Principals Facing Inclusive Schooling or Integration

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Abstract

This article presents part of the results of a large research project on favorable conditions to academic development and achievement of students with learning difficulties in regular classes in Grades 5 and 6. More particularly, it focuses on the subjective views of three school principals who participated in this research about inclusive education or integration of students with exceptional learning needs and how these views connect with actions initiated and obstacles encountered within their schools respectively. Physical integration of students with learning challenges in the regular classroom can be expanded to full membership and programming for all students given an inclusive philosophy and practice. The principals' discourses, recorded during individual interviews, have been analyzed in light of the most important elements within our frame of reference. Three different approaches (academic integration, social integration, and inclusion) and three distinct leadership styles (organizational, transactional, and a third leadership style based on the "reculturing" principle) have been identified and question the type of leadership that is most likely to favor necessary changes in views and practices of inclusive education within their establishments. In the belief that a school's evolution toward a philosophy and principles of inclusion is consistent with a long process of co-construction of meanings shared among individuals from that community, this study puts forward the idea that these principals are guided by adaptability to their environment and act according to principles that agree with their staff members. These findings provide insight into the ways that principals integrate their approaches and beliefs about including students with difficulties into their overall work as leaders and provide ideas for further study.

Résumé

Cet article présente une partie des résultats d'une importante recherche sur les conditions favorables au développement et à la réussite scolaires des élèves ayant des difficultés d'apprentissage dans les classes de 5ème et de 6ème année. Plus particulièrement, il met l'accent sur les points de vue subjectifs de trois directeurs d'école qui ont participé à cette recherche sur l'éducation inclusive ou l'intégration, et la manière dont ces points de vue sont en lien avec les actions entreprises et les obstacles rencontrés dans leur école respective. Leur discours, enregistrés lors d'entretiens individuels, ont été analysés à la lumière des éléments les plus importants au sein de notre cadre de référence. Trois points de vue différents (l'intégration scolaire, l'intégration sociale et l'inclusion) et trois leaderships distincts (organisationnel, transactionnel, et un fondé sur le principe de « reculturation ») ont été identifiés et posent la question de quel type de leadership favorise le mieux les changements nécessaires à une vision et aux pratiques d'une école intégrative dans leur établissement. Convaincue que l'évolution d'une école vers la philosophie et les principes de l'inclusion est un long processus de construction de sens partagés entre tous les individus qui forment cette collectivité, cette étude avance l'idée que ces directeurs sont guidés par leur capacité d'adaptation à leur environnement et agissent conformément aux principes qui sont approuvés par les enseignants.

Principals Facing Inclusive Schooling or Integration

Introduction

A strong movement in North America and in other countries concerned with philosophical reflections on rights to education and equal opportunities for everyone advocates inclusive education to better meet the needs of all students (Maertens, 2004; Vienneau, 2004). Conceptually, the expression 'academic inclusion' refers to full-time integration of all students—no matter what their difficulties are—in a regular class corresponding to their age and located in a school in their district (Bélanger, 2004). In this way, according to this inclusive principle, students make academic progress with students their age and pass each school year normally (Parent, 2004). A successful inclusion implies a planned intervention that will provide the teacher and all students in the class with accommodations and support necessary for everyone's success, and success in the best possible environment (Bélanger, 2004; Maertens, 2004). In scientific as well as in philosophical literature, the concept of inclusion tends more and more to replace integration (Aucoin & Goguen, 2004; Beaupré, Bédard, Courchesne, Pomerleau, & Tétreault, 2004; Maertens, 2004; Vienneau, 2004), which implies including a disabled student in a regular class insofar as it does not impose an excessive constraint on the school or does not greatly undermine students' rights (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1999). Thus, according to the philosophy behind this concept, some students are either difficult to integrate or cannot be integrated so that traditional placement procedures with associated services are retained (assistance in regular classes, assistance outside of class, special class within a regular school or a special school), ultimately contributing to upholding segregated services (Vienneau, 2004).

In school environments, inclusive schooling and even integration still face several obstacles and are not accepted unanimously. In this respect, several scholars question the principal's role and how key this role can be in terms of their staff's support for the philosophical principles and the success of inclusion (Beaupré, Bédard, Courchesne, Pomerleau, & Tétreault, 2004; Bélanger, 2004; Doyle, 2002). This question received particular attention in a large study focusing on favorable conditions regarding the academic development and the success of disabled students in regular classes in Grades 5 and 6.[1] It is to be noted that this study took place in schools in Quebec where the adopted ministerial policy is that of integration, not inclusion. Individual interviews were held with the principals of these schools (a woman and two men) to establish their subjective views of school integration and to comprehend how these views connect to actions undertaken and obstacles encountered within their respective schools. First, we will give a description of the relevant literature, frame of reference, and methodological framework in this study, all of which were used to analyze principals' discourses and second, results of this study will be presented and discussed.

Theoretical background
According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), a child's development results from multiple interactions with his immediate

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1. *In situ* observations were made in three classes in three different elementary schools to identify success factors linked to class management, teacher-student relationships, and teaching methods in French and mathematics. This research took place in French-speaking environments in Quebec (Canada).

environment, i.e. different microsystems (e.g., family, school) during a given period. One could be tempted to attribute the success or failure of school inclusion or integration to people with whom the child interacts directly, which is mostly the teacher in terms of school environment. However, the model also postulates that the child is also influenced by 1) the relationships existing between two or more of his immediate environments or mesosystem, "in short, … a system of two or more microsystems" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 1016) such as the relation between his family and his school; 2) the relationships existing between one of his microsystems and another system to which he does not belong or exosystem (e.g., relationships between his school and the school board); and 3) the society in which he lives or macrosystem, which is to say influence by the culture, institutions, religion, and so forth in which he grows. From such an angle, it becomes possible to analyze the importance of principals in regards to the future of students. Indeed, they are themselves influenced by the macrosystem formed from political decision-makers (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Principals find themselves in the exosystem (by virtue of their relationship with the school board), as well as in the mesosystem (by virtue of their relationship with the teacher and other interveners), and in the child's microsystem (by virtue of their direct connections with the child and parents) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). They are perceived by many scholars as an authority who plays a key role in the success of implementing inclusive schooling, whether from a managerial point of view or from a more abstract, philosophical point of view (Beaupré et al., 2004; Bélanger, 2004; Collins & White, 2001; Guzmán, 1997; Ingram, 1997; Parent, 2004; Praisner, 2003).

Riehl (2000) suggests an interesting epistemological framework to explain more precisely how principals can bring about the necessary changes, especially as far as their staff adhesion to the basis of inclusion is concerned. Riehl occupies a position between two theoretical trends: on the one hand, sociological theories that consider the school to be an institutionalized organization and, on the other hand, theories about organizational sense-making, a framework that considers the school to be both a cognitive and social construction. From this viewpoint, meaning-making is placed at the centre of the dynamics of this structure. In this way, the school constructs itself around meanings that individuals hold about it and their legitimacy. It is a complex mixture of understandings, beliefs, and values, all of which are encoded in its culture, structures, and practices. These understandings are negotiated socially and result from a process of co-construction implicating the school community. And yet, due to their status, school principals should assume a decisive role in influencing the development of understandings. Indeed, changes of meaning cannot only result from saying things or by simple assimilation; they must be defined by administrators (Riehl, 2000) who, moreover, have the possibility of modifying the meanings by acting on structures, routines, and practice. For instance, they can manage the school schedule so as to allow teachers and members of the professional staff to discuss different case studies or they can organize classes so as to facilitate inclusion.

A rigorous study of favorable conditions to inclusive education or integration of disabled students must take into account elements related to school administrators. Some of the literature in this field has enabled us to note attitudes and perceptions of principals, as well as certain rational elements that underlie their role and actions in terms of inclusive education. Taking these studies into account helped draw up the theoretical background, allowing us to analyze and situate the subjective viewpoints of principals

who participated in this study relative to the Quebec institutional policy on inclusion (MEQ, 1999). These principals have the responsibility of establishing this policy within their respective school environments.

Literature Review

According to certain authors, school administrators set the tone for inclusion in their schools (Bélanger, 2004) by providing a vision, leadership, and administrative authority (Brotherson, Sheriff, Milburn, & Schertz, 2001; Guzmán, 1997; Kerzner and Gartner, 1998). Moreover, the success of inclusion is thought to be associated with administrators' planning and will, as well as the essential factor their values, beliefs, and their positive attitude constitute in creating a favorable climate in which all students in the school can be accepted (Collins & White, 2001). By attitude, we mean in Shapiro's terms "the tendency for an individual to act or react positively or negatively to his or her world based on values, beliefs, and paradigms rooted in his or her social experiences" (Shapiro, 1999, pp. 8-9).

Some studies have established connections between the principals' positive attitude towards inclusion and their actions regarding the process of implementing inclusive practices. In this way, the principal's positive attitude would be associated with a greater availability of resources and time to enable different interveners to collaborate (Collins & White, 2001). This type of leadership better suits the change in attitude necessary to play a crucial role in the success of relationships between ordinary and special education teachers (Guzmán, 1997) and would help integrate disabled students in a natural environment with very little restriction (Praisner, 2003). It would be related to more contact between 'able' and disabled students and impart better knowledge of the special education issue (Collins & White, 2001; Praisner, 2003). Conversely, attitudes that do not favor inclusion result in failure (Bélanger, 2004) since they are associated with insufficient planning, limited resources for teachers, lack of knowledge of better practices, and limited personal experiences with students with special needs (Collins & White, 2001). As they play an important role in moulding the attitudes and behaviors of not only staff members, but also students, parents, and most of the community towards inclusion (Collins & White, 2001; Guzmán, 1997), it is imperative that school principals demonstrate attitudes, abilities, and knowledge of strategies to facilitate inclusive practices (Collins & White, 2001).

In her review of the literature, Riehl (2000) categorized the tasks of administrators according to their responses and respective contributions to diversity, which allowed her to emphasize three types of roles: 1) foster the development of new understandings regarding diversity, 2) promote inclusive practices within schools (inclusive teaching and learning practices and development of inclusive school cultures), and 3) establish connections between schools and communities. The approach of school principals to these three roles would determine the degree to which their practices are characterized as being inclusive and able to promote changes in the regard (Riehl, 2000).

On the basis of specific criteria, Salisbury and McGregor (2002) and Guzmán (1997) interviewed principals considered exemplary in terms of implementing inclusive practices in their schools. The characteristics of leadership identified among the five administrators who participated in the Salisbury and McGregor study referred to promoting inclusive principles and practices in their schools by practicing what they

preach, by encouraging the formation of learning communities, and by resorting to sharing the power of decision-making with their staff members. Beyond superficial changes, these principals attempted to bring about real changes in attitudes, beliefs, and practices to modify each school's culture. They hired staff members by taking a reflexive approach and used information from their own schools to provoke discussions on the values and implications inherent to diversity, inclusion, collaboration, and teaching practices. They knew how to create opportunities and find time to allow staff members to reflect on and discuss the factors that might affect the development of inclusive practices. During this process, staff members learned to collaborate more effectively, adapt their teaching methods to support all students, and document the efficiency of their interventions.

Similarly, from a study based on the practices of six principals of successful inclusive schools, Guzmán (1997) identified a series of common factors. These administrators collaborated with their staff to develop an inclusion philosophy adapted to their school's needs. They established a communication system that allowed staff members to make critical judgements on the politics and practices of the institution and make recommendations for possible changes. They were actively and personally involved in developing intervention strategies for at-risk students and in dialoguing with parents. They established disciplinary policies for all students by taking specific problems related to students with learning difficulties into account and taking appropriate action. They followed a professional development plan concerned with inclusive schooling, among other things. Finally, they demonstrated abilities to collect information and solve problems.

Using a questionnaire, Ingram (1997) identified the various roles of school principals according to the opinions of teachers who worked with disabled students (moderate to severe) in their classes and practiced inclusion. The analysis of questionnaires helped determine two types of school administrators in terms of the exercised leadership: transactional leadership and transformational leadership. The first type is characterized by control, respect for practices and policies, stabilization of programmes, teacher competence, and motivation of staff members based on external reinforcement. Transformational leadership, on the contrary, emphasizes on the development of beliefs, shared meanings and values, and collective commitment to a common goal (sharing the school's mission, objectives, and strategies). Because of this, transformational leadership suits the change in attitude necessary for inclusive schooling. Indeed, principals play an important role in identifying and articulating a philosophy that reflects the belief that all students can learn, and that all students have a right to education with children their own age in regular classrooms where the needs of all students are met. Principals must reach a consensus regarding ideas in their schools and only through real change in the culture of the school can success be achieved. Indeed, this type of leadership would have a greater impact in terms of motivating teachers to make changes and take up new challenges raised by inclusive education, according to the teachers' answers to Ingram's questionnaire (Ingram, 1997).

Indeed, according to Doyle (2002), leadership aiming at reculturing the school would be more efficient to bring about a culture conducive to inclusion. The author specifies that "a school's culture is formed by the assumptions, values, and beliefs that predominate within its members and define how things are done" (p. 38). The reculturing process helps people identify their values and beliefs in order to discover those held by

the school and, therefore, establish their own set of principles. It modifies group dynamics as well as individuals' abilities to evaluate themselves. It also develops the ability of leaders to think in a critical manner and to question the 'why' rather than the 'how,' in terms of inclusive practices. In this way, efforts towards reculturing have an effect on the sound foundations of the school: its meanings and structures.

Finally, several studies have identified difficulties and obstacles principals encounter in assuming their role. Results produced by Brotherson, Sheriff, Milburn, and Schertz (2001) obtained from individual interviews and focus groups held with administrators from elementary schools summarize well the difficulties and obstacles perceived by these administrators: 1) the growing number of disabled students, as well as an increase in the severity and diversity of disorders; 2) the feeling of uncertainty experienced in providing services and ensuring follow-ups on different students; 3) the search for qualified staff to teach to disabled students; 4) the lack of previous training and experience of these teachers, linked to the fact that special education is only part of their tasks; 5) the feeling that the success of inclusion is external to them and out of their control; 6) the lack of time, money, and space to develop inclusive programs; and 7) the wide gap between the mandate they were given, the realities of classrooms, and the lack of support for research. Moreover, the school administrators who were interviewed (61 subjects) did not consider themselves as part of the solution concerning inclusion. They did not have the tendency to talk spontaneously about what would make them efficient inclusive leaders or about what they needed to succeed. They were concerned with external changes such as increases in subsidies and required changes in the system, all of which should fall into the realm of families and community programmes, but they were not concerned with changes that affect them personally.

Doyle's research (2002), conducted by means of individual interviews with 18 administrators, completes this description. Results showed that few administrators really believed in inclusive schooling and they emphasized the constraints rather than the benefits. Their comments showed that they seemed to be leaning toward school integration for which the inclusion of disabled students was merely a method of placement but not full membership. Moreover, several administrators acknowledged that collaboration between teachers remained their greatest challenge. Strategies adopted to meet this challenge corresponded more to actions aiming at restructuring the school; that is, once more, adapted schedules to allow teamwork or direct support to included students in the classroom, for instance. And yet, when these actions were not combined with strategies to change the school's culture, they did not suffice to bring about the necessary changes to establish an inclusive school.

The Current Study

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to describe the extent to which the discourses of administrators interviewed during the research coincide with theoretical hypotheses and empirical data collected from the international literature. Considering the previous statements, our study focuses on the subjective views of each of the administrators and the way these views connect to undertaken actions and encountered obstacles within their respective schools. Their discourse has been analyzed in light of the most important themes in our frame of reference, which will be presented under the following headings:

1) The principals' experience (Collins & White, 2001; Praisner, 2003)

2) Methods for identifying "at-risk" students (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002)

3) Methods for integrating "at-risk" students (Bélanger, 2004; Doyle, 2002; Ingram, 1997)

4) The concept of the integrated student (Ingram, 1977; Riehl, 2000)

5) Provided services for integrated students (Collins & White, 2001; Guzmán, 1997)

6) Satisfactory actions in terms of integration (Guzmán, 1997; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002)

7) Obstacles to integration (Brotherson et al., 2001)

8) Aspects to improve (to favor the academic success of integrated students) (Doyle, 2002; Ingram, 1977)

9) The principal's role in comparison with the politics of school integration (Collins and White, 2001; Doyle, 2001; Guzmán, 1997; Ingram, 1977; Riehl, 2000; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002)

This study, by applying the themes found in the literature to analyzing the views expressed by principals, aimed to organize and provide a more thorough understanding of how attitudes relate to practices.

The synthesis of the different themes mentioned in the frame of reference allowed the development of a protocol for interviews and a questionnaire prior to this synthesis. Thus, after specifying the socio-economic characteristics of each school, this article will focus on the point of view held by participants regarding the main themes identified in our review of the literature. These themes will appear as subheadings in the section presenting the results.

Methodology

Data Collection

As mentioned before, the general objective of the research program of which the present study is a part consisted of specifying favorable conditions to academic development and the achievement of students with learning difficulties in regular classes from Grades 5 and 6. With this purpose, observations were made in three classes situated in three different schools for three consecutive days a month during six months (from November to April of the same school year). This methodological approach allowed researchers to identify several factors associated with class management, teacher-student relationship, and French and Mathematics teaching, as well as principals leadership styles.

Sample

To be able to conduct this research, general directors of three school boards where our students in specialized education perform their practical training were contacted. Thus, it is with their permission and with their help that schools' principals were selected in order to allow the researchers to communicate with them. One of them had been a

former music teacher while the two others had been former special education teachers, as is often the case in the province of Quebec. Since our method of collecting data was very strenuous and time-consuming, it was necessary to limit the number of classes which would be observed, and thus the number of principals included in the study.

Approach

Principals of the three selected schools were contacted to set a date for an individual interview, conducted approximately two weeks later. They were then given the questionnaire to answer before the interview, as well as the protocol that included the interview questions. Literal transcriptions were made of the interviews, which were recorded on audiocassette and, on average, lasted an hour.

Analysis

Based on these transcriptions, contents were analyzed in order to bring out meanings from the discourses of the three principals who participated in this study (Miles & Huberman, 2003). The analysis consisted of three phases. The first phase focussed around one interview at a time, enabling the research team to emphasize central elements connected to aforementioned specific themes; that is, the themes covered by the questionnaire used to meet school principals. The second phase attempted to bring out meanings by establishing comparisons and contrasts between the discourses of the three administrators. Finally, a synthesis from the profiles of all of the three principals was made. The next section of the article will present the findings from these analyses.

Findings

After specifying the socio-economic characteristics of each school, this article will focus on the point of view held by participants regarding the main themes identified in our review of the literature. These themes will appear as subheadings in the section presenting the results.

Within the context of this study, the three participating schools were named Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn and their principals, Mr. V., Mr. J., and Mrs. S., respectively.

Venus and its Principal Mr. V.

Socio-cultural environment and profiles of "at-risk" students. Venus is located in a rural area and has 152 students, of which 21 (13.6%) are considered "at risk." The latter present different disorders: learning difficulties, speech disorders, and behavior problems. In accordance with identified needs, these students are provided with remedial education in-class and out-of-class speech therapy, special education, and psycho-education[2].

Mr. V.'s experience. Mr. V. divides his administrative tasks between two schools and has been a principal for the past four years. Before becoming a principal, he was a special-education teacher.

Methods for identifying "at-risk" students. The process of identifying "at-risk" students follows a well-established approach. In February, teachers filled out a form in which they had to identify students who presented various types of difficulties as well as

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[2] Psycho-education is an intervention method designed by Québécois psychologist Gilles Gendreau to rehabilitate young delinquents as well as to help children and adolescents with serious socio-affective problems.

a high risk of failure. Afterwards, Mr. V. met with each of the teachers in order to get them to clarify their observations and evaluations, and anticipate possible interventions. He then met with the team of specialists (psychologist, speech therapist, remedial educator, and psycho-educator) to discuss each of the cases. Following this meeting, a new evaluation was made. Parents were contacted to authorize their child's assessment and follow-up, as well as to participate in the process. Around mid-June, another meeting was held between the principal, the team of specialists, and the teacher to discuss each of the students' problems and sum up each case. Among the specialists, someone was appointed responsible for each file according to students' particular disabilities. From the beginning of September, the appointed specialist committed to monitoring the student gave an account of his/her observations and recommendations to the parents and the principal.

Methods for integrating at-risk students. The assistance provided for disabled students takes two possible forms: it is either provided to the students out-of-class or to the teacher in-class, the first approach being used more frequently. Mr. V. is deeply concerned with this situation, which existed before his arrival at this school. He is attempting to change the practices. Given the fact that teachers resist to the second approach, Mr. V. began by introducing it as part of psycho-educative interventions.

Provided services. At the time of the interview, Mr. V. was attempting to get his staff to think about the difference between preventive action and early intervention. This principal does not approve of early intervention outside of class. He would rather favor preventive action. For example, as early as in pre-school, the remedial teacher must initiate in-class preventive action in collaboration with the teacher to discover the disabilities. Her role is to make sure the teacher is well-equipped for this kind of work, have discussions with the teacher, and inform him/her to the best of her knowledge. From this perspective, contenting herself with remedial education assessments in kindergarten is out of the question. As for the psycho-educator, Mr. V. gives her three roles: 1) preventive action, 2) intervention, and 3) training. He encouraged the psycho-educator of his school to conduct her interventions with all students in class, in collaboration with the teacher and the special education teacher according to an integrative model of behavior. According to Mr. V., the speech therapist takes on a training role. She meets with teachers and parents to offer them training. She is also involved in preventive action, especially in kindergarten and in Grades 1 and 2. Venus benefits from the services of a special education teacher whose interventions are not only aimed at disabled students, but at the entire class as well. As for the psychologist, Mr. V. believes that his role is essentially assessment.

Concept of the integrated student. The question, "How do you define an integrated student?" seemed odd to Mr. V. Indeed, although the term "integrated" is commonly used to describe the situation of students with difficulties integrated in regular classes, Mr. V. did not like to use this expression because, in his view, it carried a stigmatizing connotation. Thus, he preferred to speak of "academic success for all students" because instead of focusing on children it referred to the school educational project.

Integration methods: Satisfactory and unsatisfactory actions. Mr. V. identifies the following actions as being satisfactory: 1) the development of accurate diagnoses and collaborative work, which, among other actions, helped equip parents and made them understand that the school acts in their child's best interest; 2) the collaborative effort

from the remedial educator and the speech therapist in terms of phonological awareness; and 3) the assemblage of small groups of students (officially "at-risk" or not) with similar disabilities aiming at making them work together.

Obstacles. According to Mr. V., the main obstacles that were met were the following: 1) in relation to expert diagnostic evaluation, the problem of finding a time when interveners involved with each case can meet and make sure they assist these students quickly, this difficulty being due to the lack of time and the large number of students involved; 2) in relation to family-school-community collaboration, the difficulty interveners had in settling on a common understanding of the situation; 3) the fact that his school is located in a small community, which entails a risk in terms of credibility in the case of inefficiency; 4) the specialists' lack of availability attributable to their workload (e.g., the speech therapist divides her time between eleven schools); 5) the child's removal from class, which could break the bond between he and his teacher; 6) the lack of specialists, which would prevent a person responsible for each case from being identifying so that the problems would end up in the principal's hands; and 7) a poor collaboration within teams teaching in a same school level, this lack of collaboration being caused by different views and practices.

Aspects to improve. According to Mr. V., the aspects to improve are related to a change in how the school is perceived, with regard to the teaching paradigm in comparison with learning. The people concerned must be given chances without expecting immediate results. Teachers must find ways of helping children and must change their point of view if they believe themselves unable to help children without external services. Moreover, Mr. V. is trying to convince his teachers to get help within their classes by permitting an easier access to services, and thus putting an end to specialists' current practice that consists of taking students out of the class to assist them.

The principal's role in comparison with the politics of school integration. Oddly enough, Mr. V. summarizes his role very briefly by targeting the most important element: in collaboration with his teachers, his role consists of finding the best strategy to implement the integration policy so that students may benefit from the best possible service. The obstacle he has been encountering in the realization of this role is the deeply rooted school culture, which is a culture that is difficult to change. This is the challenge he must face. Another obstacle consists of making parents accept cuts in subsidies on account of a decrease in the number of students (less money, fewer services).

Jupiter and its Principal Mr. J.

Socio-cultural environment and profiles of "at-risk" students. Jupiter is also located in a rural area. Ninety-one students attend this school, of which 22 (24%) are considered "at-risk." The students' difficulties that have been identified are related to learning difficulties, speech disorders, and behavior problems. Students benefit from remedial (in-class and out-of-class), psycho-education, and speech therapy services. As there are not many students in this school, classes are multi-levelled.

Mr. J.'s experience. Mr. J. is also the principal of another school. He has been the principal of this school for two years. Previously, he was the vice-principal in a high school for two years. Before acquiring experience in school administration, he was a special education teacher at the high school level.

Methods for identifying at-risk students. First, disabled students are reported by the teacher at all times, as early as kindergarten. However, other children are referred

by the regional rehabilitation centre[3]. Then, evaluations are made by the speech therapist, the psycho-educator, the psychologist, and the remedial teacher. It becomes Mr. J.'s responsibility to do follow-ups on different cases.

Methods for integrating "at-risk" students. Mr. J. specified there were no special classes in his school. Another school in the region offers this type of service. In this way, all students at Jupiter who have been identified "at-risk" attend regular classes with the support of an intervention plan. It would seem that the teaching staff of this school favors remedial education, but Mr. J. did not confirm this.

Provided services. Specialists make evaluations and a few follow-ups according to their respective area of expertise (although in some cases it is the remedial teacher who offers greater assistance). According to Mr. J., the roles of the remedial teacher and of the psycho-educator consist in supporting "at-risk" students and their teachers. Moreover, a technician in specialized education helps disabled students in their learning. The roles of the speech therapist and the psychologist are to make evaluations, as these specialists lack the time to do follow-ups. Jupiter also benefits from services of a guidance counsellor (mainly for students in Grades 5 and 6) who initiates actions in accordance with the guidance-oriented approach to learning, which is centered on the knowledge of professions and occupations, thus motivating students and encouraging them to pursue their studies.

Concept of the integrated student. Mr. J. considers an integrated student to be "at-risk" when, on account of learning difficulties or behavior problems, he or she benefits from additional services within a regular class.

Integration methods: Satisfactory and unsatisfactory actions. Mr. J. identified several satisfactory actions: 1) student follow-ups made by additional services; 2) parents and retired teachers who volunteer for reading sessions in kindergarten, and in Grades 1 and 2; and 3) the intervener's work in terms of phonological awareness seemed to produce very positive results. Thanks to these last two measures, only two students remained with reading difficulties at the end of Grade 2. Mr. J. did not identify any unsatisfactory actions. According to his own evaluation, all measures carried out have achieved some success. Mr. J. emphasized that locals are very much involved in the community and the school. Even fire-fighters from the area sometimes take part in school activities.

Obstacles. According to Mr. J., the main obstacles encountered in terms of school integration are at different levels. As far as the expert diagnostic evaluation is concerned, Mr. J. emphasized that evaluation deadlines constitute a great disadvantage for the quick implementation of interventions appropriate to students' needs. He also mentions the lack of availability of specialists on account of numerous cases to deal with (specialists work in more than one school). This situation has a negative impact on support services, on the student's supervision, and on his/her follow-up, as well as on the control and evaluation of the intervention. Finally, he lays stress on the difficulty of having reliable indicators to evaluate and make decisions because he must rely on his teachers' judgment.

Aspects to improve. Mr. J. believes that when students' disabilities are too great, it becomes difficult to keep them integrated in spite of the teaching differentiation. The

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[3] Regional Rehabilitation Centers have been set up so as to concentrate the services offered to handicapped people.

lack of support for teachers and students is not favorable to students in regular classes, nor to integrated students, or teachers.

The principal's role in comparison with the politics of school integration. Mr. J. thinks his role consists of providing services adapted to his teachers. In this way, he takes all the necessary steps to get financing (e.g., homework assistance, addition of resources allowing teachers to intervene with disabled students on an individual basis). He also makes great efforts to seek help from volunteers—often parents, but also retired teachers to allow teachers to work more intensely with subgroups of students, especially those who experience special difficulties. In short, Mr. J. takes all the necessary steps to obtain services and he succeeds in doing so. Teachers occasionally have trouble managing all the help that is provided for them, but this is a minor problem. Mr. J. has a management method that involves teachers. They participate in taking decisions with regard to the use of services and certain budget-related arrangements. To this end, he schedules a meeting at a time that is convenient for everyone, for example, at lunchtime. Finally, Mr. J. believes it is his responsibility to follow through with certain student files. He gathers the interveners needed for each case and gives them his support.

Mr. J. identified several obstacles concerning his role, particularly in regards to student file follow-ups. He finds the lack of resources with regard to supplementary services deplorable as people implicated in these services do not have enough time to do follow-ups. The waiting periods are very long (e.g., speech therapy and psychology), which delays assessments and intervention planning. His role consists then in compensating for this shortage by finding additional resources (e.g., volunteers, retired teachers).

Saturn and its Principal Mrs. S.

Socio-cultural environment and profiles of "at-risk" students. Saturn is a suburban school with 518 students, of which 75 (14.5%) are considered "at-risk" and 41 (7.9%), handicapped. The difficulties that have been identified are vary: learning difficulties, specific disorders (dyslexia, speech disorders), behavioral problems, mild disabilities, and handicaps (dysphasia, dyspraxia, hearing impairments, pervasive developmental disorders, and atypical impairments). In this school, there are five special classes, of which four are said to be "communication" classes for students with speech disorders and one for those with learning difficulties, a mild disability, or dyspraxia. Other students with handicaps or learning difficulties attend regular classes.

Mrs. S.'s experience. Mrs. S. has been a principal for seven-and-a-half years. She has been Saturn's principal for a year-and-a-half. Before getting her position in the school administration, Mrs. S. taught music.

Methods for identifying "at-risk" students. The identification process begins with in-class teacher interventions that proved useless. The teacher then refers the student to an ad-hoc committee made up of qualified specialists. The committee examines what has already been done with the student, what works and what does not, as well as what should be done to improve the situation. This reflection often leads to different avenues and evaluations. Expert diagnostic evaluations that the school can resort to are the following: psychology, remedial education, audiology, speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, neuro-psychology, and neuro-pediatrics.

Methods for integrating "at-risk" students. According to Mrs. S., "at-risk" students are included right away in Saturn so that the integration policy applies only to

handicapped students. In spite of the pressure to integrate handicapped students in their natural environment as much as possible, Mrs. S. believes it is impossible to integrate some of them. Integration is possible when there are chances of success at the self-esteem level. Mrs. S. thinks that integration involves attending a regular class in order to participate in an activity such as music or visual arts. The decision to integrate a student is made on an individual basis, according to the student's strengths. The student is then placed according to his possible success, not his age (often two grades below the level that corresponds to his age group) with the underlying intention of allowing the student to achieve success so that he will feel capable. These students are socially integrated during recess, lunchtime, and during extracurricular activities involving the entire school. Unfortunately, this type of integration is often unsuccessful since it may, for instance, lead to conflicts between the different persons involved, as regular students do not readily accept their peers who present difficulties. As for the 67 students with learning difficulties, 49 of them attend regular classes. Budgetary constraints (tied to the fact that handicapped students are prioritized in terms of services) have prompted Saturn to make a choice: only students in Grades 2, 3, and 4 can benefit from remedial services which, for the most part, are outside of class.

Provided services. Mrs. S. explained that, occasionally, specialists work with students on an individual basis, but only for a short period of time. They offer teachers support, especially to help them carry out pertinent interventions. For budgetary reasons, they conduct their interventions according to established priorities: for example, the remedial teacher will first work on reading, then writing, and finally, mathematics. Apart from this aspect, the descriptions she gives concerning the role of each specialist are conventional: the psycho-educator works on the student's behavior and the speech therapist on his communication skills while the psychologist holds consultations and evaluates.

Concept of the integrated student. An integrated student is a handicapped child who has been integrated in a regular class to allow him or her to face normal situations, but requires some form of adaptation. At-risk students are always in regular classes and, therefore, no integration is involved. Occasionally, a student with behavioral problems is placed in a special class and then integrated in a regular class, but this type of situation is rather rare.

Integration methods: Satisfactory and unsatisfactory actions. For the time being, Saturn seeks to list what is being done, in which context and with which students, so as to build a system of reference to identify effective actions. Efforts are concentrated on all five special classes, but other strategies are being tested out. Mrs. S. gives the example of the intervention conducted by the special-education technician. When students in regular classes show special needs, this technician integrates them in one of her "communication" groups while working on developing social skills. Mrs. S. believes it is a very good strategy: on the one hand, these students benefit from a training that targets language and, on the other hand, dysphasic students have the opportunity to come into contact with students from regular classes. According to her, when the teacher shows open-mindedness toward the child with behavioral problems and is willing to spend time with him or her, the integration is a success. This teacher is not afraid of making mistakes and can deal with the feeling of helplessness. Mrs. S. also raises the importance of collaboration. However, she would never ask some of her teachers to integrate a disabled student because, by forcing them, she would only contribute to aggravating the situation

and creating problems. She believes it is important for the principal to know the staff and one of the key elements is to make them feel comfortable and supported, not overloaded.

Obstacles. According to Mrs. S., the main obstacles are: 1) waiting periods; 2) diagnoses made by unspecialized people in the field (e.g., a doctor deciding a child is dysphasic or a speech therapist diagnosing dyslexia); 3) the lack of resources in comparison to the growing needs as far as supervision, follow-ups, and support services are concerned; 4) the feeling of helplessness; 5) the view similar to the medical approach; 6) the difficulty of changing mentalities as far as teachers are concerned; 7) the virtually insignificant progress made by certain students, which incites teachers to resign; 8) the tendency to repeat the same actions rather than to wonder about the reasons for this lack of progress; 9) a single specialist instead of team assessment as far as intervention follow-up, evaluation, and impact are concerned; 10) demands or, on the contrary, the disengagement of some parents; 11) differences in values between parents and the school, and the lack of adjustment that ensues as far as family-school-community collaboration is concerned; and 12) the fragility and isolation of some teachers in regards to cycle-team collaboration.

Aspects to improve. First, for Mrs. S., it is important to have shared views and values. Furthermore, the school administration must inform teachers and provide them with training enabling them to adapt their requirements to their classes' needs. Furthermore, facilities must be provided for specialists, which will make consultations easier and give direct access to the established screening process in the school. It would also be advisable to recognize the school's strengths and set-up structures that will allow job-sharing in terms of colleagues' distinctive professional skills within the establishment, thus helping all interveners feel secure. Mrs. S. also supports teamwork among interveners from additional services in elaborating a pre-school prevention programme that will allow teachers to develop skills and acquire useful knowledge, a programme the school can disseminate. Mrs. S. is convinced of the importance of the following values: the administration's belief in the school orientations, human and financial support, and open-mindedness and creativity on everyone's part.

The principal's role in comparison with the politics of school integration. According to Mrs. S., principals work on many varying levels and must be leaders in every aspect of their task. They must be instigators in their environments and be consistent with their discourse, actions, and behavior. Mrs. S.'s discourse also reflects a certain concern with respect to administrative and political practices, e.g., Ingram's (1997) transactional leadership. Mrs. S. reports several obstacles concerning the realization of her role. The lack of time is a major obstacle, especially for workaholics (such as herself) for whom it is difficult to know when to stop and have a life of one's own. The lack of knowledge, feelings of helplessness and heavy workloads experienced by some are also problematic, as well as the false belief that special education has been the subject of numerous cutbacks, the teachers' reluctance when offered training on dyspraxia or dysphasia giving the excuse that they do not want to become specialists in those fields (at lower costs for the institution), and the lack of a common view which makes it difficult at times to come together and reach a consensus. Moreover, when everyone shares a common view and works together, the required time to carry out projects can become an obstacle. The solutions she has found to overcome these obstacles consist in learning to name things, objectifying with the staff, and reframing to eliminate misleading interpretations and awkwardness. Once this has been done, it is always

possible to solve problems. Finally, the principal must present an image of what has been said or, in other words, the principal must set an example.

Discussion

Before examining the discourses of the Québécois principals who were interviewed for this study in comparison with theoretical models and empirical data introduced in our frame of reference, it would be useful to look at the situations in their schools respectively.

Socio-cultural Environment and Profiles of "At-risk" Students

The size of the school has been identified as a factor to take into consideration insofar as small schools are concerned. Indeed, Cotton's (2001) and Hylden's (2004) papers drew a positive picture of small schools in many respects (better academic results from disabled students, more personalized attention, greater satisfaction from teachers, parents, and the community, among other things). Although Venus and Jupiter are privileged in terms of size, it is not Saturn's case that welcomes children with numerous and various disabilities so that it becomes extremely complicated to quickly identify and satisfy the special needs of these students. Moreover, it is quite possible that the current state of things might have repercussions on principals' discourses without their knowledge of it since people's expectations and attitudes are probably influenced by the objective conditions in which Mrs. S practices her profession.

Principals' Experience

To favor inclusion, a principal should have previous and noteworthy experience with disabled students insofar as such an experience is associated with more positive attitudes toward these children, thus predisposing administrators to adopt the philosophy, principles, and practices of inclusive schooling (Brotherson et al., 2001; Collins & White, 2001; Guzmán, 1997; Parent, 2004; Praisner, 2003; Riehl, 2000). In this respect, by virtue of their teaching experience in special education, Mr. V. and Mr. J. seem particularly well-prepared to introduce inclusive schooling in their schools, whereas Mrs. S.'s experience lies mostly with integrating handicapped students in her class.

Methods for Identifying "At-risk" Students

In general, early tracking of emotional (Feil, Small, Forness, Serna et al., 2005) and cognitive (Deno, 2003) disorders is considered a beneficial practice for disabled students. In light of this statement, identification practices at Venus (in February, systematic identification of students who present difficulties) and Jupiter (problems reported as they reveal themselves) seem more favorable to including disabled students rather than demonstrate the failure of past interventions to be able to report such students, as was the case for Saturn. Nevertheless, the latter method might help avoid taking the risk of reporting students too quickly, which could be harmful to them (Ellwein, Walsh, Eads, & Miller, 1991). Moreover, the principals' commitment to identifying at-risk students and, particularly, to elaborating an intervention plan (Guzmán, 1997) is one of the points we emphasized in our frame of reference. In this respect, Mr. V. clearly distinguishes himself from his colleagues by virtue of the importance he attaches to systematic and repeated data collection as well as of his involvement in the process,

especially through meetings with teachers, specialists, and parents. Finally, the principal's arbitrating role with regard to dialoguing with parents constitutes another factor that helps identify "at-risk" students (Beaupré et al., 2004; Doyle, 2001; Guzmán, 1997; Kerzner & Gartner, 1998). And yet, only Mr. V. refers to it. However, this analysis is based on principals' spontaneous discourses. Although some of the administrators do not mention the role of parents in their discourses, it does not mean they do not attach any importance to it and that the parents in their schools are not involved in the process.

Methods for Integrating "At-risk" Students

Students from Venus and Jupiter all attend regular classes and provided services for these students very often equal support outside of class. This situation, which contributes to maintaining segregated services, concerns Mr. V.; he is attempting to rectify it by inciting the staff to change its practices in his environment. As for Mrs. S., given the fact that students with learning difficulties are automatically integrated in regular classes, the integration process only concerns handicapped students; therefore, integration methods are applied only to those students. Problems ensuing from this situation are: efforts to integrate handicapped students are exclusively of an emotional nature and the automatic integration of students with learning difficulties has led to the centring of remedial services in Grades 2, 3, and 4, a phenomenon reported by Praisner (2003) that deprives students of services at turning points during their schooling (Grades 1 and 6).

Provided Services

By attempting to have an influence on specialists' roles according to a view of appropriate inclusive practices, Mr. V. wants to bring about real changes in attitudes, beliefs, and practices, all of which are linked to a genuine philosophy of school inclusion (Guzmán, 1997; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). On the one hand, he is trying to bring different interveners to revise their roles in terms of prevention and early intervention, which he is attempting to promote at school. On the other hand, he is seeking to redefine actions according to the priority given to teachers' supporting and training roles (as opposed to evaluation). Finally, the fact that he encourages reorientation toward the entire class with regard to some of the specialists' actions shows his concern about the non-segregation of services from the perspective of inclusive schooling. The adoption of an innovative approach such as the orientational approach and the organization of educational innovations is also an element considered positively in scientific articles (Bailey & Plessis, 1997), small schools like Jupiter having an advantage on this point (Hylden, 2004).

Concept of the Integrated Student

Three methods of integration were highlighted in the discourses: 1) inclusion with Mr. V., 2) integration with Mr. J., and 3) social integration with Mrs. S. These attitudes (specific to principals' beliefs, values, and behaviors) are supposed to have a considerable impact on the situation as a whole: the school's culture and atmosphere; attitudes of the staff, students, parents, and the entire community; decisions taken at administrative and educational levels; and methods of placement (Bailey & Plessis, 1997; Beaupré et al., 2004; Bélanger, 2004; Collins & White, 2001; Doyle, 2001; Guzmán , 1997; Praisner,

2003). Nevertheless, all these organizational elements do influence the principals' actions.

Integration Methods: Satisfactory Actions

Time and time again, parents' collaboration is mentioned as being a favorable condition for including "at-risk" students or students with difficulties (Beaupré et al., 2004; Brotherson et al., 2001; Doyle, 2001; Kerzner & Gartner, 1998; Guzmán, 1997). All three principals in our study believe that activities involving collaboration are positive measures, whether it is a question of collaboration or volunteer work on the part of the parents or teamwork, and they all attach great importance to establishing good communication with everyone. Jupiter, probably favored in this respect by its small size (Hylden, 2004), distinguishes itself because of Mr. J.'s devoted energy to mobilize all available resources in the community so as to provide support for teachers, students, and the school, as well as to promote innovative educational approaches. As far as Mr. V. and Mrs. S. are concerned, they both refer to the beneficial effects of interventions based on the grouping of students with particular difficulties, whether they have been identified as "at-risk" or not, therefore avoiding the stigmatization of students. Mrs. S. also specifies that the system of reference she proposed to her staff seems to have led them to later develop the ability to question themselves about the best ways to intervene with students with difficulties, which corresponds precisely to the reflexive approach advocated by Guzman (1997) and Salisbury and McGregor (2002), as mentioned earlier in this paper.

Obstacles

The main obstacles emphasized by Mr. V. and Mr. J concerned: 1) the lack of resources (waiting period for interventions, lack of teacher reference, lack of specialists, lack of indicators allowing teachers to make better evaluations) and 2) a poor collaboration (either between the different interveners or between schools and parents as well as between schools and communities). As for Mrs. S., she raised many points, most of which concerned what interveners should be doing (Brotherson et al., 2001). According to Ingram (1997), her attitude is typical of the discourse on transactional leadership. Indeed, teachers should: 1) abandon their views related to the medical model, 2) accept the training provided for them and change their practices, 3) evaluate the effects of interventions on students and stop repeating actions which are apparently ineffective without questioning, 4) struggle against feelings of helplessness caused by the little progress made by students, and 5) eliminate their prejudices linking the principal's actions to budgetary cuts. As for parents, Mrs. S. mentions that they should share the school's perspective and values and in return, the school should adapt itself.

Although some of the problematic aspects raised by all three principals are similar to the school administrators' remarks mentioned by Brotherson's research team (2001, p. 9), there are several others that caught our attention. Given the fact that the number of studies in the field is still limited, this observation prompts us to advise taking into account all of the factors listed, whether they come from researchers or school administrators, so as to better identify the variables that will lead to success in the future.

Aspects to Improve

We mentioned previously that, according to scientific articles (Aucoin & Goguen, 2004; Beaupré et al., 2004; Bélanger, 2004; Brotherson et al., 2001; Kerzner & Gartner,

1998; Parent, 2004; Riehl, 2000), providing support for teachers is one of the factors favoring a successful inclusion, and this is precisely the position adopted by Mr. J. who believes that such support is essential to ensure academic success of integrated students. According to Mr. V., the aspects to improve go through the school's "reculturing" advocated by Doyle (2002). On the other hand, Mrs. S. insists as well on staff training, a favorable factor frequently mentioned in studies (Aucoin & Goguen, 2004; Guzmán, 1997; Parent, 2004). Indeed, training the staff and sharing professional skills should contribute to bring about improvements insofar as, in addition to facilitating collaboration, the sharing of skills would help interveners to develop a feeling of security and reduce their feeling of isolation.

Principals' Roles in Comparison with the Politics of School Integration

Interestingly, the principals we met with for this study adopt each a different position with regard to inclusion. Mr. V. believes in "reculturing" considered by Doyle (2002) as the type of leadership most likely to favor inclusion. Moreover, Mr. V. thinks that his primary role as principal consists of finding the best strategy to implement the integration policy. Since obstacles to inclusive schooling originate from the deeply rooted culture of the school, the logical step to favor inclusion consists of changing the school's culture. In addition, Mr. V. insists on involving parents in the process (Kerzner & Gartner, 1998). As for Mr. J., he rather favors organizational theories described by Riehl (2002) or structural theories put forward by Doyle (2002). Indeed, he is attempting to maximize support for teachers and students. In so doing, he encourages the participation of teachers, which he appeals to when the time comes to make decisions concerning the school's objectives and the means to achieve them, a positive strategy mentioned by several authors (Bélanger, 2004; Doyle, 2002; Kerzner & Gartner, 1998). Another point recognized favorably is the acknowledgement of his role in terms of management and follow-ups. Several authors (Beaupré et al., 2004; Bélanger, 2004; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Riehl, 2000) have emphasized the principal's beneficial influence when he/she gets involved in the intervention plan (contact with parents, follow-up). From this perspective, Mr. J. distinguishes himself from Mr. V.—for whom there are too many cases for a principal to deal with—and considers that teachers are in a better position to do follow-ups because of the close relationship they have with their students. Mr. J. also describes his role as principal in terms that make us suppose that he considers himself an integral part of the solution (follow-ups, search for resources and support). Nevertheless, these actions only concern administrative and organizational frameworks. Finally, Mrs. S.'s leadership clearly resembles the transactional leadership described by Ingram (1997). She believes that the principal assumes a leading role in every aspect related to the task: philosophical, pedagogical, practical, and particularly administrative and political aspects; however, her descriptions are general and are not specifically concerned with the integration policy. In her discourse, she defines elements that are not part of her role (Brotherson et al., 2001): the lack of time, feelings of helplessness and heavy workload, false perceptions of parties involved, the difficulty of sharing a common view (the principal can have a view, but everyone must share it).

Conclusion

Three principals (Mr. V., Mr. J., and Mrs.. S.), three different views (inclusion, school integration, and social integration), and three distinct leaderships (directed toward "reculturing," organizational, and transactional). According to Doyle (2002) and Ingram (1997) respectively, the leadership based on "reculturing" and the transformational leadership are more likely to favor changes necessary to hold a view and have practices characteristic of an inclusive school within their establishments. In comparison to our study, Mr. V. seems to be a principal who exercises this type of leadership in addition to promoting inclusive schooling. Can Doyle's and Ingram's theory be confirmed? We believe that the evolution of a school into a philosophy and principles of inclusion is consistent with a process of individuals in the community co-constructing shared meanings. From a socio-constructivist perspective, social interactions have an impact on the modification of meanings only if they exercise their influence over an area known as "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1985). Thus would it be impossible to change mentalities and practices of people who do not endorse the implemented ideas? In this way, could it be possible that Mr. J. and Mrs. S. are guided by adapting to their environments and act according to constraints they must cope with?

In fact, there are several sources of influence: the type of school (small, average, large, resolutely inclusive, with special classes); social environment (from rural to urban); experience (taught subject, regular or special classes, knowledge or ignorance of the problematics concerning school and social integration); the culture of the school prior to the principal's arrival; his/her own comprehension, view, culture, and philosophy in terms of the school as well as inclusion; and his/her own personality which will lead to relational and school management styles particular to each individual. All of these factors will influence the way principals will manage the establishment of which they are responsible. Principals themselves are in the centre or on the periphery of different systems of which they are subjected to influence, pressure, demands, and constraints. However, these influences do not play a role *per se*, but interact with each other and with the personality of each principal so that it is extremely difficult to establish management practices favoring inclusion.

Our results emphasize the reciprocal interaction between principals and their schools. This phenomenon, which is extremely complex, should be investigated in the future. The bio-ecosystemic model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) might be an interesting approach to do so, since one could study the influence of the different elements pertaining to each system and see their relative influence on the principals. What is more, one might analyse the system on which principals could have the most influence.

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