Ring & Reetz, 2000). Because helpless children see their failures as indicative of low ability and unbeatable, they view effort as futile (and perhaps as meaning low weak ability) and challenge as a potential threat to their self-esteem (Dweck & Reppucci, 1973; Weiner, 1994). Thus, not displaying sufficient effort may guard against perceiving they have low ability and are intellectually inadequate (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Unfortunately, in the case of the participants in my study, such thinking may preclude using the "Acquiring Autonomy" manoeuvre to change their situation for the better and they may continue to rely on this and the other two manoeuvres to protect their self-images. It is difficult to know whether any of the participants in my study were helpless with regard to their learning. Yet, some were certainly helpless with regard to their school situation and negative, dissatisfying circumstances.

Failure of the manoeuvres.

No two individuals adapt to the same environment in the same way. They may therefore adapt to their circumstances grudgingly, apathetically, agreeably, or eagerly

which, in turn, affects their environments (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura (1997), once people develop a mind-set about their efficacy in given situations, they act on their established self-beliefs without further appraising their capabilities. Thus, when people have a low sense of personal efficacy and no amount of effort by them, or others like them, produces valued outcomes, they become apathetic. As described in the previous section, such individuals become convinced of their powerlessness to improve the human condition and they do not put much effort into effecting changes (Bandura, 1997). In the case of the participants in my study, those who have given up thinking that there will be a change for the better and have given up having any control over changes may come to a point where they no longer continue to try. The result of feeling helpless, apathetic, and passive about school is that these students may become disengaged from school and not continue to invest their efforts at all. In the long run, this disengagement may lead students to leave school prematurely. Kortering, Haring, and Klockars (1992) found that the number of district-initiated interruptions (suspensions, expulsions), school transfers, and family intactness most contributed to the risk of high school students with learning disabilities dropping out. Hence, actions which are associated with excluding students with learning disabilities not only contribute to lowered motivation and achievement, but may also increase the probability that they will leave school prematurely.

"Expressing hostility" was described as being a means of transferring blame and anger to others. In situations in which people feel that they cannot express anger, however, they may become self-critical and feel ashamed or even depressed (Miller, 1985). The passivity and helplessness described in the "Passively Forfeiting Control" section may signify that these students have accepted that they will not achieve their ideal selves and that there is some failure of the self-protective mechanisms. As with anger, these perceptions can also lead to dejection-related emotions such as depression (Higgins, 1991). Continued exposure to shameful experiences, and failure to control this adversity, is also associated with hopelessness and depression (Oatley & Bolton, 1985; Seligman et al., 1984; Tangney, Burggraf, & Wagner, 1995; Weiner, 1980). Depression may occur "When an ashamed person judges that he or she cannot correct a personal deficiency that diminishes self-esteem..." (Miller, 1985, p. 135). The person may feel helpless and, although very aware of his or her personal deficits, not know how to alter the pain that these deficiencies cause.

Miller (1985) seems to imply a continuum among anger, shame, and depression: if anger cannot cover up shame, then shame results and if the problem which causes shame cannot be resolved, helplessness and depression result. Among children who are depressed, however, these feelings may all coexist in some form or another. In examining the affective and cognitive characteristics of depression in children, Blumberg and Izard (1985) found that anger was predictive of depression in boys, while self-directed hostility was predictive of depression in girls. Although two of the girls in my study did express self-directed hostility, they also expressed anger.

Depression, and self-disparagement, may be compounded when individuals perceive themselves as ineffectual, but see others like them enjoying the benefits of successful efforts (Bandura, 1997; Davis & Yates, 1982). For example, in the case of the students in my study, if they see others like themselves become integrated, but not themselves, they may believe this is due to something negative about themselves or place the blame on unfair powerful others. Placing the blame for this unfairness on teachers, parents or unknown school personnel may protect the self from being disparaged and depressed. However, complete failure of the self-protective manoeuvres may result in perceiving the "me-self" as inadequate and stupid. This is similar to the view that depression results from the failure of cognitive distortion or of an "affect regulation" system whose goal is to maintain healthy functioning (Heath, 1995). In the long-run, a negative self scheme may develop which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Leahy, 1985). These individuals may selectively focus on information which confirms this negative scheme, ignore information that contradicts it, and develop a pattern of behaviour which maintains inferiority and self-critical depression (Leahy, 1985).

Some failure of the self-protective manoeuvres described in this theory was detected. Although none of the participants indicated that they were victimized *because* they were inferior, dumb, or stupid, at least three of the students made self-deprecating comments (e.g., not being able to do things other students can do). One girl actually referred to herself as *being* stupid: "sometimes I just feel like I'm stupid or something like that. Cause I don't know the stuff in there." Another girl perceived herself as "nothing" and other students as "something." Thus, for a few of the participants, the self-protective mechanisms were not entirely successful. Yet, it is striking that, in a group of students with a history of learning

problems and negative experiences related to this, self-critical comments were rare. It appears that nobody, including the students in this study, wants to think that they are stupid and they may put much effort and a variety of strategies into defending against this perception.

The above path is supported by a review of research regarding the self-concepts, attributions, and emotional functioning of adolescents with learning disabilities (Huntington & Bender, 1993). In addition, some research has found that children with learning disabilities have significantly lower academic and global self-concepts than children without learning disabilities (Chapman, 1988a; Cooley & Ayres, 1988; Gresham, Evans, & Elliot, 1988; Harter, Whitesell, & Junkin, 1998; Margalit & Zak, 1984; Rogers & Saklofske, 1985; Smith & Nagle, 1995; Yauman, 1980). Huntington and Bender (1993) suggested that being repeatedly unable to be academically competent potentially leads to feelings of powerlessness in school and increasingly negative feelings, which, in turn, may be related to the high rate of depression in this population (e.g., 14 to 18% identified as severely depressed, levels which are higher than expected in the population of children without learning disabilities). Even more disconcerting is the high risk of suicide in adolescents with learning disabilities, perhaps due to cognitive deficits, poor problem-solving skills in dealing with stressful situations, and helpless feelings (Huntington & Bender, 1993). Suicidal children have similar risk factors as those described in this study, including feeling excluded by siblings and peers, stressors such as personal and social disruptions, poor coping skills, and academic difficulties (Paulson et al., 1978; Pettifor & Perry, 1983). Depression and suicide are serious emotional issues and identifying the precursors and paths which lead to them is important. To this end, there may be a group of children with learning disabilities who respond particularly poorly to special education placements or who have particularly severe difficulties, and are at-risk for emotional difficulties (Dalley et al., 1992). Furthermore, in dealing with the stressors and negative experiences related to special education placement and learning difficulties, children with poor coping skills and self-protective strategies which fail may be those who follow the path to helplessness, disengagement, hopelessness, and depression. Those who feel most hopeless, and have the poorest coping skills, may be those who attempt suicide.

# CHAPTER V

## Conclusions and Implications

### Summary of Findings

This study aspired to gain insight into the perspectives, beliefs, and experiences of children with learning disabilities about receiving special education support. This goal was successful given the unique and personal information which was shared by the participants. From the interview data, eight relevant themes emerged which were presented and analyzed in Chapter III. These themes revealed that most of the participants had an inadequate understanding of special education policies and procedures and felt excluded and victimized for receiving special education support, which made them angry and sad. Furthermore, many of the students wanted a change to their placements and described methods of obtaining this change. The central issue which emerged, however, was the need these students had to protect their "me-selves" in light of circumstances which made them feel inferior. This issue, along with the balance of power between them and adults, was incorporated into the theory *Self-Protective Manoeuvring*. The feelings of shame that were potentially triggered by their experiences of being excluded and victimized and the reduced perceptions of control they had regarding their school lives necessitated various manoeuvres to protect their "me-selves." These manoeuvres, developed from the information provided by the participants in this study, included using self-protective attributions to deal with negative situations, expressing hostility and resistance, attempting to acquire autonomy and control, and passively forfeiting control. These manoeuvres, however, have both positive and negative consequences and may not always be successful in protecting the self.

### Limitations of Research

Although I have used other research with children who have learning disabilities to support many of my findings and theoretical connections, it is not yet known whether this theory will apply to other children with learning disabilities receiving special education support or to children with other exceptionalities. This limit in generalizability is due to the fact that all of the participants came from one Board of Education in one community, and despite the appropriateness for this type of study, the number of students was small. In

addition, all of the students had learning disabilities and many also had behavioural problems, meaning that the themes and theory may not apply to children with other learning needs. In particular, it remains to be shown whether this theory will be applicable to those students who are supported in placements which differ from the ones described in this study or to those who attend schools with different social and cultural contexts. All of the four schools used in this study served students from a variety of cultural and social backgrounds (multicultural). The three schools with the Resource Room programs were larger schools, serving from about 400 to over 500 students each, and were more culturally diverse and from lower SES areas than the school with the Self-Contained class. The largest school was also a program-assisted school meaning that it received additional financial resources for serving economically-disadvantaged students and families. Concord school, the school with the Self-Contained class, was smaller (about 250 students), was in a higher SES area than the other 3 schools, and was less culturally diverse (approximately 20% English as a Second Language students compared to 40-50% for the other schools). Some of the students who attended the Self-Contained class, however, may have come from areas (their home school areas) which were lower in SES.

The above-described social, cultural, and economic contexts of the schools and communities used in this study may have played a role in the information shared by the students and in the themes and theory which were developed. The themes and the theory, therefore, may vary as a function of the context in which students with special needs are educated. In the future, a more textured and elaborate theory might result from studying children with different exceptionalities, from different classes, and from different schools and social-cultural contexts. In addition, specifically examining the role of socioeconomic status and cultural context in the development of student attitudes and perceptions and in their actual experiences would be useful. Although I did not seriously investigate issues of SES, culture, and classroom context, I believe that these were likely factors in some of the themes and in the theory developed. For example, the students' knowledge and involvement as well as parental involvement may vary as a function of SES. In addition, in the "Power of Perks", many of the examples came from the Self-Contained class whose educators may have relied on these rewards for behaviour modification more so than for academic motivation. Classrooms which primarily rely on "perks" for academic motivation,

on the other hand, and use them in moderation may not have to deal with the negative implications which were discussed in the "Power of Perks" section. That is, if rewards are used as a means of encouraging children to work on tasks which they do not find interesting, this may provide them with incentive to attempt and to complete their work so that they can eventually become intrinsically motivated (as they make progress and experience success). In this case, the perks may have more positive and adaptive consequences than they do in classrooms which rely on them to control behaviour. The implications for the "Power of Perks", therefore, may vary for different contexts, classrooms, and pupils.

Despite the above limitations, an advantage of my study is that the participants did come from several different cultures and from both sexes (over 50% were minority students). In addition, having included children who were being supported in a Self-Contained program is a strength because of the paucity of studies examining their perceptions, despite the fact that approximately 20% of students with identified learning disabilities may be educated in separate classrooms (special education for more than 60% of the school day), as shown by U.S. statistics from the late 1980s (McLeskey & Pacchiano, 1994).

During the analysis of the data, I was often reminded of another limitation which is the breadth of the interviews and information gained. I covered many different issues and subjects during the interviews and if I had been able to go back and re-interview after I had completed more detailed analysis, this would have made my theory even richer and clarified questions which arose during the analysis. For example, it would have been valuable to pursue exactly how the participants imagined they could be more involved in decision-making and what aspects they would have liked to be involved in. However, the issue of breadth could really not have been helped, partially due to the exploratory nature of the study, the limited time span of data collection, and my own over-exuberance in wanting to know so much and actually knowing so little about these students' perceptions when I began.

Although I believe that I gained new and valuable information through interviewing the participants in my study, it should be noted that this information may have been clouded by many factors, including any hesitancy that they may have had in sharing information that was unpleasant. This hesitancy was shown by the resistance of a few of

the participants, a factor which was actually incorporated into the theory. In addition, my understanding of the students' thoughts and feelings may have been impacted by their ability to verbally express themselves. Yet, what they did express proved to be new and worthwhile, adding insight into the perceptions and experiences of these children.

## Implications for Future Research and Practice

Perhaps the sign of a worthwhile study is that it generates many important issues and questions to ponder. The most relevant issues raised by this study are the methods of obtaining students' perceptions, the consequences of self-protective manoeuvring, the motivation of students with LD, the level of their knowledge about special education, their involvement and control in making decisions, their goals and wishes, their exclusion and victimization, and special issues related to minority students and special education. These issues are discussed below.

### Methods of Gaining Students' Perceptions

This study demonstrated that interviewing children with the assistance of nonverbal techniques can be effective in ascertaining their feelings and perceptions about important topics. However, continued exploration of effective methods of eliciting information from children, especially those with learning challenges, is needed. Having them provide drawings appears to be one particular avenue to investigate and has been used by other researchers (e.g., Armstrong, 1995). Through their drawings, students in Armstrong's sample were able to communicate their school experiences and indicate ways in which their education could be modified so that it would be more ideal. In addition, ensuring that interview questions are phrased appropriately for children and are easily understood by them is critical.

### Self-Protective Manoeuvring and its Consequences

This theory, or parts thereof, needs to be supported with both quantitative and qualitative research. For example, examining the reactions of students with special needs to exclusion and victimization, in the moment that these experiences occur, would be beneficial. Such research might address questions such as: What do their reactions and

responses look like during these situations? Do they appear to be ashamed (e.g., averting their gaze, walking away) or do they look sad (crying) or angry? Do they retaliate? What factors are associated with these different reactions? Other issues to pursue include which children are most likely to need and use the self-protective manoeuvres presented in this study and are there factors which distinguish those who rely primarily on one over another? For example, are there sex differences in the types of manoeuvres preferred? In addition, does this theory and the themes apply to children with special needs who are educated in different settings and placements (e.g., full inclusion schools, team-teaching programs)? Do students from full inclusion schools experience victimization and do they require self-protective manoeuvres to the same extent as pupils similar to those who participated in this study?

Many consequences of using the self-protective manoeuvres were discussed in the previous chapter. An additional consideration, however, is if children with learning or behavioural difficulties guard against information which suggests that their behaviour or academic skills need improvement, does this preclude using other self-processes to change their behaviour? These processes might include motivational functions such as striving for goals, identifying plans and incentives to meet these goals, and developing standards which will encourage self-improvement (Harter, 1999). Furthermore, if these students do not have an adequate understanding of their "disability" or difficulties, perhaps because it is perceived as threatening information, might this prevent them from understanding the skills and areas they need to work on and how their strengths can be used to learn more effectively? Thus, the self-protective functions may have consequences which include impeding attempts to improve behaviour and scholastic achievement. Despite these risks, there is a need to continue to examine the coping and protective strategies used by academically at-risk children, both in terms of research and in terms of practice. In this way, we can help them find ways to cope more adaptively so that their motivation, emotional functioning, and academic progress are not negatively affected. Giving up, being hostile, and "not working" are not productive methods of dealing with dissatisfaction, but may be the only means available to them. Perhaps having models who have coped with learning difficulties more successfully would be helpful. In addition to adaptive coping skills, placing them in a position in which they do not need to be so self-protective is clearly

preferable. Providing them with more control and reducing their exclusion and victimization are possible methods of decreasing the need for self-protection.

Motivating Students with Learning Disabilities

Although external rewards were an important means of motivating these students on a daily basis, using enticements for students, especially those with learning disabilities, may have negative consequences. It may hinder the development of their own internal controls and motivation for learning. It is recognized that it may have been necessary for teachers to use these "perks" to get these students to complete tasks. However, examination of the best ways to motivate these students on a daily basis *and* develop their own internal motivation, decreasing their need for rewards, would be fruitful. One strategy to consider is providing students with learning or behavioural problems with choice regarding their academic tasks, something which has been shown to improve their engagement in tasks, academic performance, and motivation (Kern et al., 1998). Furthermore, having teachers continue to concentrate and comment on the positive aspects of their students' achievements and efforts is clearly motivational. Commenting not just on effort and ability, but on processes, strategies, new skills, and progress is important.

Students' Knowledge and Certainty

Most of the participants expressed a great deal of uncertainty about what had occurred and what might be occurring in the future with regard to their education. This uncertainty suggests that educators and parents are not handling their transition to special education programs well in terms of their understanding and preparation. This implies a need for *continuous* education and counselling regarding their educational plan, why they need special support, and what they need to do to achieve their goals and be integrated more. An important goal for the education system would be to have these children be informed and proactive about their own education, even if they have cognitive weaknesses which make it difficult for them to understand this information (e.g., language problems, memory problems). In order to become involved, they need to have a greater understanding of the system, its procedures, and what to expect. In turn, the children who best understand their special education program and are involved may adapt and handle changes better and

achieve outcomes that are reasonable and hoped for. Although some students reported that they did not want to know more about special education, perhaps if it is framed as "So you can understand how you can participate and what is going on" may help. The students who are reticent to become involved and learn more may think that it means knowing more about their problems and what they cannot do or being given tests to assess their knowledge. Furthermore, educating them about the positive aspects of special education, using clear information, may improve their engagement in learning.

Another implication regarding their lack of knowledge involves psychological assessments. Perhaps it should be made clearer to them what the purpose is and what the possible outcomes are of these assessments. In addition, in providing them with assessment feedback, helping them to attribute their failures to ineffective task strategies may be more effective than focussing on ability or strengths/weaknesses as a more fixed concept (Licht, 1983). As reported in the last chapter, caution is indicated in having these students over-rely on blaming effort for their failures (e.g., "If you just tried harder, you would do better").

Students' Involvement and Control

I: Does anybody ever ask you what you want to do? Like, what class you want to be in or if you want to go for special help?

Mary: Yeah.

I: Do they ask you?

Mary: Yeah.

I: Who?

Mary: You.

I: Oh, me. Anybody else?

Mary: Um...(No response).

I: Are most kids asked how they feel or what their opinions are on that?

Mary: ...I don't think.

A key implication of this study is the need to provide these students with more control and choice, listen to what they have to say, and involve them in decisions which affect them. They would benefit from opportunities to be heard and being given choices,

which may improve their eagerness to learn and feelings of inclusion. Participation provides important feelings of autonomy which has benefits in terms of motivation and involvement in learning. If these students are denied opportunities to participate, educators and parents must be prepared to deal with the consequences of this denial, including reduced motivation, behavioural problems, and lower achievement. Students with exceptional learning needs should have their perspectives taken into account even if this means simply asking them what they think or feel about an issue, decision, or choice. Just "being heard" may have its own positive impact, a view which is supported by Melton (1999) in an opinion article about children's participation in decisions. He argues that children need to experience and observe situations in which they are heard and their views are taken seriously: "Nothing is more fundamental to the experience of being taken seriously than simply having a say, being heard politely, and having one's perspective considered - in effect, being part of a conversation about matters of personal significance" (Melton, 1999, p. 936). He advocates for a process of graduated decision-making in which children gradually assume independence with respect to decisions (a "learner's permit"). To begin participating, all that is needed is the ability to express a preference, something which the participants in this study were clearly able to do. In terms of this process, parents and school officials would have full decision-making power over important school decisions, but there would be an opportunity for students to provide their own opinions. Gradually and over years, they would assume increasing responsibility after supervised and modelled practise with participating in making decisions (Melton, 1999). To this end, it would be prudent for boards of education to develop guidelines for children's participation in decision-making in terms of how this can be graduated and how adults will supervise, prepare, and support them. In the case of students with exceptional learning needs, this should be part of special education policies and procedures. For example, this plan would outline their involvement in developing Individual Education Plans and in IPRCs or meetings prior to IPRCs. This involvement would require educating them as to the key aspects of special education procedures (e.g., what the IEP is, why meetings occur). Finally, these students should be assisted and encouraged in expressing their feelings and perceptions and responded to in a positive manner when they do so.

To assist in the above process, teaching methods and strategies which help students learn problem-solving, decision-making, and choice-making skills would be helpful. Decision-making refers to having input in making educational decisions whereas choice-making refers to choosing amongst various options. The choices may involve less important issues than major educational decisions (e.g., choosing what tasks to work on each day). Although skills training is important, it is more important that they actually have opportunities to experience control and make choices. To this end, programs which have been developed to enhance the perceptions of control in special education students have been found to be successful in improving motivation and achievement (Taylor et al., 1989). Furthermore, "choice-making" has been found to be successful as an intervention to improve the behaviour of people with disabilities, for example in vocational, social, and academic areas (Kern et al., 1998). However, more research is needed into children's consent and participation in decision-making and the effects thereof. Directly involving exceptional students in decisions, changes, and plans, in the manner described above, and examining the effects of this involvement would be prudent. In addition, those students who are not as eager to participate may require more information and support to do so. There may be certain decisions that students are more eager to participate in than others and it would be useful to determine what these are.

The principal importance of being knowledgable about and involved in special education procedures and decisions is that this may reduce the need that these students have to use self-protective attributions, hostility and resistance, and passivity in dealing with their negative experiences. Instead, we can help them "acquire autonomy", control, and assertiveness about their education. This increased control and assertiveness may assist them in dealing with stigmatizing experiences and have other beneficial effects.

Goals, Hopes, and Dreams

Like other students, these students had hopes about what they wanted to be. Some reported hoping that they would be out of special education and would be like regular education students. This is an area to explore further: What do students with learning disabilities expect or hope for their future, especially in terms of their long-term hopes and aspirations? Furthermore, what impacts on their hopes and expectations? Do their

aspirations differ from those of students without learning disabilities because they are made to feel different? Do they even think about their long-term future? It is important to look at hopes, aspirations, goals in order to have an idea of what the children think is possible, which provides important information about their self-concept.

In terms of their short-term future, it is important to assist students requiring special assistance to develop realistic goals. In addition, IEPs should be based on goals that students value as well as what their teachers value. It is equally important to teach students with special needs, ourselves, their parents, and their peers that not everybody is good at everything and that the key issue is growth and development to their own potential.

Exclusion and Victimization of Students

The victimization of special education students is a serious issue to consider when making placement decisions and when tracking these students after they are placed in special education. In the case of the participants in this study, it very much added to their dissatisfaction and might influence their involvement in and response to special support. Interventions specifically targeted at reducing bullying for children receiving special education or having special learning needs is indicated because these pupils are clearly at risk. Such interventions may include: educating other students and raising their awareness about special needs; developing whole school policies about bullying and involving students and parents in this development; bullying discussions; assertiveness training. School interventions targeted at reducing bullying for children with special needs can be effective (Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1994). Targeted videos, assertiveness training, and having a special place during free times were particularly helpful for students with special needs who are at risk of being victimized (Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1994). As assertive behaviour is better than aggressive behaviour in protecting against victimization and in coping with it when it does occur (Egan & Perry, 1998), we need to teach children with special needs not to strike back, but to be confident and assertive in dealing with peers. It may be helpful to teach them what to say when they hear comments about being "dumb" or "stupid".

Many argue for inclusive settings for children with disabilities because they are thought to promote the participation of these children in all facets of school. Interventions

to increase students with special needs' sense of belonging and inclusion (less exclusion) may have a positive impact on their motivation and achievement. Keeping them at least within their home schools may be one step towards this (i.e., not having them change schools and be bused to attend a program). Inclusion has been shown to be associated with gains including increased acceptance, overall friendship quality, and increased number of reciprocal friendships (Vaughn et al., 1998). In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that students with learning disabilities placed in full inclusion programs experience reduced stigma (less exclusion, labelling, and being centred out) and academic and behavioural growth (Banerji & Dailey, 1995). However, other studies have found that inclusion does not necessarily improve friendships, acceptance, and self-perceptions (Vaughn, Elbaum, Schumm, & Hughes, 1998). Although the results of the present study show that special education can be a very negative experience for students, this does not mean that full inclusion is the answer for every student, especially those with specific skills deficits that require some small group remediation. What is more important is how special education is handled and that it does not mean that students feel "kicked out" of their school and neighbourhood. The goal should be that special education is not associated with feeling excluded and stigmatized.

There are questions, both of a practical and research nature, to consider with regard to exclusion and victimization. What are the reasons for the real or perceived exclusion of children with special learning needs? How often do these experiences actually happen? Are some exclusion and victimizing experiences more negatively perceived by the child than others? Which is perceived more negatively - exclusion by adults or by peers? Is exclusion always negative or is it sometimes perceived positively? If so, why? For example, are these students sometimes happy when they have different work to do?

A social question, which cannot be solved with this study, is why we find it so difficult to accept people, especially children, who are different from the norm? What is the harm in being different? Is it that this provides people with a means of feeling superior over someone else? Solutions to these questions should continue to be addressed.

## Minority Students and Special Education

In the future, it may be prudent to specifically examine the school experiences of minority children in special education to determine whether they respond differently and whether they are particularly at risk for exclusion, bullying, and subsequent negative perceptions and responses to education. Few studies have looked at minority students' school experiences in general, let alone those related to special education, despite the fact that there is a disproportionate placement of minority students in special education (Artiles, Aguirre-Munoz, & Abedi, 1998).

## Conclusion

The following excerpt from Toni Morrison's children's book, The Big Box, the story of which came from her son when he was 9 years old, seemed an appropriate end to this thesis. This story is about 3 energetic children "who just can't handle their freedom" and do not abide by rules. As a result, "adults" decide that they should be placed in big brown boxes inside which are toys, games, treats, gifts, and foods they like. Despite these treats, what the children really want is their freedom (their way) and they do not understand why they cannot have it.

> Now, Patty used to live with a two-way door in a little white house quite near us. But, she had too much fun in school all day and made the grown-ups nervous. She talked in the library and sang in class, went four times to the toilet. She ran through the halls and wouldn't play with dolls and when we pledged to the flag, she'd spoil it.
>
> So the teachers who loved her had a meeting one day to try to find a cure. They thought and talked and thought some more till finally they were sure. "Oh, Patty," they said, "you're an awfully sweet girl with a lot of potential inside you. But you have to know how far to go so the grown-up world can abide you. Now the rules are listed on the walls, so there's no need to repeat them. We all agree, your parents and we, that you just can't handle your freedom."
>
> Patty sat still and, to avoid their eyes, she lowered her little-girl head. But she heard their words and she felt their eyes and this is what she said: "...I don't mean to be rude: I want to be nice, but I'd like to hang on to my freedom. I know you are smart and I know that you think you are doing what is best for me. But if freedom is handled just *your* way then it' s not my freedom or free."
>
> T. Morrison with S. Morrison (1999) The Big Box

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Appendix A

## Exceptionalities and Program Options

## EXCEPTIONALITIES

1. Behavioural: A child whose educational performance is adversely affected by identified behavioural problems, yet who has at least average intellectual ability

2. Learning Disability: A child who has demonstrated difficulties in one or more of the following areas: oral language (listening and speaking), written language (reading and writing), and/or mathematics and who has at least average intellectual ability, yet a delay in basic psychological processes (e.g., perception, attention, memory, thinking, language); their academic achievement levels fall significantly below the level expected for assessed level of intellectual functioning

## PLACEMENT/PROGRAM OPTIONS

The following are listed in **increasing** degree of need for support:

- 1. Regular class placement (no modifications or support)
- 2. Regular class placement with modifications by the classroom teacher
- 3. Regular class with program modifications and in-class support from special education teacher as required (from 1/2 hour per week up to 40 minutes per day)
- 4. Regular class placement with program modifications and Resource/Withdrawal from special education teacher as required (from 1/2 hour per week up to 40 minutes per day)
- **5. Resource Room support with supported integration in regular class (small class support from 40 minutes per day up to one half of each day)**
- **6. Special class / Self-Contained (e.g., Behavioural, Learning Disability, Mild Intellectual Delay) with some supported integration (typically, in small class for at least one half of each day; these classes usually not in the child's home school)**
- 7. Intensive programs (e.g., Intensive Behavioural, Intensive Learning Disability) with minimal integration (most or all of day spent in small class)
- 8. Day Treatment Program
- 9. Residential Program

- These are the options that were in place at the time the study was conducted.
- Options 6 through 9 may be accessed only with an IPRC (Identification, Placement, and Review Committee) identification. Option 5 did not always require an IPRC designation, although some schools may pursue this route.
- Participants in the study were receiving support through options 3 through 6 at the time of data collection. Two of the students had been fully integrated (option 3), but were still associated with a Resource Room class and still identified as having exceptional learning needs.

Appendix B

## Consent Letter

Dear Parent,

I am in a Ph.D. program at the University of Toronto. As part of that program, I am studying children with learning needs. Your child is being invited to participate in this study because he or she receives special education services. The_____ Board of Education and the principal at _____ have given permission for this study.

I will be interviewing children and I will be asking their teacher about their needs and the services they receive. I am interested, in part, in finding out what the children think about any special services they receive. I want to get the child's point of view and, obviously, the best way to get this is by asking children directly. It may be hard to believe, but there has not been a lot of research which has looked at what children with learning needs think. There are lots of studies which look at special education, but I think that we are missing a lot of information by not asking children about their own education. Thus, this project may provide important information.

While we talk, I will be audio taping what your child says so that I don't have to try to write everything down. I will also ask them to draw pictures about school. In addition, I will observe your child in his/her classroom. The interviews and observations will take place this school year and take about 2 hours in total. I believe that the children who are in my study will not be harmed in any way. Instead, they may like being asked their opinion. The information that your child provides will be combined with the information from other children for purposes of analysis; the results of the analysis will be written up in my doctoral thesis. The information will be kept private and confidential. This means that information on any individual child cannot be discussed with the teacher or parent.

I am requesting your permission to have your child participate in my study, but you do not have to do so. Please choose whether or not you want your child in this study by marking yes or no on the next page and signing your name. It's important for you to know that your choice will not affect any services that your child is receiving and you can change your mind at any time. If you have any questions, please call me.

Laura Demchuk, M.A.,
Psychoeducational Consultant
396-7923

Judith Wiener, Ph.D., C. Psych.
Doctoral Supervisor
923-6641

Appendix B

## Letter of Agreement

1) Yes, I agree ❑ to have my child _____ in this study.
(name)

No, I do not agree ❑ to have my child _____ in this study.
(name)

I understand that, if this study is published, no information will identify any child or his/her school.

Name:_____

Signature:_____

Date: _____

Phone #: _____

2) I would like to request a summary of the study results: Yes ❑
No ❑

Address (If you wish for a Summary):

_____
(Street number and name)

_____
(Postal Code)

Appendix C

## Checklist to Determine Amount and Type of Support

| Type of Support | Hours per week (e.g., 2.5) |
|---|---|
| 1) How much is this child placed in the general education class? | |
| 2) How much is this child removed from his/her general education class for individual or small group assistance by a special education teacher? | |
| 3) How much does the special education teacher spend in the general education classroom helping this student and others? | |
| 4) How much of other forms of treatment is this child given on a pull-out basis (e.g., speech therapy, parent volunteer reading, peer tutoring)? | |
| 5) How often is the child pulled out of the general education classroom by the special education teacher or other special services staff for assessment (times per month) | |
| 6) Does the special education teacher and general education teacher collaborate on a program for the child with the general education teacher delivering some of that program? | YES<br>NO |
| 7) Does the special education teacher collaborate with the general education teacher to formulate, monitor, and review program adaptations? | YES<br>NO |

6b) If yes, how is this accomplished?

_____

_____

_____

_____

7b) If yes, please explain?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank-you for your assistance.

Appendix D

## Interview Protocol

"I'm going to be showing you some pictures while telling you some short stories. Then, I will have you draw pictures and ask you questions about your school experiences - what you think about school, your class, your teacher(s) and about getting extra help. This information will help me know how you feel about school. If at anytime you want to stop, please tell me and we will stop. It's okay to tell me that you do not want to do any more. Because I want to have a record of everything you say, I'm going to tape record our meeting. Is that okay? All of this information will be kept confidential which means that nobody will see it or hear it except for me. I will not be telling your parents or your teachers what you have said and I will keep the information in a safe place. You will not get in trouble for anything you say. Do you still want to be interviewed?"

A. General picture of a school shown to child and a brief story told about children around the subject's age: "This is the school where Jason, Nathan, Jennifer, Chantal, and Eddie go. In this school they have classes from Kindergarten to grade 8 and there are over 500 students in this school."..."Draw me a picture of your school"...

1. What is your school like?/ Tell me about your school.

probes such as:
- What is the name?
- How many kids do you think are in your school?
- What grade are you in?
- Where is your class?
- How long have you been at this school?
- Did you go to another school before you came here?
- Which school was that? How long were you there?
- What other grades are in your school?
- What are some special activities at your school?
- Do you have any brothers or sisters going to this school?
- What grades are they in?

B. Picture of children in a regular classroom of about 25 children with a teacher, including Jason, Nathan, Jennifer, and Chantal, is shown to child. "This is Jason, Nathan, Jennifer, and Chantal's class. There are 25 children in the class and the teacher's name is Mrs. Clarke. They do lots of different things in their class, including reading, listening to stories, having group discussions, doing projects, going on trips...Draw me a picture of your class."

1. Tell me about your class.

probes such as:
- How many children are in your class?
- What is your teacher's name? What is she like?
- What kinds of things do you do in your class?

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How many kids in your class are your friends? What are their names?

C. Same picture as B. shown to child. "I can tell you a story about Jennifer, Chantal, Nathan, or Jason. Which child would you like me to talk about? ... Okay, Jason finds that there are good things about his class and not so good things about his class. All boys and girls have things that they like and things that they don't like as much about school. For example, Jason does not like spelling, but he likes reading. Jason also finds some parts of school easy and some parts hard. Sometimes another teacher comes into the class to help Jason and some other children with things they find hard. All children find some things in school hard".

1. What are some things that you like about school and your class?
2. What are some things that you don't like so much about school and your class?
3. What are some easy things for you at school?
4. What are some hard things for you at school?

probes such as:
Do you like your class? Why or why not?
Do you find reading hard?
Do you find writing hard?
Do you find math hard? etc.
Do you find it hard to know what to do sometimes?
Do you find it hard to understand what your teacher is saying?

D. (For children getting in-class special support): A picture of two teachers in the classroom (one is Mrs. Clarke and a second teacher) is shown to the child. "As I said before, sometimes another teachers, Mrs. Davis, comes into the class to help Jason and other children who might need some help. Sometimes she will try to help Jason understand what he is supposed to do or she might help him spell some words when he is writing."

1. Do you sometimes have another teacher, other than Ms.____, come into your class to help you? If so, who is it?
2. What does she/he help you with?
3. How often does Ms.____ come into the class to help you?
4. Why do you think you get this help?
5. How do you feel about having someone help you in your class?
6. Do you think that you need help? Why/ Why not?
7. What do other kids say about you getting help?

Probes such as:
Is it is good or bad having someone help you in your class? Why?
Would you rather get help somewhere else?

E. (For children getting withdrawal, small-class support): A picture of the four children heading towards another classroom. "Jason is going to room 101 now. He goes there everyday for an hour and he gets some help. Jennifer, Chantal, and Nathan also go to room 101 at the same time Jason does... Do you go to another class for part of the day? Draw me a picture of you walking to that class."

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1. Where is that class located?
2. How do you get there?
3. How do you feel as you're walking there?
4. What are you thinking about as you're heading to that classroom?

probes such as: What do you think other children think when you get some help in the class?
Do other children ever say anything? If so, what?

F. (For children getting small-class support): A picture of the four children, along with a few other children, sitting in room 101. The children are working and there is another teacher helping some of them. "Jason and the other children are now working and getting some help in room 101 with Mrs. Davis. He is working on some spelling exercises. Draw a picture of the room you go to."

1. What do you do there?
2. How many other children are usually there?
3. How long do you spend there?
4. Do you know why you go there?
5. What is your teacher's name?
6. Tell me about your teacher? What is she like?

probes such as: Do you get extra help with your schoolwork there?
Do you think going there has to do with the grades you get on your report card?/ Do kids with good grades or bad grades go there?
Do you think it has to do with behaviour?/ Do the kids whose teachers think they behave well or badly go there?
Do you think it has to do with schoolwork?/ Do kids who find schoolwork easy or hard go there?
Do you think it has to do with getting along with classmates?/ Do the kids who get along with their classmates or the kids who don't get along with their classmates go there?

G. (Same picture as above): "Jason finds that there are good things about going to room 101 and some not so good things."

1. How do you feel about being in that class? (refer to picture drawn)
2. What do you like about that class?
3. What don't you like so much about that class? - What can we do about these things?
4. What are the other children who go to that class like? Do they need help too?
5. Do you miss anything when you go to this class? If so, what do you miss?
6. What happens when you miss work in your other class? (probe - Does your teacher make you do the work you missed? What do you think about that?)

Appendix D

7. Which class do you feel that you belong in - your bigger class or this class you go to?

probes such as:
Does anything bad happen to you because of going there? What?
What can we do about the bad things that happen to you?
Do other children say anything about you going to that class?
What do they say?
Do you feel good or not good about going to that class?
Where would you rather get help?

H. "Jason wondered why he had to go to room 101. He asked his teachers and parents why he had to go there and what happened to get him into that class."

1. What do you think his teachers told him?
2. What have your teachers said to you about your class and why you are there?
3. What do you think Jason's parents told him?
4. What have your parents said to you about your class and why you are there?
5. How do your teachers and parents feel about you getting help?
6. What have you or your parents told friends and relatives about your schooling?
7. What have they told you?
8. How were you picked to go to this class? - How and when did you find out you would be changing classes?
9. Did any of your friends know that you would be changing classes/schools?
10. Do you know if there had to be any special meetings with your school and parents for you to get into this class? If so, what do you know about these meetings?

11. Have you heard these words? What do you think they mean? What do you think about them?:

- IPRC
- Special Education
- labelling
- Communications
- Learning Disability/ learning difficulties
- Individual Education Plan

-> What do you think of when you hear these words?

probes such as:
Who decided that you should go to this class? Your parents? One of your teachers? Or someone else?
Do your parents think it's a good idea or a bad idea? Why?
Do your teachers/school think it's a good idea or a bad idea? Why?
Do you remember anybody working with you and testing you as part of being picked to get help?
Who was this person? What did you think about the testing?

Appendix D

I. (Optional - for children who have moved schools to attend a special class):

1. Did you have to change schools to go to your class? When and how did you find out?
2. What do you think about that?
3. Do you take a bus everyday to get here?
4. How do you feel about that? What is the bus ride like for you?
5. Which is better - going to school here or going to school closer to your home? Why?

J. (Optional - for children who, at some point, bring up having had help in a different manner last year):

1. What is the difference between getting help this year and last year - how are they different? How are they the same?
2. Why do you think things changed? How does that make you feel?
3. Which is better - how you got help last year or this year? Why - what makes that way better?
4. If you could choose, how would you get help? (Probe: would you rather get help in your bigger class, or by going to your smaller class, or not at all? - Why?)

** protocol and order of pictures will have to be modified depending on the child's current placement (i.e., if they are in a special class for most of the day, show picture 3 and then maybe picture 2 if the child is integrated)

Appendix E
Welcome
101
Panda

Appendix E

Appendix F

## Observation Schedule

Participant #: _____ Observation #:_____
Date: _____ Time: _____
Interval length: _____

A) Physical Set-up of classroom:
- desk grouping/room arrangement
- location of participant
- noise level

B) Classroom Activities:
- subject/activity students are working on

C) Participant-initiated behaviours:
Includes:
- level of involvement in class activities
- understanding of instructions/questions
- amount of help-seeking and volunteering (e.g., participating in class discussions)
- level of frustration/confusion; mood
- comments to other students; behaviours toward other students
- cooperation with other students
- work/task behaviour (e.g., amount of on/off -task behaviour; time taken)

D) Teacher-initiated behaviours:
Includes:
- instructional grouping
- monitoring of participants
- modifications given to participants (different assignments? different materials?)
- comments to participants (e.g., praise, corrections, information, instructions)

E) Interactions:
Includes:
- interactions between participant and other students
- interactions between participant and teacher(s)
- comments/behaviours of classmates toward participants
- acceptance of participant by classmates

* these observation categories were adapted from McIntosh, et. al., (1994), School Climate Scale
** "participants" refers to this study's participants