An Examination of the Factors Influencing Parents’ Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Inclusive Education

Marina S. Dupasquier

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology

McGill University, Montréal

August 2010

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

Inclusive education has had a long history of support from research and policy, yet remains controversial within some parent groups. Montréal parents of typically developing children and children with disabilities of elementary school age learning in an inclusive classroom were asked to give their opinion regarding the effectiveness of their child’s inclusive classroom ($n = 66$). A number of factors were hypothesized to influence their perceptions of inclusive education, such as access to teacher resources or parent knowledge of disabilities. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through questionnaire and telephone interviews. The majority of parents were found to have an overall positive perception of the effectiveness of inclusive education (54%). Agreement with statements regarding the academic and social benefits of inclusion was related to positive views of the effectiveness of inclusive education. Qualitative data identified policy reform as parents’ main concern. Implications for school boards were discussed.
Résumé

L'éducation inclusive a eu une longue histoire de recherche et de soutien politique, mais reste controversée au sein de certains groupes de parents. Les parents montréalais qui ont des enfants ayant un développement typique ou des enfants ayant des difficultés diverses d'apprentissage en classe intégrée au cycle primaire, ont été invités à donner leur avis quant à l'efficacité de la salle de classe intégrée de leur enfant (n = 66). J’ai fait l’hypothèse qu’un certain nombre de facteurs influence leurs perceptions de l'éducation intégrée. Des données quantitatives et qualitatives ont été recueillies grâce à des questionnaires et des entrevues. Ces recherches montrent que la majorité des parents ont une perception globale positive de l'efficacité de l'éducation intégrée (54%). L’accord avec les énoncés concernant les avantages académiques et sociaux de l'intégration est lié à une vision positive de l'efficacité de l'éducation inclusive. Les données qualitatives identifient la réforme politique comme la préoccupation principale des parents.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Tara Flanagan for not only her brilliant academic advice, but also for her positive attitude and encouraging words throughout the journey towards thesis completion.

Thank you to the Lester B. Pearson School Board and especially to Cindy Finn for granting access to the parents within the constituency, and for weighing in on the development of the questionnaire.

Thank you to Allison Slopak at the Miriam Foundation for the opportunity to recruit participants at two of the foundation’s bi-annual conferences, and to Lynda Rochester and Jaclyn Guy for helping in the recruiting process.

Thank you to the Fonds de Recherche sur la Societe et la Culture Québec who graciously funded the project and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for funding one year of my studies.

Thank you to Hailey Sobel for suggestions and edits, and to Kim Daniel and Kim Cornish for introducing me to the Building Links project and for setting the stage for this thesis.

To Tom, who helped with translation, outlines, and maintaining momentum. Thank you for everything you did to make completing this thesis easier.

Thank you to Mom and Dad, whose unyielding faith in my intuition and ambition made my transition to Montréal and graduate school possible.
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An Examination of the Factors Influencing Parents’ Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Inclusive Education

Children of all ages and abilities have been learning in inclusive classrooms throughout most of the developed world for decades. As will be discussed, there have been numerous international and Canadian governmental mandates for inclusion of students with special needs in regular classrooms. As a result, the number of disabled students learning in an inclusive classroom has been steadily increasing, and the pool of research and literature regarding inclusive education is ever expanding. However, the quality of inclusion of children with a disability is far from constant or complete. In Montréal, Québec as recently as April 2010, some disabled children are still being refused access to public school (“Montréal School”, 2010). Montréal teachers still fight today for proper funding and resources for their special needs students (“Teachers Focus on Special Needs”, 2010). Clearly, these fertile years of inclusionary research, policy and practice have yet to bear a suitable system for Montréal’s teachers and citizens.

The answers to, “is inclusion beneficial for all children involved”, or “what can be done to facilitate the inclusion of children with special needs into regular classroom”, are still not conclusive. Decades of studies on the topic at every level of stakeholder and stage of education, and meta-analyses for every permutation of these instances have resulted in not much more than a stagnant body of research that is essentially ignored by policy makers in Canada (Lupart, 1998). Nevertheless, the consensus among researchers and the public alike is overwhelmingly in favor of inclusion (Idol, 2006). Historically, is has been parents of children with disabilities as well as parents of typically developing children who push for inclusive education, and who were at the forefront of establishing education policies that encourage children with special needs be
taught with their typically developing peers (see Andrews & Lupart, 2000). However, there are groups of today’s parents pushing for segregated special education (see Daniel & King, 1997; Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, & Lupart, 2009). With almost four decades worth of policy and research backing inclusive education, why is it that some parents are still dissatisfied with their child’s education?

The present study was an in-depth look of what Montréal parents of children learning in an inclusive classroom believe about inclusive education. To begin a thorough discussion of this topic, the framework of what inclusive education was defined as in the study must be presented. Although the formal definition of what constitutes an inclusive classroom differs between governments and schools, and from research paper to research paper (Salisbury, 2006), the thread connecting each definition is the notion of including students with diverse needs, backgrounds, ethnicities, strengths, and challenges into a regular classroom (Daniel & King, 1997; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Schrag & Burnette, 1994). In this paper, inclusion will be framed as the placement of at least one child with disabilities in a regular education classroom, focusing specifically on children with cognitive disabilities and other disabilities that impede their ability to learn without academic support. Appendix A shows the list of the disabilities included in this definition. It should be highlighted that the current study centers on disabilities that result in the dependency of children on extra support, on adaptations to curricula, or in requiring specialized material. Physical and psychological problems are not considered here unless the problem is addressed as an academic issue. Also, this list of disabilities was chosen for its accordance with Québec’s definition of a child with learning difficulties (Ministre de l’Education, Loisir, et Sport, 2004). As the definition encompasses a variety of different disabilities, the term ‘children with special needs’ will be used interchangeably with ‘children who require significant academic
Parents were of focus in the current research due to their integral role as the caregivers of the children during off-school hours and on the impact of their attitudes on the classroom environment. This position makes their opinions of the inclusive classroom as one of the most influential factors in successful inclusionary practice – for parents of children with a disability and parents of typically developing children alike (Barrafato, 1998; Downing & Peckham-Harding, 2007; Grove & Fisher, 1999; Hunt & Goetz, 1997). For parents of children of all abilities, their views on the perceived availability of teacher resources can sway their opinion of the entire classroom success level (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010; Elkins, van Kraayenoord, & Jobling, 2003; Leyser & Kirk, 2004). The academic and social advantages of inclusive education are numerous (e.g., Kirk & Mirenda, 2002a; Kirk & Mirenda, 2002b; Peltier, 1997), and parental awareness of these benefits has been shown to influence overall perceptions of inclusive education (see Garrik-Duhaney & Salend, 2000).

Parents’ levels of knowledge regarding what inclusive education entails and regarding disabilities have yet to be analyzed as factors in parental attitudes. Asking parents to define inclusion in their own words will shed light on the current status of parent awareness of what their child encounters every day in the classroom. Parents of children with special needs and parents of typically developing children may or may not differ in their explanations. The similarities and differences between the two groups are crucial to understanding where inclusive educations’ successes and failures lie. Parents’ knowledge of different disabilities commonly encountered in today’s classrooms has yet to be investigated. Previous research on teacher knowledge and attitude is unanimous in indicating their influence on the success of an inclusive
classroom (Dockrell Shield, & Rigby, 2003; Freire & Cesar, 2003; Nilholm & Alm, 2010; Skarbrevik, 2005). It only follows that parental knowledge and attitude would, too.

The quality of the potential responses from parents was key in deciding the optimal participant group. Opinions from parents of children with a disability and from parents of children without disability were represented. Dividing parents of children in the classroom into an “us versus them” dichotomy does not result in a complete picture of the classroom under evaluation, and does nothing to encourage inclusion. In terms of the age group of the children, inclusive education is said to be more widespread in elementary schools (e.g., Miller, 2004); therefore, focusing on elementary school-aged children was likely to produce richer responses from parents.

Inclusive education, as defined by this research, has a long history and a profound effect on the children that learn within its boundaries. It is a topic that cannot be approached uni-dimensionally, but is practically impossible to research with every influential factor taken into account within the scope of a Master’s thesis. However, to understand the dynamic interaction of the variables involved in parent perceptions of effective inclusion is only for the benefit of teachers, parents, and especially the children involved, and therefore should not be ignored.

An overview of the political history of people with disabilities (as defined in this research) is provided to give the reader context of where the current state of inclusionary practice originates. The factors influencing the success of inclusive education, in general and as perceived by parents, are discussed. The specific factors are, (a) the perceived availability of teacher resources, (b) the academic and social developmental advantages or disadvantages of children in the inclusive classroom, and (c) parent attitude and knowledge of inclusive classrooms and of different disabilities. Finally, the present study and hypotheses are presented.
Historical Perspective

It is well known that people with cognitive disabilities in Québec have not enjoyed a long history of inclusionary practice. Before the 1960’s, people with developmental disabilities were relegated to barren institutions that held no opportunities for any level of human rights to those who resided within their walls (Lusthaus, Gazith, & Lusthaus, 1992). During this era, laws mandated sterilization and lifelong segregation. No activities or programs were offered. Families disowned the mentally disabled, workers abused them, and educational rights were far from reach.

The segregation movement that allowed for the horrid maltreatment of people with developmental disabilities saw its downfall begin in the 1960s and 1970s when a few brazen authors published the realities of what occurred behind the tall fences of these institutions (e.g., Blatt & Kaplan, 1966; Wolfsenberger, 1969). Furthermore, with the emergence of parent-led advocacy groups during the 1950s and 1960s such as the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded (now the Canadian Association for Community Living) and the Canadian Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities, there was a push for special education services and acceptance, setting the stage for an era of disability awareness and change in Canada’s education systems (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Millet, 2004). The United Nations proclaimed the Declaration on the Right of Mentally Retarded Persons and the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons in 1975, which allowed people with disabilities to live within the community, work, vote, marry, become a parent, and other rights including the right to an education (Millet, 2004).

For example, Québec mandated legislation for education for children with disabilities to be within the ‘least restrictive environment’ in 1979 and made the public school system
responsible for the provision of special education services (Stainback, Stainback, & Bunch, 1989). However, the service model was essentially what regular schools and teachers had been practicing anyway; students requiring extra attention or different accommodations were placed in special education classes with a special teacher. The interpretation and policies of a ‘least restrictive environment’ varied from school board to school board, leading to a system that effectively separated the students enough from the mainstream classrooms that little had changed in the education system.

However, that is not to say that parents and educators thought the system to be ineffective. Teachers felt that segregating children with disabilities into special education classrooms offered reduced teacher to student ratios, led to better access to specialized materials, resources and teaching methods, and offered more individualized programming (Lupart, 2000). Parents and advocacy groups were satisfied with the simple fact their children were learning in the regular education system after years of lobbying for any type of recognition, and generally did not dispute the classroom set-up. For these reasons, the segregated classroom remained the norm for special education across three decades.

In the 1980s and 1990s, segregated special education classes began to lose funding and students previously educated in special education classrooms were being moved to regular education classrooms. This period of change is when the debate about the efficacy and benefits of inclusive education exploded. On one side of the argument, proponents of separated special education classes spewed that the level of attention, special equipment, human resources and individualized programming for student requiring services would dramatically decrease. Proponents of inclusive education took a human rights position by stating inclusion would reduce marginalization, offer social cognitive gains in all students, and would lead to no
significant losses in the quality of education for all children implicated. The debate continues into the present day, and inclusionary practices are only increasing in number. Indeed, Peltier (1997) was accurate in stating that “inclusion is not a fad that is going to go away” (p. 237).

Now after years of implementation, the majority of the research on the effectiveness of inclusive education is in its favor (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Hunt & Goetz, 1997). Policies are touting the inclusive educational model which is that all children regardless of ability are taught in the same classroom, have access to the same curricula and that lessons are adapted in a way to promote equity and access to education (Education Act, 1988; UNESCO, 2010). Despite the advantages reported in academia and the policy support of the practice, inclusive education is still regarded as controversial and sometimes in a negative light by parents (e.g., Garrik-Duhany & Salend, 2000). Parents’ experiences, as key stakeholders in a child’s education, must be appreciated for a successful implementation of inclusive practice. Parents are considered in the next section as a primary interest, but general findings pertaining to understanding successful inclusion are included for context.

Factors Influencing the Success of Inclusive Education

**Perceived availability of teacher resources.** Parents are accepting of inclusion regardless of disability type when their children seem well supported from an academic standpoint (Daniel & King, 1997; Elkins, van Kraayenoord, & Jobling, 2003), and when special services and human resources are readily available (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010; Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Peck, Staub, Gallucci, and Shwartz (2004) studied parents of children without a disability. The study found a strong relationship between a parent-reported successful classroom and teacher access to resources required in maintaining a constant level of attention on the class and to quell any disruptive behavior. These findings are consistent with those from a recent
Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, and Lupart (2009). These authors’ study of parent perceptions in rural Alberta found that a great majority of parents reported teacher support as one of the most essential and, unfortunately, varied characteristics of effective and comfortable inclusive education.

Parents of children with severe disabilities must feel that teachers are able to accommodate their children’s learning needs (Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001). The evidence for this statement is broad in terms of level of disability, nationality, and timeframe. For example, a study by Kluth, Biklen, English-Sand, and Smukler (2007) found that inappropriate curricula and a lack of individualized programming or other supports and services were listed as deciding factors in the choice some families make to move to a different community for a perceived better inclusive educational system for their child.

Furthermore, Cuckle and Bamford (2000) researched overall levels of satisfaction of parents of children with disabilities who had contact with the Educational Psychological Service in the UK. Parents were generally satisfied with the services, but some commented on wishing for more involvement and information from the teachers, thus implying that better teacher resources would improve satisfaction. Simpson and Myles (1989) found that parents of children with mild handicaps prefer that the availability of support personnel and classroom sizes be modified to yield to their child’s disability.

Teacher resources can stem from administrative attitudes and initiatives. For example, a strong positive leadership position from the administrators of an inclusive school tend to result in successful child outcomes, in terms of academic achievement and social acceptance, for all children involved (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Salisbury, 2006). Excellent communication and a strong inter-personal relationship between parents and teachers
have been shown to result in a more effective inclusive classroom as compared to inclusive classrooms that lack these characteristics (Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004; Cuckle & Bamford, 2000). A team-based approach to specialized education involving administrative staff, teachers, support staff, and parents was also linked to better outcomes for children with disabilities (Hunt, Soto, Maier, & Doering, 2003; O’Conner, 2008).

Human resources within a school system, in terms of personnel, commonly include resource teachers, consultants, and paraprofessionals or aides. Common sense dictates that the better trained, informed, and accessible these people are, the better the service provision for children in an inclusive class. Idol (2006) reports accessibility to resource personnel resulted in higher positive outcomes for children across eight inclusive schools. Also, Jull and Minnes (2007) found a significant relationship between positive attitudes of inclusive education and the perceived quality of resources and support available to children requiring extra assistance in parents of children with disabilities.

It is evident that one of the common denominators in positive parent perceptions of inclusive education is the perceived availability of teacher resources. As seen in the review of the literature, as the level of resources varies, so do the attitudes of parents from Canada, the United States, Europe, and Australia regarding inclusive education (Cuckle & Bamford, 2000; Daniel & King, 1997; Elkins, van Krayenoord, & Jobling, 2003; Loreman, et al., 2009).

**Academic and social development in the inclusive classroom.** Most often, arguments supporting inclusion focus on the academic and social benefits children with disabilities accrue when they are placed amongst typically developing peers (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Paradoxically, the arguments against inclusive education center on the academic losses children with disabilities and typically developing children face when having diverse ranges of learning abilities in the
same classroom (Salisbury & Chambers, 1994; Shanker, 1995). Bullying, rejection, and lowered self-esteem are what await children with special needs, according to inclusion naysayers (see Freeman & Alkin, 2000). Both sides of the argument will be explored in terms of (a) academic achievement, and (b) social development from the vantage point of children with disabilities and typically developing children.

In teaching children with severe disabilities, studies show there are no significant differences in academic achievement between children learning in segregated and inclusive classrooms (Hunt & Goetz, 1997; Hunt, Staub, Alwell, & Goetz, 1994; Ryndak, Downing, Jacqueline, & Morrison, 1995). These findings call into question the necessity of segregated classrooms; they exist because of the purported academic benefits for children requiring extra and specialized attention. In fact, other research shows the benefits actually occur in the inclusive education classrooms.

For example, Hunt and Farron-Davis (1992) used a same-teacher same-student design in which an individual teacher taught the same student in both special educational and inclusive educational settings at two different time periods to compare the quality of individualized education plans (IEPs) from a segregated class to an inclusive class. The teachers submitted individualized education plans (IEPs) from each setting. IEPs were analyzed for quality of content as measured by age appropriateness, functionality of skills taught, and whether or not the skills taught could be generalized. There was a significant increase in the quality of the IEP when the children were placed in the inclusive classroom, which also resulted in higher expectations of the children and subsequently, higher academic outcomes.

Similarly, Freeman and Alkin (2000) found in their meta-analysis that academic gains for children with disabilities are positively related to time spent in the regular classroom; a result
mirrored in Cushing, Clark, Carter, and Kennedy (2005). Additionally, research investigating time spent engaged in academics shows that children with disabilities are more engaged in inclusive classrooms when compared to children in segregated classrooms, score higher on standardized tests, and are more likely to meet IEP goals (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis & Goetz, 1994; Idol, 2006; Katz & Mirenda, 2002a; Logan, Bakeman, & Keefe, 1997).

A common concern from parents of typically developing children about inclusive education is the potential loss of teacher attention to non-disabled students, or a serious compromise in the curriculum resulting in a decrease in the typical child’s quality of education. For example, Daniel and King (1997) surveyed a group of parents of elementary school students from 12 different classrooms of varying inclusionary practice. The results indicated the parents were more concerned about the programming in inclusive schools than the programming in regular education classrooms, and parents of children learning in an inclusive classroom were generally more negative toward the state of their child’s education. In Millet’s (2004) longitudinal study of parents of children learning in an inclusive classroom, parents were revealed to be concerned that their child would not receive the individualized attention required for academic gains.

However, the literature gives an overall impression that children without disabilities do not lose out on quality of education when learning alongside their disabled peers (Ghandi, 2007; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan, 2007). Barrafato (1998) found teachers of elementary school-aged children learning in an inclusive setting were consistent in stating that non-disabled students did not suffer academically due to having a disabled child in the classroom, despite some feelings of spending slightly more time with those needing more attention. Hollowood, Salisbury, Rainforth and Palombaro (1994) reported similar findings comparing the degree to
which a teacher’s time is divided between instruction and time spent engaging students in regular and inclusive classrooms. Typically developing students enjoyed equal amounts of time spent engaged with their teacher regardless of which classroom they were in.

Being in an inclusive classroom as a child may mean helping out a disabled peer with homework. Luckily, Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, and Goetz (1994) conclude from their study of one classroom containing three severely disabled students that non-disabled students were not negatively affected academically by helping their special needs peers. The notion of kids helping kids brings the reader to the next topic: social development of children in an inclusive classroom. Children with disabilities will be considered first, followed by the research on children without special needs.

Some academics indicate there are negative social aspects to having children with special needs in a regular classroom. For example, students with a disability can be rejected by peers and can thus have a lowered self-image (Andrews & Lupart, 2000). Freeman and Alkin (2000) express how children may experience frustration due to the constant comparisons between them and more academically and socially able students. Finally, Stetson (1984) found parents were most concerned that ridicule or harm aimed at their child with a developmental disability would occur in a regular education classroom.

However, the evidence for social gain in inclusive classrooms is overwhelming. To begin, the findings of Hunt and Goetz (1997) negate the results of Andrews and Lupart (2000) and of Stetson (1984). They found that students with severe disabilities learn and make friendships in inclusive settings. In fact, the students with special needs in these studies were found to have larger social networks consisting of mostly children without disabilities. Social support was provided more often and received in higher quantities in a regular classroom than in
a segregated one. These findings mirrored those of Fryxell and Kennedy (1995), who found that elementary school students with severe disabilities educated in inclusive settings had more friendships with children without disabilities and larger support networks than disabled children in contained classrooms.

Similarly, and against some of their more negative findings of inclusive education, Freeman and Alkin (2000) argue that children who are integrated in general education programs full-time are more socially accepted by their typical peers than children who are present in the regular class only part-time. The children who were in regular classes full-time were more socially competent (e.g., more flexible, better language skills, and had more friends). The level of severity of disability proved not to be a factor in predicting which child would be more successfully integrated. Katz and Mirenda (2002b) also reported social acceptance of this type for children with special needs.

The reasons for this are apparent. A child with a disability who learns in an inclusive classroom is sure to learn in both academic and non-academic realms. There are countless opportunities to learn the socially and culturally relevant lessons that are unique to general education classrooms. Findings from numerous studies support this position. Specifically, Alper and Ryndak (1992) agree that inclusive education increases the opportunities for fostering friendships with children without disabilities. Cole and Meyer (1991) found that the frequency of interactions with non-disabled peers lead to an increase in reciprocal conversations and other social skills. Lee and Odam (1996) found that students with disabilities had improved behavioral outcomes in inclusive classrooms as compared to separate ones.

Perhaps most compelling is the case study by Ryndak, Morrison, and Sommerstein (1999). Melinda, a girl with a developmental disability, was transferred from a segregated classroom to
an inclusive environment. After a few years of attending a regular classroom, she presented at a conference about inclusionary practices where a moderator asked what she felt the greatest difference was between being separated from her peers and then learning in the same classroom as them. She replied, *When I was in a special class, I used to put my head down on the desk. I used to look out the door and watch the kids go by, and now they’re my friends* (p. 15).

Inclusion is beneficial for children with disabilities in a variety of ways; academics are either improved or are similar to outcomes from special education classes, and social competency is increased in terms of social skills, networks, friendships, and social and cultural navigation. The advantages of inclusion for typically developing children will now be of focus.

The social cognition of non-disabled peers increases with exposure to children who have a variety of different needs and abilities (LeRoy & Simpson, 1996). Furthermore, students without disabilities have been shown to have an increase in self-esteem when situated in an inclusive classroom - a benefit resulting from having friendships with the students with special needs and peer-tutoring them (Kishi & Meyer, 1994; Peltier, 1997; Staub, Spaulding, Peck, Gallucci, & Schwartz, 1996).

Indeed, across several studies, when asked for their view of what the benefits of inclusive education were for typically developing peers, the most ubiquitous opinion of teachers and parents was that the children learn a more accepting and understanding way of interacting with others – an increase in social cognition no teacher can incorporate into a lesson plan (Davern & Schnorr, 1991; Kishi & Meyer, 1994; Nabuzoka & Ronning, 1997; Staub et al., 1996). Downing (1996) conducted research that quantifies this claim. Three students with special needs were included in a rural public school over an 8-month period. Teachers were interviewed throughout this time. When compared to data from the beginning of the study, it was found that 35% more
teachers thought inclusion was socially beneficial to typical peers at the end of the study. Specifically, the teachers reported that the children no longer felt awkward around people who look or act differently.

Some supporters also tout that a full inclusion model is a more representative reflection of mainstream society (see Daniel & King, 1997). Having exposure to this more accurate portrayal of the real world fosters a humane and supportive environment beginning from childhood and should continue, expectedly, into adulthood (Staub & Peck, 1994-1995; Williams, 2000). The empathy acquired through the friendships or everyday interactions with children who have exceptionalities is surely one of the most compelling social development benefits of inclusive education.

**Teacher and parent attitude and knowledge.** In the previous research on parent perceptions of inclusive education, the initial level of knowledge regarding what inclusive education entails is not assessed. Neither is parental knowledge of disabilities. Teacher knowledge, on the other hand, is widely researched. Kuyini and Desai (2007) indicate that teacher knowledge of inclusion was related to effective teaching practices. Lack of knowledge and training undermines teacher confidence in implementing inclusive practices and thus can decrease the quality of instruction (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2001; Dockrell Shield, & Rigby, 2003; Freire & Cesar, 2003; Skarbrevik, 2005). Parents sense teacher insecurity. Grove and Fisher (1999) suggest that when parents of children with special needs viewed teachers as unknowledgeable, their opinion of inclusive education was not positive.

Nilholm and Alm (2010) found that a teacher attitude that creates an atmosphere of acceptance and cooperation helped to increase all students’ positive learning experiences. Moni, Joblin, van Kraayenoord, Elkins, Shiller, and Koppenhaver (2007) state that teacher attitudes are
so intertwined with the effectiveness of inclusive classrooms that positive inclusionary practices hinge on the attitudes of the staff.

Positive parent perceptions have been cited as one of the most integral factors influencing the inclusion process and in determining the success of children in inclusive classrooms (Barrafato, 1998; Downing & Peckham-Harding, 2007; Tari, Hancock, & Brophy, 1989; Westling, 1996). Parental attitudes towards the school their child attends influences the level of participation the parents engage in, as well as their ability to negotiate and communicate with school staff (Arnold, Michael, Hosley, & Miller, 1994; Kalyva, Georgiadi, M. & Tsakiris, 2007).

At this time only one study has been conducted in Canada regarding parental perceptions of inclusive education (Loreman, et al., 2009). The Canadian study was set in Alberta, a province that as a whole has a differing set of political and educational agendas from those in Québec and specifically, English Montréal. Thus, policy makers and school boards in Montréal have no information regarding how parents perceive inclusive education in this city. Given the benefits of keeping parents positive about having their child in an inclusive classroom discussed above, it is time for Montréal parents to be heard.

**Present Study and Hypotheses**

Clearly, unveiling the factors that influence positive parental perceptions are of utmost importance for providing effective inclusive education to all students. The research indicates that parents are keen to have their children in inclusive settings, but there are certain factors that must be in place for a level of satisfaction to be attained. Specifically, parents must feel that their children are attended to and that their needs are met academically and socially; in other words, parents must perceive their child’s teacher has access to resources. The academic and social benefits of inclusive education have been discussed, and when parents are aware of these
benefits, their perception of inclusive education is positive (Cushing, Clark, Carter, & Kennedy, 2005; Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Lastly, parent and teacher knowledge and attitude as have also been implicated as key characteristics of an inclusive educational environment (Downing & Peckham-Harding, 2007; Moni et al., 2007).

I aim to discover if the perceived availability of teacher resources, if parental perception of the academic and social advantages of inclusive education, and if parent knowledge of what inclusive education entails and their knowledge of disabilities interact with a Montréal parent’s overall view of their inclusive classroom. Firstly, a presumed availability of resources will be related to positive perceptions of the effectiveness of inclusive education, whereas presumed lack of resources will result in a negative attitude toward inclusive education.

Parents’ views of the academic and social advantages of learning in an inclusive classroom may affect a parent’s perception of inclusive education. In the current study, the perception (a) that children with special needs are not fully serviced in an inclusive classroom, (b) that children who are typically developing will suffer from having children with special needs in the same classrooms, (c) that children with disabilities will be better prepared for the real world, and (d) that inclusive education promotes the understanding and acceptance of differences were examined specifically.

Parental knowledge of what inclusion entails and of disabilities will interact with a parent’s sense of the effectiveness of inclusive education. Consistent with research on teacher knowledge, low parental knowledge will be related to negative perceptions of the effectiveness of inclusive education, and high knowledge will be related to positive perceptions.

Method
Ethical clearance was obtained from the McGill University Review of Ethics Board as well as from the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB), an English school board that practices complete inclusion of children with special needs. The LBPSB was chosen for this study based on its strong inclusionary policies and overall positive reception of children with different abilities (see Lester B. Pearson School Board, 1998 for a review of its policies).

Data was collected using a multi-method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative information. Mixed method data collection gives the researcher the opportunity to explore and enhance knowledge of an issue (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Furthermore, Ryndak, Morrison, and Sommerstein (1999) argue that qualitative data helps to increase the social validity of concepts and practices entrenched in legal and political ties – quite an apt description of inclusive education. A questionnaire was developed for the study, and three open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire. Follow-up interviews with a percentage of participants were conducted.

Materials

The questionnaire was created by the researcher and a team of school psychologists and educational psychologists. It was based on a previously developed questionnaire by Elkins, van Kraaynoord and Jobling (2003), and was piloted by 5 reviewers – two experts in the field of inclusive education, one professional working with children with disabilities, and two parents who were not involved in the study. From the original version, minor wording alterations were made to enhance clarity, two choices from one of the multiple-choice questions were dropped due to redundancy, and one qualitative question was added. The final version can be viewed in Appendix B.
The final version of the questionnaire was used as part of a larger study (The Building Links Project), but only certain variables were used in the present research. It included demographic information, three open-ended questions, and seven questions tapping parent perceptions of inclusive education. Parents of children with a disability were asked to answer another seven questions regarding their child’s disability, diagnosis, and their relationship with their child’s resource team. The choices within these questions were inputted into PASW as individual binomial variables, and the relationships between them were analysed using chi-squared tests. Where some analyses did not meet the assumptions required for chi-square tests due to low sample size, Fisher’s Exact Tests were used in SAS. Frequency analyses were also used to obtain information on the percentage of respondents who agreed with a certain statement.

Additionally, the participants were asked to rate their knowledge of disabilities on a scale of 1-4 (1 = High, 2 = Moderate, 3 = Low, 4 = Very Low). The disabilities the participants rated can be viewed in Appendix A.

**Participants**

Ten elementary schools were randomly chosen from the LBPSB’s list of schools and their principals were contacted both by telephone and through email. The principals of three schools decided to bring the study to their respective board of directors. Each of the three schools’ board of directors agreed to accept the study. The schools were public, and were located in areas from low to middle socioeconomic class. Compensation was entry into a draw to win a prize of $250 with the chances of winning being approximately one in 100.

More participants were recruited in Montréal from two Miriam Foundation conferences. These conferences were open to parents and were focused on developmental disabilities. The research team had a table set up in the exhibition area of the conference and provided
information about the study. The parents in attendance who decided to participate filled out the questionnaire on site based on verbal consent (see Appendix D for verbal script). They were also entered in the draw for the compensation prize.

In total, nine hundred questionnaires were distributed to the three schools. The response rate was 6% (n = 54). Twelve other parents filled out the questionnaire at the Miriam Foundation conferences in the Montréal area for a total sample of n = 66. Twenty-one of the 66 participants identified themselves as having a child with a disability requiring academic assistance, the remaining 45 participants were parents of typically developing children requiring no additional assistance. See table 1 to view the ages of the children.

Table 1

Age of Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With a Disability</td>
<td>10.80</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typically Developing</td>
<td>9.14</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9.67</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty four percent of the respondents had completed high school, 33% had completed CEGEP, 26% had completed a Bachelor’s Degree, 9% completed a Master’s Degree, 6% completed another type of education (such as a diploma), and 2% chose not to respond. Fifty percent of the respondents were aged between 36-45 years old. The next largest group was aged between 26-35, comprising 29% of the sample. Eighteen percent were 46 years old or older, 1.5% were aged 20-25, and 1.5% did not respond. Eighty-eight percent of the participants indicated they were the child’s mother, 11% reported being the father, and 1% indicated they were in another type of guardian relationship with the child.
Seven parents who have a typically developing child and three parents who have a child with a disability were randomly selected for the follow-up telephone interview from the pool of respondents who indicated they were interested in participating in a follow-up conversation. Previous multi-method research literature such as Carroll (2009) and Collins (1995) had approximately 15-25% of their samples participate in interviews. In the current study, 14% of the parents of a child with a disability were interviewed, and 16% of the parents of children without a disability participated. The participants were offered a ten-dollar gift certificate to Chapter’s bookstore for their time. Table 2 displays the demographics of the telephone interview participants. The sample was representative of the population of those participants who responded to the questionnaire.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age of parent</th>
<th>Age of child</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child with disability</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typically Developing Child</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46+</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedure**

The elementary school principals were instructed to distribute questionnaire packages only to classrooms considered to be inclusive (at least one child with disability that requires significant academic assistance). The packages contained a self-addressed, stamped envelope in
which the questionnaire, consent form and ballot for the compensation prize were included (see Appendix C for consent form and ballot). The questionnaire packages were distributed to the children by their homeroom teachers to bring home to their parents. Parents were informed by the consent form in the package that if they so wished, they were to fill out Parents as Gateways of Change in Inclusive Classrooms and return it with their ballot in the self-addressed stamped envelope. A total of two reminder slips were sent home at intervals of one week from the first distribution of the questionnaire packages.

Statistical analyses were computed using PASW (version 18.0) and SAS. Due to a low sample size and cell size requirements for chi-square analyses, knowledge scores from each disability were collapsed together to form three groups; high knowledge, average knowledge, and low knowledge. Four participants were excluded from analyses involving knowledge of disabilities as they did not rate their knowledge of at least 10 out of 12 disabilities.

The highest score a participant could attain on the knowledge of disabilities variable was 48, and the lowest was 12. The $M = 29$, and $SD = 8$. One standard deviation above or below the mean was considered to be either high or low. Therefore, a participant was considered to have low knowledge if the total of their knowledge ratings equalled 37 or more, high knowledge if their total knowledge score equalled 21 or less, and average if their score ranged from 22-36, inclusive.

The knowledge scores were compared to other variables, but the cell counts were too low in the high and low knowledge groups to obtain any valid Chi-Square statistics. A different method of dividing the participants on ‘knowledge of disability’ scores was developed. The category of ‘average knowledge’ was changed to include scores ranging from 26-32 (the mean (29) and scores a half standard deviation away from the mean (29 -/+ 4)), ‘high knowledge’
included scores from 12-25, and scores ranging from 33-48 comprised the ‘low knowledge’ category. Conveniently, this also divided the group evenly into a possible 12 scores within each category. Unfortunately, when conducting the analyses using these newly defined categories, the outcome often continued to violate the assumption that 20% or less of the cells must have an expected score of less than five (Pallant, 2001). To remedy this predicament, a Fisher’s Exact Test was conducted using SAS to obtain a probability statistic which does not require a minimum expected score in multi-nominal contingency tables (Agresti, 2007; Stokes, Davis, & Koch, 2000). Other studies have used this method of analysis in their multi-nominal contingency tables using a data set with a low sample size (Brent et al., 1994; Crocker, Stargatt, & Denton, 2010).

**Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data was derived from the three open-ended questions in the questionnaire as well as follow-up interviews. The three open-ended questions in the questionnaire were:

1. How would you define inclusive education?
2. Are there any factors not currently in place that you think will ease the inclusion of children with differing disabilities into regular classrooms?
3. What resources do you think need to be available to teachers in order for you to feel confident having your child in an inclusive classroom?

Question one was meant to contribute to the understanding of parents’ knowledge of what inclusive education entails. Questions two and three were to gain perspective on what resources parents thought their child’s teacher required to function as a leader of an inclusive classroom beyond that provided by the questionnaire. It was thought that the same underlying
theme worded differently in two questions would tap participants’ opinions in a more thorough manner.

The researcher identified themes in the three open-ended questions in the questionnaire. Themes were generated with the assumption that analyzing qualitative data is a dynamic process that is data-driven and should thus not be restricted to a pre-determined set of rules (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The process began by identifying the elements of the participants’ response, then categorizing them according to concept. Four or five themes for each of the questions were identified and participants’ responses were coded based on the overall impression portrayed in their answers, therefore each participant had one independent response. The themes were verified by an independent rater. The independent rater was blind to the purpose of the study, and Cohen’s $r$ reliability correlation between raters was at .80.

The telephone interview follow-up questions were based on both the quantitative and the qualitative results from the questionnaire. The questionnaire data did not reveal to great length the respondent’s level of experience with inclusive classrooms. It was clear from the data that, generally, participants had strong opinions about what resources were available to the stakeholders in inclusive educational environments. However, overall, parents were reluctant to elaborate in great detail in the space provided to them on the questionnaire. The specificities of what kind of resources would benefit an inclusive classroom or the teachers and parents participating in an inclusive classroom were thus not determined through questionnaire data alone. Therefore, the following two questions comprised the format of the follow-up interviews:

1. What has been your experience with inclusive classrooms?
2. What resources do you feel a classroom/teacher/school should have access to in order for you to feel comfortable having your child in an inclusive educational environment?

Telephone interview data was recorded in detailed typed notes that were expanded upon immediately following the conversation. Neary (1999) used this method of semi-structured interview transcription on a larger scale. The conversations took place within a naturalistic framework with the researcher only posing question two as a probe if the respondents were not clear or detailed in their dialogue following the first question. Themes were identified using data from the entire interview as opposed to by question. Elements of the participant’s interview were identified and categorized into one of five themes. Using this method of data reduction, it was possible for one person to give a number of responses across two or three themes. Again, a rater who was blind to the purpose of the study verified themes. Cohen’s $r$ reliability correlation was at .84.

**Results**

General findings indicate that when asked about inclusive classrooms as an overall concept, a slight majority of parents perceived inclusive education as an effective environment for children of all abilities, and most participants acknowledged the academic and social developmental advantages of inclusive education. However, it was clear that the participants did not have a unified view of what inclusive education entails. Parental knowledge of disabilities as a variable did not play a role in the perceived effectiveness of inclusive education. In the qualitative data, where information pertaining to teacher resources was anticipated, an overwhelming and unexpected negative response toward inclusionary policy at the school board level was revealed.
Quantitative data

Fifty four percent of the sample believed inclusive education is effective, while 17% felt it is not. The remaining 29% felt the effectiveness of inclusion depended on a variety factors – quite a large number considering that the questionnaire offered only the options of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ as responses. Of their own volition, these 19 participants created the additional option separate from knowledge that others had done the same. Fifty six percent of participants believed teachers lack resource materials, 41% believed teachers did not lack resources, and 3% did not respond. Fifty six percent believed that children requiring significant academic assistance’s needs were not met in a regular classroom, the remaining 44% believed needs are met. Seventy nine percent of respondents indicated that having a child with special needs in a regular classroom would not effect the academic achievements of typically developing children, 21% disagreed. Seventy one percent of participants believed that children with disabilities will be better prepared for the real world when educated in an inclusive classroom, 29% disagreed. Finally, 77% believed the mixed environment that inclusive classrooms offer promotes the understanding and acceptance of differences, and 23% disagreed.

After four incomplete cases were excluded from the analysis of the knowledge variable, the entire group was approximately evenly distributed with 19 participants reporting high knowledge, 22 average knowledge, and 21 low knowledge. The four cases were included for all subsequent analyses not involving knowledge scores.

A number of $\chi^2$ were performed, as well as Fisher’s Exact Tests as replacements for the $\chi^2$ statistic when cell counts were too small. A participants’ perception of inclusive education did not interact with their perception that teachers require additional resources, Fisher’s Exact Test, $p = 0.15$. There was a significant interaction between the perceived effectiveness of inclusive
education and the attitude that the needs of children with special needs are not met in a regular
classroom, $\chi^2(2, N = 66) = 6.54, p = 0.04$. Perception of the effectiveness of inclusive education
also had significant relationships with perceptions that typical students will not do as well in an
inclusive classroom, Fisher’s Exact Test, $p = 0.01$, that children with disabilities will be better
prepared for the real world, $\chi^2(2, N = 66) = 11.02, p = 0.004$), and that inclusive education
promotes understanding and the acceptance of differences, Fisher’s Exact Test, $p = 0.04$.

Participants’ level of knowledge of disabilities did not influence the perception of
whether or not inclusive education is effective, Fisher’s Exact Test, $p = 0.91$. Their level of
knowledge did not effect parents’ perceptions of a lack of teacher resources, Fisher’s Exact Test,
$p = 0.29$, perceptions that the needs of children with special needs are not met in a regular
classroom, $\chi^2(2, N = 62) = 0.18, p = 0.91$, that typical students will not do as well in an
inclusive classroom, Fisher’s Exact Test, $p = 0.87$, that children with disabilities will be better
prepared for the real world, $\chi^2(2, N = 62) = 0.10, p = 0.95$, or that inclusive education promotes
understanding and the acceptance of differences, Fisher’s Exact Test, $p = 0.75$.

**Qualitative Data**

Originally intended for analysis as one group, the researcher divided the sample into two:
parents of children with a disability, and parents of typically developing children. Upon analysis,
it was clear the groups were unique, despite some similarities. It was imperative to report the
data in a way that the reader can appreciate the differing experiences of parents involved in an
inclusive classroom, while remaining cognizant of the commonalities.

**Definition of inclusive education.** As a whole, participants did not have a unified
definition of inclusive education. As defined in this research, inclusive education refers to having
at least one child requiring significant academic assistance learning alongside his or her typically
developing peers in a regular classroom. This basic definition was a common response among the participants, particularly the parents of children who are typically developing. Services and resources are, of course, required for inclusive education to be effective, and indeed a number of participants indicated their awareness of this requirement within their definition. This definition was most often presented by parents of children with a disability.

Of those who did not mention having a child with special needs in a regular classroom in their definition, the most common response referred to children with disabilities having an “equal opportunity” in either the social or academic realm, or both. A minority of participants referred to inclusive education as “a tool”. The remaining participants chose not to answer the question or indicated they did not know how to define the concept. Refer to table 3 to view how participants defined inclusive education. Percents are reflective of the group the parent belongs to (with a disability \( n = 21 \) or typically developing \( n = 45 \)). Each respondent had one independent answer.
Table 3

*Participants’ Definitions of Inclusive Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>With a Disability</th>
<th>Typically Developing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Reply/Do not Know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs in Regular Classroom – Mention of Services</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs in Regular Classroom – No Mention of Services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a Tool</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Opportunity (Social and/or Academic)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factors not currently in place.** Parents were asked to indicate what factors could be implemented at their child’s school that would make the inclusive classroom more effective. Of the parents who decided to reply, most indicated policy changes or improvements within the school. For example, common answers included programming for students and teachers such as social skills training or more education on disabilities, more individualized curriculum, introduction and question and answer sessions for children at the beginning of the school year, more human resources, continuity of services from one year to another, zero tolerance of bullying, team communication with parents, and a lower student to teacher ratio. Some parents felt that no other factors were required in their school, while a minority felt that governmental policies need revision in terms of transparency of funding initiatives in inclusive education and a
greater push toward informing the broader public of different disabilities. Please see table 4 for a breakdown of participant’s responding patterns.

Table 4

*Perceived factors of an effective inclusive classroom not currently in place at child’s school*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>With a Disability</th>
<th>Typically Developing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Reply/Do not Know</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No other factors required</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy improvements within school</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy improvements at the governmental level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Resources for teachers.** Most parents of a child with a disability chose policy improvements within the school system as a method of increasing their confidence in the teachers leading their child’s inclusive classroom (e.g., training and information sessions for teachers). Second to policy improvements were direct and tangible services. As a group, parents of children without a disability saw policy change (and an increase in direct and tangible services (e.g., technology) as equally important in feeling confident in having children with special needs in the regular classroom. In table 5 the reader will find a breakdown of participant responses.
Table 5

*Perceptions of what resources should be available to teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>With a Disability</th>
<th></th>
<th>Typically Developing</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Reply/Do not Know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No additional resources required</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services (direct, tangible)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy improvements within the school</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove special needs children from regular ed. classrooms</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Telephone interviews.** The telephone interviews further highlight both the similarities and differences of experience between the two groups of parents. A difference was clear in terms of understanding the school system and thus inclusive education. Parents of a child with a developmental or other learning disability were more aware of what inclusive education currently entails, and what it requires for optimal effectiveness. Their interviews were inundated with suggestions and grievances toward the school board, such as curriculum adjustments and standardization and homework programs. Generally, they were also more negative toward inclusionary practices. All three parents of this group spoke of their impression that their child’s teacher was overwhelmed and did not have the proper time for them or their child. One parent lamented at the lack of classroom options available to her child, as she was highly disappointed with her child’s education. Her daughter, she reported, was only getting worse.
As compared to parents of a typically developing child, the answers of parents of a child with a disability were more specific as to what direct services a school or teacher could offer to increase the effectiveness of inclusive education. For example, one participant listed, “a smart board, laptops that read to the child, extra devices to help the child function, age-appropriate material, and visual material” as technological resources her child could use in the classroom.

Parents of a typically developing child were less aware of what encompasses inclusive education, unless they had extensive experience with an inclusive classroom (such as work within the education system, or having several children). In these cases, their responses were as rich and were similar in nature to parents of children with a disability. One less enlightened parent referred to inclusion as, “having the teacher follow the kids throughout the years”. When the researcher probed about the level of inclusion in her child’s classroom, she stated, “not everything is perfect, not everyone has two arms, two legs, most kids are sheltered from the differences”, indicating a focus on physical disabilities. She was not alone. Another participant replied, “there is one I saw when I dropped my daughter off” when asked about her child’s classroom composition. When probed to explain, the “one” she referred to was a child in a wheelchair. These two parents are examples of people who are not fully informed of what inclusive education entails.

However, many of the parents of typically developing children offered fruitful and informed responses. Two mothers considered the hiring standards for integration aides are not adequate. Three spoke of the need for increased communication between not only the teachers and parents, but also between other service providers such as school psychologists, social workers, autism/behaviour consultants, and resource teachers.
Parents of children with a disability were far more inclined to comment on the academic benefits or concerns they experience having their child in an inclusive classroom, while parents of typically developing children focused more on the social benefits or concerns. Parents of children who are not disabled frequently commented about the benefits of having their child exposed to diversity, and the compassion and tolerance that ensues. Three were concerned about potential bullying of and the self-esteem of the children with disabilities. Two also commented about how children with special needs might scare the other children.

Table 6 highlights the major themes found in the telephone interviews, and although the responses are divided by group, the numbers are not reflective of group size. Each element from each parent’s interview was counted individually and independently.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes from telephone interviews</th>
<th>With a Disability (n = 3)</th>
<th>Typically Developing (n = 7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy improvements within school</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy improvements at the governmental level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services (direct, tangible)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic concerns or benefits</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social development concerns or benefits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The study sought to understand the factors that influence Montréal parents’ perceptions of the effectiveness of inclusive education. It was expected that the parents’ perceptions of the
availability of teacher resources would be related to whether or not the parent thought inclusive education is effective. The parents were asked if they agreed with statements pertaining to the academic and social developmental benefits of learning in an inclusive classroom, to which agreement was to coincide with positive perceptions of inclusive education, and disagreement was to coincide with negative perceptions. Perceptions of teacher knowledge and attitudes, and parent knowledge and attitudes were thought to interact with belief that inclusive education is effective.

A mixed method of data collection was used to attempt to grasp the nuances of participant expression. Quantitative data were collected in order to assess a large number of participant views in a short amount of time. Also, these data allowed for computation of statistical analyses and to provide participants with a quick method of responding should they have not wanted to take the time to respond to the open-ended questions or the telephone follow-up. The qualitative data provided more depth and detail than the simple quantitative data, and were focused on the research questions regarding knowledge and resources.

**Perceived availability of teacher resources.** The participants’ perceptions regarding a lack of teacher resources was not a factor in perceiving whether or not inclusive education is effective, and thus was an unexpected finding according to previous research (Idol, 2006; Jull & Minnes, 2007). However, with a closer analysis of the qualitative data, we see one subset of parents did follow previous research predictions exactly. Parents of children with disabilities suggested resources such as special services and human resources as fundamental characteristics of an inclusive classroom, consistent with parents in previous studies (e.g., de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010; Kluth, Biklen, English-Sand, & Smukler, 2007). The inconsistency within this finding is likely due to the fact that over half of the parents in this group were recruited at a
Miriam conference that highlights disability issues and practices. Thus, these parents likely had an interest and prior knowledge regarding inclusive education and disability. Low sample size also may have contributed to the statistically non-significant result from the analysis. However, there is the glaring fact that this finding is consistent in the theme that parents of students with a disability were more accurate in defining inclusive education. Perhaps it is the mere exposure to the inner workings of the school system parents of children with disabilities that raises their awareness of the potential lack of teacher resources. Parents of children who are typically developing would not necessarily have this exposure and therefore would not know what resources are missing or incomplete.

**Academic and social development in the inclusive classroom.** The perception of the effectiveness of inclusive education was significantly associated to two academic factors and two social development factors. Negative perceptions of inclusive education were related to perceived negative academic outcomes for both typically developing children and children with disabilities (i.e., the variables (a) needs of children with disabilities are not met in a regular classroom environment, and (b) typically developing children will not do as well in an inclusive classroom). Negative perceptions of inclusive education were also related to participant disagreement that children with different disabilities learning in an inclusive classroom are better prepared for life in the real world, and a disagreement with the statement that inclusive education promotes the understanding and acceptance of differences.

The finding that a negative perception of inclusion is associated with a perception that children will be academic disadvantaged in an inclusive classroom is consistent with research (Daniel & King, 1997; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010). Furthermore, parents who disagreed with statements regarding the social advantages of inclusive education were more likely to have
a negative view of inclusion; a finding that is not unique to this study (Daniel & King; de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010). Therefore, it seems as though having a negative view of inclusive education tends to be related to a disregard or unawareness of both the academic and social advantages of learning in an inclusive environment accrued by all children.

Any person with experience in classrooms, inclusive or otherwise, may concede that having a child who requires extra attention from the teacher in the class will prove to be at the expense of the other children’s opportunity to learn. Therefore, it is not shocking that some parents did not believe there are academic advantages to practicing inclusion. However, given that much literature supports the claim that there are academic advantages for students with or without disabilities, the belief is unfounded. These parents may not have contact with classrooms that practice effective inclusion, in that the teacher may be unsupported in the classroom and therefore time taken to accommodate a child with special needs actually does impede the entire classroom’s learning outcome.

That the social advantages of inclusive education seem to be overlooked by those who had a negative opinion is in need of attention. Although it is disconcerting that the most pervasive and uncontested benefit of inclusive education for typical children as well as children with special needs is not acknowledged by some parents, it is not the first finding of its kind. Peck et al. (2004) indicate parents do not see the academic and social benefits of inclusive education as related. Again, one explanation may be that parents who do not have much experience with an effective inclusive classroom can be unaware of the social benefits. However, there is a well-known tendency for participants to report in socially acceptable ways, where in this case it would be socially acceptable to be positive about including people with disabilities in the classroom. A grimmer explanation might be that participants who disagreed with statements
touting the social benefits of an inclusive classroom are unfamiliar with or even afraid of people with disabilities. The fear of the unknown may be playing a part in the neglect of the clearly documented social benefits of inclusive education.

Regardless of its nature, a negative attitude on the part of any stakeholder in inclusive education is detrimental on a number of levels. To implement inclusionary practices would seem futile to people who do not believe there is any benefit in it. Therefore, effective inclusionary practices will flounder if the stakeholders, in this case parents, are not aware of the potential benefits inherent in inclusive education. Potential solutions are proposed in a later section.

**Teacher and parent knowledge and attitude.** Analyses using parent knowledge of disabilities as a variable resulted in no statistically significant results. This was an unexpected finding on the part of the researcher, but no previous research is available to determine whether or not this is an anomaly. However, from the research on the interaction between perceived effectiveness of inclusive education and teacher knowledge (e.g., Cook, 2002), one would assume parents would follow suit. This finding calls into question the validity of the ‘knowledge of disabilities’ variable, and indicates a need for further research.

Although parental knowledge of inclusive education as determined from their definitions was not analyzed formally, a preliminary computation indicates this variable may be a more appropriate method of measuring parent knowledge and in future research should be analyzed as a discrete variable. The majority of parents of children with a disability defined inclusive education correctly, mentioning service provision; most parents of typically developing children defined correctly but without mentioning services. From this data, it can be assumed parents of children with disabilities may have more knowledge of the details of inclusionary practice. However, parents did not vary significantly in thinking inclusive education is effective based on
group membership. Perhaps there is no interaction, or perhaps the low sample size affected the results.

The reasons why inclusive education leads to satisfaction in most parents, discontent in some, and complete bewilderment in others are obviously multipronged. The fact that those opposed to inclusive education tended to be unaware of the academic and social developmental advantages available to their children in an inclusive classroom is but a symptom of a larger problem, deep-rooted in school board policy. Of the parents who participated in the qualitative sections of the study, most reported a need for some type of policy improvements. It cannot simply be a coincidence that numerous parents of children from all abilities replied with a common call for help: we need more funding, we need more information, we need a team effort. The specific suggestions for change are simple, inexpensive, and in the researchers’ opinion, attainable.

Perhaps the factor that most motivates one to take action is that policy change, effective inclusive education, and positive parental perceptions are intertwined. It has been discussed that effective inclusion and positive perceptions are related. This is a micro-level interaction. If policy is included into the equation, a macro-level interaction is created. Changes at this level will trickle down, in theory, to other aspects of the system. The negative perceptions held by some parents regarding the effectiveness and the benefits of inclusive education may thus be ameliorated by policy change.

**Policy**

The findings provide a clear picture that parents want policy improvements. What is especially poignant about this finding is that the aim of the study did not focus on policy. Based on an extensive literature review, the development of the questionnaire used perceived
availability of resources, opinions of the academic and social benefits of inclusive education, and parent and teacher knowledge and attitude as focal points of interest. The participants shared a strong position toward policy reform despite the concentration on other variables in the forms of data collection. Suggestions of how to implement these changes were offered in abundance by the participants, and most suggestions for change fall to the jurisdiction of the school board. Three main, connected, areas of change were put forth: class size and student to teacher ratio, teacher training and knowledge, and student-based services. Québec law states that it is the school board’s responsibility to set class size and hiring standards (Education Act, 1988), and that school boards are responsible for their own resource budget and the school tax proceeds in their constituencies. A review of the participants’ suggestions and relevant research is to follow.

The most common suggestion made by the participants was pertaining to class size and student to teacher ratio. Teachers agree that smaller student-teacher ratios should be smaller within an inclusive classroom (Rampaul & Freeze, 1991). If the school board cannot budget for more teachers, perhaps hiring more paraprofessionals or allowing parent volunteers into classes would be advisable. Adapted materials may also help alleviate the pressures of teaching an inclusive classroom. As one parent suggested, a child who is working at a pace she or he is comfortable at is less likely to cause disruption.

Similarly, a concern with teacher knowledge and training was evident. Participants reported that teachers require more training and knowledge in order to lead an inclusive classroom. Parents of children with disabilities especially, spoke of a lack of teacher competency when interacting with their child. An earlier discussion of the topic revealed that teacher knowledge is directly related to positive parent perceptions and an effective inclusive classroom (Cook, 2002; Kuyini & Desai, 2007). Further, a body of research has suggested that pre-service
teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach inclusive classrooms, and that many teachers are not well versed in areas of disability (Cook, 2002; Loreman, Sharma, Forlin, & Earle, 2005). There is evidence to suggest that many teachers do not feel that they are well versed in the skills, or have the time necessary to adapt a curriculum to special learners (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002).

Courses on disabilities for pre-service teachers ameliorate feelings of anxiety and insecurity toward teaching an inclusive classroom (Loreman, 2007; Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006; Shippen, Crites, Houchins, Ramsey, & Simon, 2005; Rampaul & Freeze, 1991). It is the responsibility of the school boards to require more knowledge and training for school staff, and it is clear from this and other research that parents and teachers alike would appreciate the increase in quality service provision.

As parents suggested, student-based services are an excellent way to curb costs of resourcing and fostering a more positive environment for children with disabilities. For example, peer support was found to be an effective alternative to paraprofessional support (Cushing, et al., 2005). One parent suggested having a question and answer period at the beginning of the year for students regarding the disabilities they will encounter. This may reduce tension regarding the “elephant in the room” that there is a person with a disability in the class, and allow children who otherwise would not understand another child’s behavior to have the opportunity to learn about the disability and how to befriend someone with that disability in a safe space.

The suggestions the parents made for policy change are all validated by research and attainable at the school board level. Some, of course, would take longer to implement than others, such as limiting classroom size and changing policy to require higher standards in terms of knowledge of disabilities and inclusive education. But, school boards can surely encourage
their schools to implement student-based services, and offer information sessions on disability and inclusion to teachers, parents, and students alike. Negative attitudes will then be less likely to occur, and less likely to influence the effectiveness of inclusive education.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to the current study. Firstly, an unusually low response rate in collecting questionnaire data resulted in low sample size. In future studies where questionnaire data is required from parents in an inclusive classroom, it is advisable to use a method that recruits the parents directly rather than involving their children in the distribution of questionnaires.

Statistical analyses were not ideal due to the low sample size. Often, there were not enough participants to fill cells in Chi-square analyses and thus a less powerful analysis (Fisher’s Exact Test) was applied in some cases. As a further consequence of a low sample size, the knowledge of disabilities variable was divided in a way that is not commonly seen in research. Although the division was done in a way that it sound, it may have skewed the results of the study in terms of the sizes of the groups high knowledge and low knowledge. Additionally, as in all analyses conducted with a low sample size, the statistically non-significant findings in these analyses may become significant if a larger sample size is used.

Another limitation was that the vast majority of respondents were female, and half were between the ages of 36-45; a group which may not be necessarily representative of the communities sampled. A greater effort to hear from representatives of all parent members of the school board jurisdiction should be made in future studies. With a more representative sample, the findings can generalize to other school boards or cities, whereas in this case it would be difficult to do so.
There may have been a self-selection bias in the respondents who indicated a desire to participate in the follow up discussion. Twelve of the 21 participants who were parents of a child with disabilities were recruited from Miriam Foundation conferences. These parents, in attending the conference, had an interest in the topic already and thus are likely not representative of the average parent. Additionally, all the parents who participated in the telephone interviews were educated mothers who, generally, had clearly given the topic thought. As a result, the findings are difficult to generalize to the school communities the participants were recruited from, as well as other communities outside the LBPSB’s jurisdiction.

Future studies may use how parents define inclusive education as a discrete variable to compare to other predictors of positive parental attitude. It may be that this variable is a more valid indicator of parent knowledge than the knowledge of disabilities. In the current study, knowledge of disabilities offered no variability, and thus other methods of assessing knowledge should be investigated.

**Final Thoughts**

Despite these limitations, the study did achieve in gaining a perspective of inclusive education that had yet to be examined in Montréal. Overall, it is clear that inclusive education is for parents of children with a disability and parents of typically developing children, a complex issue. A majority indicated positive perceptions of the effectiveness inclusive education. Contrary to previous research, perceived availability of teacher resources was not related to attitudes regarding the effectiveness of inclusive education. Those who had a negative attitude toward the effectiveness of inclusion also did not acknowledge the academic and social developmental benefits of learning in an inclusive classroom. Parental knowledge of disabilities did not prove to be a factor in parents’ views of the effectiveness of inclusion. As a group,
parents did not have a clear definition of what inclusive education entails. Parents of children with a disability defined inclusion in more accurate detail than parents of typically developing children. Most parents who participated in the qualitative sections of the study spoke for policy reform at the school board level and offered suggestions for implementation of a more effective and positive inclusionary practice.

It can be derived from this and previous research that a parents’ state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with inclusive education is often the result of some interaction involving experience and attitude (e.g., de Boer, Pijil, & Minnaert, 2010). The overwhelming call from parents for policy reform indicates the interaction is even more complex, requiring an approach to inclusive practice from all angles (parents, to teachers, to school board policy). Only by working at every step by which the parents experience inclusive education can efforts result in awareness and understanding, truly the very elements that when absent, underlie negative attitudes.

Children’s educational experience is a priority for parents, teachers, and policy makers. When inclusive education is working well, there are documented benefits for all children in terms of academic and social development (Freeman & Alkin, 2000; Kalambouka et al, 2007; Peck et al., 2004). Inclusive education is therefore the key to a positive experience for children of all abilities, at least in terms of academic and social development. Throughout history and as seen in the current study, research supporting this statement has often been ignored by stakeholders, especially policy makers (Lupart, 1998). It is time for all decision makers in effective inclusion to take a stand in making inclusion a high priority.
References


Cook, B. G. (2002). Inclusive attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses of pre-service general


doi:10.1177/10442073070180010501


Millet, S. (2004). Inclusion or exclusion: The special education dilemma in Québec public high schools. (Master’s thesis) Concordia University, Montréal, QC.


Appendix A

List of Disabilities Included in Questionnaire

Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder
Autism Spectrum Disorder
Down Syndrome
Emotional Disorder
Fragile X Syndrome
Hearing and/or Visual Difficulty
Language Disorders
Learning Disorders (Reading/Math)
Motor Difficulties
Non-Specific Intellectual or Developmental Delay
Tourettes Syndrome
Appendix B

Parents as Gateways of Change in Québec’s Inclusive Classrooms

Please read each question carefully and fill out the survey accordingly. All responses will remain confidential.

1. Gender of Child:
   Male .......................................................... □
   Female ...................................................... □

2. Relation to child:
   Father ......................................................... □
   Mother ...................................................... □
   Other, please specify: _____________________________.

3. Your Age:
   20-25 .......................................................... □
   26-35 .......................................................... □
   36-45 .......................................................... □
   46+ ........................................................... □

4. Your level of education:  (Please check highest attained)
   High school .................................................. □
   CEGEP ......................................................... □
   Bachelor’s Degree .......................................... □
   Inclusive Education Certificate ................................ □
   Masters ....................................................... □
   Doctorate .................................................... □
   Other certification/degree (please specify): ________________.

5. Age of your child: ............... years ............... months

6. Current cycle and year (grade): ..............................................

7. How would you define inclusive education?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
8. Do you feel as though inclusive education is effective?
   Yes .......................................................... ..................
   No..............................................................

9. How do you rate your current level of knowledge the following disabilities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fragile X Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hearing or Visual Difficulty</td>
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<td>Language Disorder</td>
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<td>Learning Disability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Difficulty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math Difficulty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tourettes Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Specific Intellectual or Developmental Delay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motor Difficulties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Disorder (e.g. anxiety, oppositional defiant disorder, etc.)</td>
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</table>

10. Does your child have a disability?
    If YES, please proceed to the next question.
    If NO, please proceed to question 18.

11. Which of the following describes your child’s disability?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention Deficit Disorder/ADHD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
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<td>Down Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fragile X Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hearing and/or Visual Difficulty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language Disorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Disorders</td>
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<td>Reading Difficulty</td>
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<td>Math Difficulty</td>
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<td>Tourettes Syndrome</td>
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<td>Non-Specific Intellectual or Developmental Delay</td>
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<td>Emotional Disorder (e.g. anxiety, oppositional defiant disorder, etc.)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

12. At what age did you first notice any difficulties? .................................................................

13. When did you receive a professional diagnosis? ...........................................................................
14. Who made the professional diagnosis? (Please choose only one)
   Pediatrician..............................................................................................................
   Family Doctor ...........................................................................................................
   Child Psychiatrist .....................................................................................................
   School Psychologist .................................................................................................
   Geneticist ...................................................................................................................
   Teacher ......................................................................................................................

15. Your child is currently attending:
   A regular class part-time (less than 50% of the time), spending the rest of time outside of the classroom..........
   A regular class full-time with extra support....................................................................
   A regular class full-time without extra support ............................................................
   Other, please specify: ____________________________________________________________

16. How would you describe your relationship with your child’s resource team?
   Excellent - We meet when needed and I can contact the team to discuss any issues..................
   Good to Satisfactory - We meet occasionally with an adequate amount of contact...............
   Unsatisfactory to Poor - We meet sporadically with minimal contact..............................

17. What would improve your relationship with your child’s resource team?
   A Frequency of Meetings.............................................................................................
   B Increased Level of Communication...........................................................................
   C Shared Resources ....................................................................................................
   D More Knowledgeable Resource Team ........................................................................
   E Openness to Collaboration ....................................................................................... 
   Other, Please Specify: ________________________________________________________________

17. a Which of the above would you rate as the most important factor (a, b, c, d, or e)? Please choose only one.
   ........................................................................

18. Approximately how often are you in contact with your child’s inclusive classroom?
   Weekly .........................................................................................................................
   Monthly .....................................................................................................................
   Once or Twice a Year ............................................................................................... 
   None ..........................................................................................................................
   Other (please specify): _____________________________________________________________.

19. In your opinion, what challenges is your child’s classroom facing by including students with differing developmental disabilities in the classroom? (Please check all that apply)
A  Teachers are having a hard time managing the classroom .................................................................
B  IEP’s (Individualized Education Plans) are not being carried out successfully ....................................
C  Teachers and other staff have a negative attitude towards children with developmental disabilities .............
D  Hard to get typical and atypical children to socialize and/or work together...........................................
E  The teachers lack resource materials to help them teach children with differing abilities .............................
F  None of the above .................................................................................................................................
Other, Please specify: .............................................................................................................................

19. a Which of the above would you rate as the most challenging factor? ....................................................

20. Please indicate what stressors you experience due to your child’s participation in an inclusive classroom, if any.
A  I do not experience any stress due to my child’s participation in an inclusive classroom........................
B  The behaviour of children with special needs requires more patience from the teacher ..............................
C  It is likely that children with special needs will show behavioural problems in a regular classroom setting......
D  Children with special needs are likely to create confusion in the regular classroom.................................
E  Teachers of regular classrooms do not have enough resources to teach children with special needs ..........
F  The curriculum in a general classroom does not match the needs of children with differing disabilities ........
G  The presence of children with special needs will be harmful to the education of the non-disabled children ....
Other, please specify: .............................................................................................................................

20. a Which of the above would you rate as the most stressful factor? ............................................................

21. Please indicate which of the following features of a school you think would be a positive factor when including children with special needs in a regular classroom.
A  Smaller class sizes ..................................................................................................................................
B  Teachers who are eager to team up with specialist staff ...........................................................................
C  A positive attitude from all people who work at the school ........................................................................
D  More time for teachers and parents to talk about their child’s experience in the inclusive classroom ....
E  Additional educational resources for teachers about the disabilities present in their classroom ................
F  Use of parents or aides to assist children .................................................................................................
G  In-service training for teachers ................................................................................................................
H  Having therapy services for children with disabilities included in their school day (psychological, physical, speech/language) ........................................................................................................
Other, please specify: .............................................................................................................................

21. a Which of the above would you rate as the most important feature? .......................................................
22. Which of the following would you describe as disadvantages to inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms? (Please check all that apply)
   A. The needs of children with special needs will not be met in a regular classroom .................................................................
   B. Typical students will not do as well in school if taught in an inclusive environment .................................................................
   C. Children with special needs might be bullied or teased ..............................................................................................................
   D. Children with special needs will show behavior problems ......................................................................................................
   E. The extra staff in the classroom might be distracting to others ................................................................................................

22. a Which of the above would you rate as the most disadvantageous factor? .................................................................

23. Which of the following would you describe as advantages to the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms? (Please check all that apply)
   A. Children with disabilities will be better prepared for the real world ................................................................................................
   B. Students gain a greater sense of community ............................................................................................................................
   C. Students gain an increased capacity to get along with others ..................................................................................................
   D. Provides leadership opportunities for stronger students ..........................................................................................................
   E. Students with disabilities will have the opportunity to model positive behaviour .................................................................

23. a Which of the above would you rate as the most advantageous factor? .................................................................

24. Which of the following describes your attitude towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms? (Please check all that apply)
   A. The needs of children with special needs are best served in separate classrooms .................................................................
   B. Children with special needs do better in school when they face the challenge of learning the same subjects as their typical peers ........................................................................................................
   C. Typical students will not do as well in school if taught in an inclusive environment ................................................................
   D. Children with special needs will benefit socially and emotionally from being in a regular classroom ................................
   E. The mixed environment that inclusion offers promotes understanding and the acceptance of differences ...
   F. It is likely that children with special needs will show behaviour problems in a regular classroom environment ........
   G. The inclusive environment can be beneficial for children without special needs ........................................................................

24. a Which of the above would you say best describes your attitude? ........................................................................

25. Are there any other factors not currently in place that you think will ease the inclusion of children with differing disabilities into regular classrooms?
   .................................................................................................................................................................................................
   .................................................................................................................................................................................................
   .................................................................................................................................................................................................
   .................................................................................................................................................................................................
   .................................................................................................................................................................................................
Thank you for your participation!
Appendix C

"The development of a virtual resource tool on developmental disabilities for educators and families: linking research and practice."

In each of today’s very diverse classrooms, there are unique sets of opportunities and challenges. We are developing a website aimed at helping you, your child, and your child’s educators make inclusive classrooms the best possible learning environments they can be.

This website will be a free resource tool you and your child’s educators can use independently or together to help better understand developmental disabilities, and to make the inclusive classroom a productive learning environment. Learning and behavioural strategies for a large number of developmental disabilities at each core developmental stage will be available for both parents and teachers. It will offer new, up to the minute information on each disability from university-based research sources. Our goal is to not only create a useful resource tool for those involved in educating a child with a developmental disability, but also to foster a greater understanding of developmental disabilities and those who are affected by them. Your input will guide what will be on the website – we will tailor the material on the website to reflect the current informational and resource needs that parents, students, and educators in Montréal’s inclusive schools say they require.

We need your help. Please fill out the included questionnaire and sign the consent form indicating you understand what the purpose of the questionnaire is and what is required from you, and mail them back to us in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. You are by no means obligated to fill out any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, and you can withdraw from participating at any time. All your responses will remain completely confidential. Only the research team will see your completed questionnaire. Please contact us if you have further questions. We will be happy to answer them.

We thank you kindly for considering this request. Please submit your name and contact information if you wish to be entered in a draw for a chance at one of two $250 cash prizes.

Sincerely,

Tara Flanagan, Assistant Professor, McGill University
Director: Social Policy, Advocacy, Research, Community (SPARC)
Tel: (514) 398-3441. Email: tara.flanagan@mcgill.ca

Marina S. Dupasquier, M.A. Student/Research Assistant, McGill University
Child Laboratory for Research and Education in Developmental Disorders
Tel: (514) 398-2450. Email: marina.dupasquier@mail.mcgill.ca
CONSENT FORM:
In signing this consent form, I recognize that the study has been explained to me, and that I understand the purpose of the study. I also agree that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and that all my questions have been answered satisfactorily.
I, ______________________________________, have read the above description. I fully understand the procedures, advantages and disadvantages of the study, which have been explained to me. I freely and voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

Name of the participant

__________________________________________________________________________________
Signature                                      Date

----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
Yes, please enter me in the draw for a chance at one of two $250 cash prizes! (Odds of winning are approximately 1 in 100).

Name:__________________________________________________________

Contact Info:__________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix D

Verbal Script for Conferences

The purpose of this study is to assess the attitudes and perceptions of those parents and legal guardians whose children are in the early inclusive educational settings. We are asking that you complete this 15-minute questionnaire so we can learn from your experience with inclusive education. We will also be using this information to guide the development of a web resource tool aimed at helping parents and educators involved in inclusive education.

If you decide to complete the questionnaire, you may stop at any time, and you will not have to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable responding to. All your answers will remain confidential, and only members of the research team will be seeing completed questionnaires. If you would like to know the results of the study, please provide us with a means of contacting you.