

**Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
Promoting Early Intervention Project**

**Teacher Education Working Group
Recommendations for Teacher Education in the
Province of Ontario
Summary Report**

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The working group would like to acknowledge the many individuals who contributed their time and effort to creating this report. We are especially grateful to the voices of practising teachers, students, and their families. Furthermore, we would like to honour the many exemplary teachers who work with students with learning disabilities on a daily basis and who have made it their career mandate to make the learning experiences of all children a positive one.

Please note that throughout this document references are made to appendices contained in the full teacher education report and not in this summary. The full document is available through LDAO's website at www.ldao.ca.

Preface

In 1999, the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) was awarded a grant from the Government of Ontario to promote the early identification and treatment of young school-aged children (students four to eight years of age) with learning disabilities. Specifically, the LDAO was provided with the mandate to develop recommendations and/or implement services and support systems that will increase our understanding of learning disabilities and improve the overall educational experiences of young students and their families.

In order to meet this mandate, a volunteer Steering Committee consisting of members of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario and professionals

within the community (see Appendix A) established five working groups: (1) Definition, (2) Screening and Assessment, (3) Programming, (4) Public Awareness, and (5) Teacher Education.

Briefly, the primary mandate of the **Definition** working group was to formulate a “scientifically based” definition of learning disabilities that was accessible to not only professionals but also classroom teachers and parents. To date, the Learning Disabilities Association of America has expressed its support of this definition and the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada has adopted this definition and is encouraging its provincial chapters to follow accordingly. It is our hope that this new definition will replace the current definition of learning disabilities used by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

The mandate of the **Screening and Assessment** working group was twofold. Its first mandate was to develop a tool or battery of tools that would assist primary-grade educators to identify students who may possess learning disabilities. Its second mandate was to develop a protocol for the professional identification and documentation of learning disabilities. The Screening subgroup developed the Dynamic Screening and Intervention Model for Senior Kindergarten (DSIM-SK), with a number of demonstration sites having been established across the province to test the efficacy and accessibility of the model. Similarly, the Assessment subgroup identified appropriate tests for the assessments of learning disabilities, as well as criteria for the adequate documentation of a learning disability. Responding to the growing need to

provide services to children with learning disabilities and their families in remote areas throughout the province, the Assessment subgroup is recommending the creation of a registry of practising psychologists, speech and language pathologists and other professional who would be willing to provide services to these areas. It is expected that this registry would be well received by both educators and practitioners.

The primary purpose of the **Programming** working group was the implementation of effective programs that would allow students to reach their full potential based on current scientific understandings about learning disabilities. To this end, the group developed the Web-Based Teaching Tool (WBTT), an interactive database for classroom teachers. LDAO is currently evaluating the effectiveness of WBTT as part of the services provided to primary-grade teachers at schools designated as provincial demonstration sites after two full years of piloting.

The **Public Education** working group held the responsibility of communicating the overall outcomes of this initiative to all vested interest groups including parents and educators, maintaining the momentum of the project, and raising public awareness around issues associated with learning disabilities in general. It has successfully sponsored a number of information sessions, such as the Research into Practice Conference held at the Toronto Convention centre in the fall of 2001 and produced three project newsletters.

Finally, the primary mandate provided to the authors of this report, the **Teacher Education** working group, was to determine the level of education and support presently available to educators and other professionals working with young students who have learning disabilities in the province of Ontario and to provide recommendations about how these supports and services can be enhanced.

Collectively, the results of the undertakings of all five working groups were expected to create significant systemic changes within the Ontario educational system, especially with respect to the support and services provided to children with learning disabilities.

The Teacher Education Working Group

Mandate

The mandate of the working group was to research, study, and make recommendations that would guide teacher education in the province of Ontario. The committee recognized that having the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to encourage learning and growth in our students is important for all education practitioners. To that end, it provides both short-term and long-term recommendations for change across all levels of professional development (e.g., pre-service, in-service, additional qualifications). It is noteworthy that concerns regarding teacher preparation have subsequently arisen out of the work of the LOTF and At-risk Working Group.

Rationale

In Canada, the majority of students identified as “exceptional” have learning disabilities (Smith, Polloway, Patton, Dowdy, and Heath, 2001; Wong, 1996). In Ontario, children with learning disabilities have consequently constituted approximately half of the identified special education population (Weber and Bennett, 2000; Wong, 2001). It follows, then, that the majority of teachers and other professionals working in school settings will encounter and interact with students who have learning disabilities at some point in their careers.

Over the past decade, extensive efforts have been made to document the knowledge and skills that teachers and other school professionals need to possess in order to work effectively with students who have learning disabilities (see Appendix C for a summary of these knowledge and skills). In this report, members of the Teacher Education working group extend and elaborate on this list.

Members

The Teacher Education working group consisted of over twenty professionals including:

- Practising teachers (public, separate, French and provincial)
- Special education teachers
- School board supervisory officers
- Teacher-federation representatives
- Professors of education
- Psychologists

- Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario representatives

Appendix B includes a complete list of the members of the Teacher Education working group as well as their professional affiliations.

Process and Progress to Date

Beginning in the fall of 2000, members of the Teacher Education working group met on a regular basis to examine and formulate recommendations concerning teacher education. Three basic questions formed the impetus for this committee's work:

- What do teachers need to know when working with young students who have learning disabilities?
- What do teachers need to be able to do when working with young students who have learning disabilities?
- How can they best acquire this knowledge and these skills?

In order to meet its information-gathering mandate and provide informed recommendations for future teacher education initiatives, members of this committee identified a number of stakeholder groups who play critical roles in the delivery of formal and informal teacher education programs and continuing professional development activities and programs. The working group also identified stakeholder groups who provide support and services to young students with learning disabilities, their teachers, and their parents. Specifically, the following stakeholder groups and organizations were identified and consulted by this committee:

- Teacher candidates and professors of education
- Practising teachers (classroom teachers, special education teachers, associate/mentor teachers)
- Additional qualification candidates
- School board administrators
- Learning Disabilities Association chapter members
- Professional support services (psychologists, speech and language pathologists, social workers)
- Post-secondary students with learning disabilities and students from the Provincial Demonstration Schools

Action Plans

For each of the identified stakeholder groups, the members of the Teacher Education working group developed corresponding “action plans” (e.g., focus group sessions, individual interviews, pen and paper surveys, electronic questionnaires). Essentially, these action plans outlined formats for collecting information about the current status of the supports and services provided to teachers and other professionals with respect to working with students who have learning disabilities. These action plans also examined stakeholders’ perceptions about the quality of these supports and services and their thoughts and opinions about how they can be enhanced. Action plans for each stakeholder group are listed in Appendix E, which also contains specific information about the participants, recruitment processes, information collecting processes, and analysis.

Other Activities

Members of the Teacher Education working group also participated in a number of other activities designed to enhance the services provided to young students with learning disabilities and to promote general awareness of the issues and challenges associated with teacher education in Ontario. For instance, the working group formulated several position papers concerning teacher testing, teacher education, and the revision of additional qualification courses in special education, and addressed these concerns to the Minister of Education and the College of Teachers. In addition, the working group addressed issues and concerns associated with teacher education at several local, national, and international conferences including the Council for Exceptional Children and Research into Practice. (Appendix F provides an exhaustive list of activities of the Teacher Education working group.)

Recommendations for Teacher Education in the Ontario

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario Teacher Education working group for the Promoting Early Intervention (PEI) project has developed a number of recommendations for improving teacher candidate preparation and meeting the ongoing professional development needs of teachers. The aim is to build the capacity of our teachers and our schools to enhance the learning experience for all students, especially those with learning disabilities. The committee believes that helping teachers to understand and use instructional and assessment data to develop effective instructional practices for students in the early years will enhance students' opportunities for life-long learning.

The following recommendations are grouped by whether they pertain to teacher candidates, practising teachers and schools, or ongoing education and additional qualification programs. These recommendations are based on an extensive survey of relevant education stakeholders, such as both experienced and new teachers, education administrators, parents, students, and support professionals. They are not presented in order of importance.

Recommendations for Pre-service Education

One of the most frequently expressed concerns during the consultation process was the need for improved special education instruction in teacher education programs. Teacher candidates and practicing teachers often felt they lacked the skills and knowledge to identify and effectively teach students with

learning disabilities. Students, as well, felt that their teachers were inadequately prepared to meet the special challenges posed by their learning disabilities.

The Teacher Education working group believes that a fundamental reason for this problem is that there is no consistency between faculties of education regarding course requirements, and that many of the existing curricula do not adequately address fundamental issues such as language development and literacy acquisition. To address these issues, the working group recommends establishing a revised and standardized teacher education curriculum.

Recommendation 1: That the Ministers of Education and Training, Colleges, and Universities consider working with the deans of the faculties of education to develop a common curriculum for teacher education in Ontario.

Furthermore, given that approximately one-half of the students identified as exceptional in this province are identified as having a learning disability, a representative portion of instruction should address learning disabilities, both throughout the curriculum and within special education courses. In order to ensure that special education instruction is of a length and depth that adequately reflects the complexity and demand in this area of study, the length of post-graduate teacher preparation programs may need to be extended.

Recommendation 2: That faculties of education across the province require a *mandatory* full or equivalent course in the area of special education for all pre-service graduates, and that critical

information about learning disabilities constitute a large component of special education courses.

Like the standardized curriculum, special education programming should ensure that all teacher candidates receive the same quality instruction addressing the range and depth of issues relating to special education.

Recommendation 3: That the Ontario Ministers of Education and Training, Colleges, and Universities consider working with the deans of the faculties of education to and establish province-wide standards for special education content and experiences.

The following sections detail the specific components that the Teacher Education working group has identified as essential to a successful teacher education program.

A Common Curriculum

The Teacher Education working group strongly believes that a standardized teacher education curriculum that includes detailed instruction on the following topics will better prepare teachers and school administrators to work with children with learning disabilities:

Effective learning strategies and teaching methodologies: Teacher candidates should receive instruction in effective learning strategies and teaching methodologies for students who have learning difficulties, such as reciprocal reading techniques, cloze procedures, talk-aloud strategies, story webbing,

information chunking, and the use of visuals. It is important that these strategies be proven and effective over a broad range of grade levels and subject areas. This instruction should not only be part of a specialized course in special education or learning disabilities, but also be incorporated into all curriculum areas, particularly mathematics and language arts.

Child development, language development, and literacy acquisition:

Educational psychology should be a required full course in all teacher education programs, with candidates completing this course as part of either their concurrent or their consecutive studies. Within this course, information should be provided regarding language and speech development, literacy development, reading and writing processes, atypical development, learning, instructional practices, and assessment and evaluation procedures. This collective knowledge base will better enable teacher candidates to identify students who would benefit from instructional accommodations and modifications and who may have learning disabilities.

As well, all teacher candidates, especially those involved in primary/junior programs, should receive instruction in child development, including factors that promote healthy development and those that hinder it. As part of this knowledge base, teacher candidates should possess general knowledge about the physical development, cognitive development, and social development of all students.

Reading instruction: All teacher candidates, but especially those completing primary/junior programs, should possess a firm understanding of reading (and writing) processes, as well as factors that influence the acquisition of these skills. They should also possess a sound knowledge of the following research-based conclusions and associated instructional practices:

- Phonological awareness instruction promotes early reading and reading comprehension (decoding and comprehension) and spelling skills.
- Systematic phonics instruction improves reading, spelling, and, to a lesser extent, comprehension.
- Guided oral reading and repeated readings increase reading fluency.
- Vocabulary instruction (e.g., visual mnemonics, paraphrasing, context, questions) promotes reading comprehension.
- Comprehension strategies (e.g., graphic organizers, question answering, mental imagery) improve students' text comprehension.
- Direct/explicit instruction and transactional strategies instruction enhance student learning.
- Computer technologies hold substantial promise in promoting and reinforcing students' reading skills.

As well, the instructional practices and recommendations presented by established national and international reading associations such as the National Reading Council, the International Reading Association, the International Dyslexia Association, and the National Reading Panel should be endorsed.

Early intervention programs: Teachers who will work in the field of early childhood and primary education should become familiar with and learn to

effectively use the Web-Based Teaching Tool (WBTT) developed by the Learning Disabilities Association Ontario in its Promoting Early Intervention project. The WBTT provides teachers with a reliable and easy-to-use screening tool, as well as a database of teaching strategies and resources, so remediation is begun before a concrete school-based learning problem is manifested.

Another important tool with which teacher candidates should become familiar is the Dynamic Screening and Intervention Model (DSIM) developed by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario and incorporated into the WBTT. Designed to be delivered over the course of the senior kindergarten year, the DSIM provides a practical guide to the systematic observation, screening, and support of students at risk of school failure. More information on the WBTT can be found on the LDAO website at www.ldao.on.ca.

Being an informed consumer: All teacher candidates should possess the knowledge and skills required to be an “informed consumer” of educational products, teaching materials and resources, and pedagogical practices. This involves adopting critical questioning protocols, even toward information presented in pre-service courses (e.g., what empirical evidence supports the use of this product/process? What would students gain from using this product/process? Can I adopt this product/process to meet the needs of all the students in my classroom, including those with learning disabilities?). To this end, the committee endorses the questions and guidelines developed by such

organizations as the Canadian Health Network (www.canadian-health-network.ca/html/help/checklist1.html).

Teacher candidates should be especially diligent when evaluating information posted on the Internet. While the Internet is a valuable source of information, teacher candidates should learn to assess the credibility of organizations and individuals who have posted and be sensitive to costs associated with the use of any educational product or process. The WBTT also provides valuable support and information in this area.

Being a reflective education practitioner: Teacher candidates should learn to adopt practices consistent with being a reflective practitioner and/or action researcher in the classroom; that is, learning to regularly assess the educational needs of students, the effectiveness of any commercially produced or teacher-made product and/or process with respect to meeting these needs, and the effectiveness of any corresponding adaptations/modifications. They should also be able to serve as advocates for students with learning disabilities and their caregivers when promoting the use of effective educational resources and instructional practices, and be able to inform parents of questionable products and practices.

Empathy and perspective taking: Teacher candidates should participate in educational sessions designed to increase and promote empathy and positive attitudes when working with students with exceptionalities and their parents. It is imperative that teacher candidates acknowledge the lived experiences of parents and other caretakers and recognize the emotional strain and stress that may be associated with caring for students with learning disabilities. They should also receive instruction regarding effective methods of communication, especially with respect to discussing students' progress, instructional programming, and the roles and responsibilities of parents and educators. It would be beneficial to involve knowledgeable and experienced community members (e.g., students with learning disabilities, parents, members and staff of local chapters of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario) in the presentation of such information to teacher candidates.

Special Education Course Content

The Teacher Education working group firmly believes that all teachers and school and board administrators should possess the specific knowledge and skills required to work with students with learning disabilities. To that end, information about learning disabilities should be incorporated (to a greater extent than is present practice) in all curriculum and methodology pre-service courses. Such information would include how to identify and recognize indicators/characteristics of children who may have learning disabilities, and how to assess and design

program accommodations and modification as part of daily lesson plans and unit plans.

In addition, the Teacher Education working group endorses a mandatory special education course that covers the following issues:

The nature of learning disabilities: Teacher candidates should acquire sound knowledge of the overall nature and characteristics of learning disabilities (e.g., difficulties with language processing, memory, executive functioning, social skills), as well as of specific learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia). They should also develop an understanding of other disorders and/or giftedness characteristics that often co-exist (co-morbidity) with learning disabilities (e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, language/communication disorders, Tourette's Syndrome). As well, they should also have the opportunity to review the information contained in the document, "Learning Disabilities: A New Definition" (Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, 2001).

Assessment and evaluation practices: Given the increased emphasis on assessment at both the provincial and school levels, course work should specifically address this complex task. This course work should be extensive, allowing teacher candidates to acquire an operational understanding of a variety

of assessment and evaluation tools and methodologies, as well as accommodation and modification procedures applicable in assessment and evaluation. Adequate attention also needs to be paid to the methods available for collecting student information, including observation, portfolio development, teacher-made assessment instruments, and dialogue with students.

Accommodation and modification processes: Given the large number of student with diverse needs within Ontario classrooms, teacher candidates should be instructed in alternate methods of delivering curriculum within a variety of subject areas. This instruction should include accommodations and modifications to instruction procedures, such as providing a separate space for individuals to complete work, reducing the amount of work or simplifying the language. It is important that teacher candidates know what is permitted and how to implement accommodations and modifications for assessment and evaluation procedures at a variety of levels. These would include teacher-made tests as well as provincial assessments.

Legal responsibilities: Teacher candidates should have a firm understanding of the expectations placed on them as classroom teachers within the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process as outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education. In light of their role and responsibilities within this process, teacher candidates should be knowledgeable about the Identification Placement Review Committee

Regulation 181. As well, they should be made aware of the role and responsibilities of the Special Education Advisory Committee as mandated in Regulation 464, Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE), and the relationship between these bodies and special education practice. Finally, teacher candidates should be made familiar with all national, provincial, and local special education regulations and standards policies, procedures, and guidelines that have an implication and impact on the delivery of services to children with exceptionalities. These include the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Ontario Education Act, which supercede other legislation such as the Education Act.

Social, cultural, and economic influences: Teacher candidates should possess an understanding of how social, cultural, and economic factors may influence or shape/affect the lived realities of students with learning disabilities and their caregivers. Consistent with the recommendations of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario's Promoting Early Intervention Screening and Assessment working group, teacher candidates should possess an awareness of cultural bias within some forms of standardized and teacher-developed testing, especially for students who are Aboriginal Canadians, recent immigrants, or whose cultural or linguistic diversity may limit the validity of many instruments. Details of the working group's recommendations can be found at www.ldao.on.ca/ldao_projects/pei/apdec_02.html.

Available resources: Teacher candidates should be made aware of the resources and the local and provincial organizations, such as the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, that are available to help them to continually develop their skills in this area.

Special Education Practicum Experience

Special education teacher education can be further enhanced by linking pre-service instruction within the university setting to practicum experiences in schools. As an integral component of pre-service teacher education in Ontario, the practicum experience can provide an invaluable opportunity for teacher candidates to learn to identify and effectively teach students with learning disabilities. However, to accomplish this, it is important that faculties of education and mentor teachers be aware of this focus, and that teacher candidates be aware that working with students with learning disabilities is an expected part of the practicum experience. To that end, the Teacher Education working group recommends the inclusion of the following components in the province-wide standardized teacher education program:

Special education observational experiences: A portion of the required practicum should be set aside to allow all teacher candidates to participate in special education settings, either inside or outside the regular classroom. During

this time, teacher candidates, in collaboration with their mentor teachers, should have the opportunity to:

- Observe and/or instruct students who have learning disabilities within the classroom setting and/or with special educators outside the classroom, including learning resource teachers;
- Develop and deliver evaluation and assessment procedures for students with identified or suspected learning disabilities;
- Develop and implement accommodations and programming modifications for students with special needs, including those with identified or suspected learning disabilities, as part of daily lesson plans and plans;
- Access and, when possible, participate in the development of Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) documentation for students with identified or suspected learning disabilities;
- Participate in in-school teams related to the development and implementation of IEP and IPRC processes;
- Observe and/or participate in the delivery of services provided by professional support persons such as school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and social workers;
- Observe and/or participate in the delivery of services provided by paraprofessional support persons such as educational assistants;
- Observe and/or participate in parental communication sessions/conferences (e.g., between teacher and parents, between in-school support team and parents, between professional support person and parents), especially those that relate to the academic and socio-emotional well-being of students with learning disabilities (observation or participation in such communication sessions should be contingent on explicit parental approval); and

- Whenever possible, observe and/or participate in instruction provided in the four Provincial Demonstration Schools.

Standardized structure: Faculties of education should develop and disseminate to mentor teachers and hosting schools a “practicum checklist” of relevant activities and experiences for teacher candidates. The checklist can also be used as a guide/prerequisite for hosting teacher candidates, helping school administrators and faculty members determine which schools/teachers are best suited to host and mentor teacher candidates. An example of such a checklist is given in Appendix D.

Opportunities for informed, informal dialogue: There should be increased opportunities for dialogue with teachers, professionals, and paraprofessionals who work with students with learning disabilities, especially with respect to programming and best practices, assessment and evaluation, and collaborating with family. Also important is increased involvement, dialogue, encouragement, and direct support from school districts and school administrators, faculties of education, and relevant community organizations, including the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario and affiliate chapters across the province.

Recommendations for Practising Teachers and Schools

During the consultation process for this study, the Teacher Education working group received many valuable suggestions from the various stakeholders for improvements to education delivery for students with learning disabilities. Based on these suggestions, the working group has developed the following recommendations for practising teachers and administrators.

Recommendation 4: That the Ministry of Education as well as school boards, individual schools, and the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario's local chapters increase recognition of best practices by formally acknowledging teachers who provide exceptional instruction to students with learning disabilities.

There are many educators across Ontario who provide exemplary instruction and extraordinary care when working with students who have learning disabilities and their caretakers. By recognizing their work, preferably annually in a public forum, we can provide examples of best practices for other education practitioners. The working group also suggests that school boards, school administrators, and faculties of education seek out/call upon these exemplary educators to provide mentorship and modeling to others in the field, particularly beginning teachers.

Teachers can also benefit from working closely with professional support providers such as psychologists, speech and language pathologists/audiologist,

and social workers. These professionals comprise an integral component of successful education delivery for students with exceptionalities.

Recommendation 5: That schools and teachers increase involvement of professional support providers and school support teams when designing education programming for students with learning disabilities.

While it is desirable that all schools and teachers be able to access and utilize support services when needed, the Teacher Education working group recognizes that this access is often compromised by financial, geographic, and linguistic factors. However, there is room for improvement within the existing structures. For example, school boards can provide in-service training to teachers on how to effectively collaborate with and participate in in-school team partnerships, and teachers can allot adequate time for meetings with support service providers.

The Teacher Education working group found that, in general, teachers lacked enough time to dedicate to designing successful programming for students with exceptionalities. Teachers need more time for collaborating with support persons and for participating in IPRC processes and developing IEPs. They also need consistent and clear guidelines on how to develop IEPs and assess their success.

Recommendation 6: That the Ministry of Education and the school boards provide standardized instruction of the development

of IEPs and increase the allotted time and resources for teachers to develop special education programming.

Finally, the Teacher Education working group believes that mandatory hearing and vision testing would do much to improve the overall programming and service delivery for young students.

Recommendation 7: That the Ministry of Education mandate vision and hearing testing for all children prior to their entry into the elementary school system.

Recommendations for Ongoing Education and Additional Qualification Programs

The Teacher Education working group firmly believes that all practising teachers should possess and practice the knowledge and skills outlined above for teacher candidates. In order to continue to acquire and refine such knowledge and skills, the committee recommends that practising teachers avail themselves of the large number of professional development opportunities presently available in the province of Ontario including:

- In-service workshops and presentations
- Board-based workshops and presentations
- Federation-sponsored summer institutes
- Additional qualification courses
- Websites and educational chat rooms
- Graduate courses and degrees
- National and international conferences
- Local community organizations including local chapters of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario

The working group believes that professional development programs will be most beneficial when they are tailored to meet the needs of the audience for which they are intended. To that end, the working group recommends that the Ministry of Education, together with school boards and faculties of education, provide a wider variety of professional development opportunities, such as teacher mentoring; short, intensive, subject-specific instruction; conferences; professional reading; and teacher dialogue. As well, in order to ensure that

additional qualification courses are accessible to all teachers and administrators, the working group recommends reducing their cost, simplifying sign-up procedures, and offering courses at times that are most suited for the participants.

Recommendation 8: That the Ministry of Education work with school boards and faculties of education to improve access to additional qualification courses and provide more choices for professional development.

It is also important to modify the existing additional qualification courses to provide more hands-on/practical training rather than theoretical learning alone. As well, courses should be divided to reflect the divisions (primary, junior, intermediate, and secondary) in the school setting, and there should be increased emphasis on issues relating to learning disabilities, such as identifying and recognizing indicators/characteristics of children who may have learning disabilities and how to assess and program for these students.

Special education training is imperative not only for teachers, but for principals and administrators as well. The working group firmly believes that all persons responsible for educating students with learning disabilities should understand and be able to meet the needs of these students.

Recommendation 9: That all school and board administrators complete Special Education Part 1. As part of this instruction, there should be an increased emphasis on the nature and characteristics

of learning disabilities, effective programming for these students, and assessment and evaluation procedures.

Recommendation 10: That faculties of education revise the Principal's Qualification Part 1 course as well as the Supervisory Officer Qualification Program to include detailed information regarding programming needs, modifications, accommodations, and assessment and evaluation procedures for students with exceptionalities as identified by the Ministry of Education. There should also be a specific focus on special education law, guidelines, legislation and regulations, and the Special Education Policy Memorandum.

Finally, faculties of education, school boards, and individual schools should take advantage of the knowledge and expertise of community organizations and associations such as the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario when developing and delivering professional development programs, whether in designing additional qualification course content or presenting workshops to practising teachers and administrators. Involving such organization would ensure that the information presented is relevant and meets the needs of students with learning disabilities.

Summary

The preceding recommendations represent a comprehensive and daunting challenge to Ontario's faculties of education, the Ontario College of Teachers and to the Ministry of Education. However, as we increasingly see recommendations surface in a range of reports (LOTF, At-risk Working Group, etc.) reflecting concern regarding teacher

preparedness, it becomes clear that teachers are often entering the professions insufficiently prepared to address the needs of their most vulnerable students.

Within a short time, the annual expenditure on special education in Ontario will be close to \$2 billion per year, a substantial commitment and teachers represent the means for delivering not just the curriculum but the additional support needed by all students but especially those in special education. It is essential, therefore, that classroom teachers have the skills and knowledge they need to support students before they enter the classroom and that they be supported in meeting the expectation of career-long learning. Students deserve nothing less.

Voices and Perspectives

Teacher Candidates/Pre-service Students

Participants

A total of 91 teacher candidates representing 6 of the 10 faculties of education within the province of Ontario volunteered to participate in a series of focus group sessions held at their respective institutions. The teacher candidates ranged in age from 22 years to 54 years ($M = 28.83$, $SD = 6.61$), with most of the teachers, 85.4%, being female. All participants were in the process of acquiring primary/junior (grades 1-6) or junior/intermediate (grades 4-8) teaching qualifications.

Methodology

All focus group sessions were held in the spring, either immediately prior to or just after the completion of the last teaching practicum. There was an assumption that the teacher candidates would have greater perspective about classroom practices and pre-service programs at this time, and that they would have completed all of the pre-service education necessary before becoming licensed teachers.

Three general questions or prompts were used to guide the focus group sessions. The first prompt asked teacher candidates to reflect on their school year and provide constructive feedback about how the pre-service program could be modified to better prepare them to work with students with learning disabilities: “Discuss any recommendations or ideas about how pre-service instruction may be enhanced with respect to learning and understanding children who have learning disabilities.” Because the practicum is a central component of any pre-service program, participants were

invited to share their classroom experiences: “Describe your teaching practicums, and the guidance and information that you received from teachers while completing them with respect to how to work with students who have learning disabilities.” Finally, the teacher candidates were asked to discuss any apprehensions and concerns they may have with respect to beginning teaching: “Discuss any concerns that you have as a beginning teacher with respect to working with students who have learning disabilities.” The dialogue was open-ended.

Responses

Pre-service Programs

The need for extended pre-service teacher education: Some teacher candidates advocated for the extension of the pre-service year. However, other participants were more cautious about longer programs and qualified that any extension should be based on a reduced schedule.

- *I think that a two-year program would be better.*
- *The pre-service program should be two years or at least lengthened to 10 months. Lengthening the program would provide teacher candidates with more training.*
- *We’d had enough by April. The program included too many hours in a week already. If the program were to be extended, there would need to be fewer hours. That way, we would have more time and less stress.*

The need for extended studies in special education: One sentiment teacher candidates reiterated consistently across all the focus sessions was the need for extended, mandatory studies in special education. There was a shared sentiment that existing classes were too large and too general in their scope. In addition, there were suggestions for increased

numbers of electives, with courses in learning disabilities being included in these offerings.

- *We need more time in the course on special education. How can all the information be covered in one 20-hour course?*
- *Our special education course should run all year. When I was in my undergraduate program I took 10 different psychology courses. Many people come into teachers' college without this background and only get 20 hours of instruction on special education.*
- *Our big classes did not provide the opportunity for individual attention. In smaller classes, we would be able to learn more.*
- *We had one year, but what we did was lacking. The course content was very general.*
- *We should focus on practical applications. We should do evaluations and assessments before we go into the classroom.*
- *We need more electives. I didn't have much choice for electives. I could only pick one.*
- *I think that courses in learning disabilities need to be mandatory. Teachers should be assessed on their skills in the area of learning disabilities.*

The need for special education experiences: The teacher candidates who participated in these focus sessions were also consistent in their preference for special education experiences as part of the pre-service year. It was suggested that these experiences could be acquired through either observational sessions or as part of the teaching practicum. A few students elaborated on the positive experiences that they had in special education settings as part of their teaching practicums.

- *If we had a year of special education, half of that time could be spent on observation. We could have days in the semester where we could go into schools and observe teachers working with students who have exceptionalities.*
- *Perhaps teacher candidates could spend one day a week in the resource centre.*
- *I think that teacher candidates should have a practicum experience within a special education classroom. I feel unprepared to teach students with learning disabilities or special needs because I didn't have any practical experience in the pre-service program.*
- *Teacher candidates should have an opportunity to be in special education in at least one practicum or placement.*
- *On my teaching placement, I went to the special education classroom in the mornings. I was able to attend meetings for some of the primary, middle, and high school students. I was able to observe how to program for these students and follow through on accommodations in the classroom.*
- *When I was on one of my placements, I went into to the resource room to see what the resource teacher did when working with an exceptional student from my practice teaching class. I learned a lot from this experience. Also, the hands-on practice was very helpful. I think that teacher candidates should be encouraged to take similar initiative or to seize opportunities to learn as much as possible when in practicum placements.*

The need for revised curriculum courses: While the majority of teacher candidates advocated for extended studies in special education, many of them also acknowledged the importance of integrating such information throughout the curriculum. This was especially true with respect to information about accommodation and modification processes. Finally, some candidates seemed to be especially frustrated with the present status existing between curriculum and special education courses. Specifically, they

claimed a state of “double jeopardy” in which pre-service instructors made inaccurate assumptions about information being covered in parallel courses.

- *The other courses in the pre-service program need to have a more clear connection to learning disabilities.*
- *We need to discuss what to do for students who have learning disabilities in all our subject areas. In math and language arts we never discussed how to work with children who had learning disabilities and how to modify these curriculum areas.*
- *If the necessary information about assessing and recognizing students with learning disabilities were more ingrained into all the pre-service program courses, teacher candidates would be better able to recognize learning disabilities.*
- *Some instructors didn't want to talk about it [working with children with learning disabilities].*
- *If we asked about working with students with learning disabilities in our language arts and other curriculum classes, we were told that this information would be covered in special education. In special education, there wasn't enough time.*
- *Typically, the special education course in pre-service programs covers general accommodation strategies and does not provide particular information about how to accommodate in specific subject areas. Everyone talked about “what if” and “they would modify lessons” but no one really had any concrete ideas or experience doing it themselves.*

The need for relevant supports, resources, and materials: Another consistent message that emerged throughout the focus group sessions was the desire for recent, relevant support materials. Specifically, many teacher candidates expressed a wish for resources that would support their initial screening and assessment of students who may have

learning difficulties, as well as resources that would help them program for these students.

- *If we had something like a checklist of symptoms to look for, it may be helpful. It is hard for me to tell if a child potentially has a learning disability. I need some kind of strategy to identify possible learning disabilities.*
- *I need to know what the signs and symptoms are for children who have learning disabilities so that I can help my students. I need to at least have an idea of what to look for and what to expect.*
- *Something like a checklist would be helpful. I need some kind of strategy or support to identify students who have learning disabilities.*
- *We want doable, effective strategies.*
- *A list of strategies that will help new teachers program for and work with all students.*
- *I would like to see a place for teachers and teacher candidates to go to gather resources for working with students with learning disabilities. If I have a student in grade 8 working at a grade 3 level I can find out what works and what has been researched and tested. I can take the program or materials and use it in my class knowing that it is going to work.*

The need for increased opportunities for professional dialogue: There was a call for increased opportunities to participate in informal but informed dialogue with other educators with respect to working with students who have learning disabilities. There was a sentiment that such discussions are more authentic and enhance learning more than didactic dialogue.

- *We should have an opportunity to share our experiences working with students who have learning disabilities and to hear what modifications other teachers have*

made when working with these students. This would be great. Not a textbook-based conversation, but one based on real-life experiences.

- *I would suggest some type of class where we could try out some strategies and teaching techniques and then come back to discuss what worked or did not work.*
- *I would like to see more debriefing sessions where we talk about the challenges that we faced and could learn from each other.*
- *I would like to see a phone tree to call for support on LDs.*

Practicum Experiences

When asked to discuss their practicum experiences, teacher candidates expressed a great deal of variability both among each other and across their individual teaching placements. Teacher candidates presented a number of scenarios ranging from very negative to very positive experiences.

The importance of the practicum experience: The practicum is considered the heart of pre-service teacher education programs and the responses of these participants revealed that the same principle holds true for learning about children with learning disabilities. This was expressed both implicitly and explicitly.

- *We need more time in classrooms and less time in the faculty of education.*
- *We get more practical knowledge in the classroom. It doesn't do you any good if you are sitting there, not doing anything.*
- *I had a placement with Learning Disabilities. I learned more there than anywhere else.*
- *You get more benefit from more experience.*

The need for exceptional associate and mentor teachers: Participants identified the relation with their associate or mentor teachers as key to the success of a teaching block, with most candidates equating a successful block to working with “knowledgeable” teachers who provided them with a number of learning opportunities within both the classroom and the larger context of the school. The opposite characteristics were often presented when describing a negative experience, albeit some candidates discussed learning gains associated with working with such teachers. Some participants questioned the preparedness of some associate teachers to supervise teacher candidates.

- *My placement was very rewarding. The school had a very organized resource system and staff. All the staff had a positive attitude towards the students. They were very caring and nurturing towards the students and discussed how to help them.*
- *The associate teacher was fantastic.*
- *In my school there were about 208 students. Over 50 had a learning disability. She took the time to train us, made us understand what to do with each student.*
- *The guidance and information was typically in the form of discussion from experienced teachers. This is the most useful information.*
- *It all depends on the associate teacher. Some student teachers had amazing experiences. My teachers just left me alone. I just ended up babysitting for them.*
- *You can learn just as much from a “bad” experience. For example, you will know what not to do in a similar situation. I had a difficult time coping with some of the things that I saw. It is okay to be uncomfortable when you learn. I would like to see more debriefing sessions where we talk about the challenges that we faced and could learn from each other.*

Even more importantly in the context of this study, many of the participants questioned the preparedness of some associate and mentor teachers to work with students who have learning disabilities. This has been cited in the research literature as a barrier to

the accommodation of students with special needs (Scott, Vitale, and Masten, 1998).

While some teacher candidates commended the efforts of practising teachers with respect to being sensitive to the needs of students with learning disabilities, others believed that many practising teachers were unable and/or unwilling to provide these students with a positive learning experience. Many of these comments centred on the ability to modify curriculum for these students.

- *In my placement, the associate teacher provided me with a lot of help to modify lessons for learning disabled students. The associate teacher was very helpful, as she knew the students' needs.*
- *I found it very rewarding to take a unit designed for the whole class and also make the unit work for the learning disabled students. It was very rewarding to have my associate teacher tell me that I should be proud of myself and that the student could not have completed the unit without the changes that I made.*
- *In my teaching blocks, I found that some teachers presented the attitude that they did not want to have anything to do with special education. They made comments like, "I chose not to teach special education because my strength is in the regular classroom." They are happy to give the child and all of his or her needs to the educational assistant and resource teacher. They choose to pass the responsibility on.*
- *Many teachers believed that they did not have the experience necessary to develop a plan to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities.*
- *It seemed like students with learning disabilities were regarded as being in the way. It was very bad.*
- *I was shocked.*
- *Some of the teachers did not have in-service and seemed to overlook students' learning difficulties or not know how to address them. They were not aware of some of the new information that I had learned.*
- *In one of my placements the associate teacher identified a student with a learning disability. However, the associate teacher did not provide me with any specific*

direction about how to deal with student. I think that associate teachers should be providing direction.

- *I watched the resource teacher fight with the classroom teacher. The resource teacher wanted to be giving the lessons to the students with learning disabilities ahead of time so that they would not fall behind. The teacher wouldn't do this because she thought that everyone should start together and then if they fell behind, the resource teacher could provide help.*
- *The only information that I received was "Johnny gets help." I was told to modify my grading for him but not his program.*

The need for faculties of education to give associate teachers clear and unambiguous

expectations: Embedded in the comments above but also mentioned specifically by the participants was the recommendation that faculties of education be more explicit regarding expectations for teacher candidates as well as for school personnel who work with teacher candidates.

- *[Associate] teachers need more guidance about what teacher candidates are supposed to do. The teachers did not seem to be well informed about such issues as how to mark teacher candidates and what they should expect from them. There should be clear expectations before teacher candidates go into the classroom. Do schools have some structure with respect to helping teacher candidates?*
- *Had to really ask the associates for information.*
- *It is important to know how to access the resource teacher, their job descriptions, how they can help me as a pre-service teacher.*

Concerns of Beginning Teaching

Feelings of being unprepared: When asked to discuss their thoughts about beginning

teaching, the teacher candidates expressed feelings of being uncertain and unprepared.

Underscoring this is an assumption that they must meet the needs of children with

learning disabilities on their own, not recognizing the roles of others in the school.

- *We were very overwhelmed, very unprepared.*
- *Perseverance. We need someone to tell us how to do this or that. Ten years from now, I'll know what to do. Right now, I don't know what to do.*
- *I wanted to be a teacher, but now I want to quit. I'm scared about all the things I don't know. Teachers' backs are up against the wall. We just don't have any time. It was a lot tougher than I imagined.*
- *I am leaving the program ill prepared to assist students with any exceptionality. I am scared that I will not know how to work with students with exceptionalities.*
- *I feel that I might become overwhelmed, and I feel like I cannot do it all at once.*
- *I feel incredibly unprepared.*

Assessment skills: Many of the participants expressed concerns about their abilities to observe and make initial assessments with respect to students who may have learning disabilities. Teacher candidates expressed fears about raising false alarms and being able to identify other potential factors when students experience learning difficulties.

- *I'm afraid of falsely diagnosing everyone.*
- *I wonder if my observational skills are good enough to make adequate assessments.*
- *I am worried about my assessment abilities. I wonder if I will know how hard and how far to push students. I wonder if I will know how to coach students and whether I will know what are reasonable expectations for them.*
- *I don't think I would be able to detect the differences between a student with a learning disability and one who is acting out or not mature.*

- *When do we start to notify the school that a particular child needs help? Do we do the background work? When do you start worrying about it? In the primary grades some students might catch up later. I don't know any of this stuff! When do you say that there is definitely a problem?*

Lesson planning, accommodations, and modifications: When discussing their concerns as beginning teachers, a substantial amount of the dialogue focused on issues associated with lesson planning. Specifically, the participants were concerned about developing and implementing effective lessons for students with learning disabilities. On the whole, most teacher candidates were uncertain about how they would create effective lessons for students with learning disabilities while still adhering to the provincial curriculum expectations. They expressed uncertainty about their ability to monitor the appropriateness of their modifications with respect to meeting the needs of individual students.

- *I am terrified that due to my lack of knowledge I might contribute to children thinking they cannot do the work, or that I will modify too far and thus make the work too easy and boring for the children.*
- *I am worried about how to create modifications for students with suspected learning disabilities. Is it how you grade or assess these students? Do you modify what these students do within their present grade level or do you modify the work entirely to the grade level of the students' ability? How do you meet the curriculum without lower expectations?*
- *The problem is that the curriculum is full. My associate teacher said that you have to get through the curriculum and if some students don't understand the information, then they have to come see you after class for extra help. If one*

student doesn't understand and you don't have time for that child, that child may disrupt the remainder of the class.

- *The concerns I have with working with students with learning disabilities involve being able to keep up with the new curriculum and still meet the needs of my students. I plan to take things a step at a time and realize my limitations.*

Consistent with their concerns for meeting the programming needs of individual students, many of the teacher candidates were also concerned about their ability to establish “instructional balance” in their classrooms. The teacher candidates doubted their ability to create a climate of “equity” in the classroom with respect to the attention they could provide to each student.

- *I am worried that I will treat learning disabled or suspected learning disabled children differently and that other children would then see these children as more important and thus, possibly help create social difficulties in the classroom.*
- *I think that I will be able to handle a class with one child with a learning exceptionality but I am really worried about how I will handle a class that has a number of students with multiple exceptionalities.*
- *It is also difficult to meet the needs of all those children when you have multiple students with learning disabilities because each is at a different level. I worry about my ability to split myself and meet the varying needs of all children in the classroom.*
- *How do you help them strive to reach their full potential while trying to teach the rest of the class?*

Finally, teacher candidates expressed concern about their ability to craft accurate Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Many participants confided in knowing very little about IEPs and Identification, Placement, and Review Committees (IPRCs), stating that

they were precluded from participating in these processes while completing their teaching placements.

- *I didn't see the IEPs and my teacher said not to worry about it. If the students didn't do the homework, she would take care of it.*
- *There was supposed to be modified programs for students with learning disabilities, but I never saw them.*
- *I never saw the IEPs because the two students were always in the resource room. At report-card time, I saw a difference.*
- *We don't have the practical experience to do the report cards ourselves.*
- *How do you evaluate someone who is on the IEP compared to the rest of the class?*
- *What if a grade 5 student is working at the grade 2 level? Do you write on the report card that he or she received an A on grade 2 math even though he or she is in grade 5?*
- *You've got all these students with A's but they are not getting A's when it comes to the final grade.*

The need for continued mentoring and informed dialogue: Consistent with the sentiments provided when discussing pre-service programs, teacher candidates expressed their preference for ongoing mentoring and increased opportunities to participate in informed dialogue. Most participants hoped that such dialogues would occur within the context of their schools, with many stating that such conversations constitute effective and relevant learning opportunities.

- *I would like to see some kind of a mentoring program where the special education teacher works with a new teacher, or a seasoned veteran teacher works with new teachers to let them know what strategies could work, and what the mentors have used successfully in similar situations.*

- *I think that mentoring of new teachers by experienced teachers may help the new teachers enhance their programs.*
- *Most of what I learned was through teaching experiences and working with teachers and learning from my peers.*
- *When you start at a school you go to a person you like and ask them for help. Most of the teachers will help you because they care about you.*
- *Who has the responsibility of mentoring us?*
- *You need someone to talk to.*

Collaborating with other professionals and paraprofessionals: Many of the teacher candidates expressed concerns about collaborating with other professionals and paraprofessionals. The majority of these comments were specific to working with educational assistants, with many participants sharing what they perceived to be negative instances involving educational assistants. Specifically, participants commented that teachers did not provide educational assistants with appropriate instructional recommendations or guidelines, or, in the cases where they were provided, they were not implemented.

- *There was an educational assistant in the classroom, but it seemed that she was ill prepared. The teachers and resource teachers did not provide her with information about students' needs and the program requirements.*
- *The educational assistant was not expected to provide any instruction; the teacher did not give any information to the educational assistant regarding the child's needs or the child's program.*
- *I found that often teachers also did not know what the child's program should include.*
- *The teacher provided the educational assistant with suggestions about appropriate accommodations but the educational assistant chose not to use them*

and just sat with the children. The teacher even provided materials for the educational assistant but the materials were never used.

- *Educational assistants, resource teachers, and teachers have to communicate in order to be effective.*
- *I saw an effective, good model in my school: the educational assistant was integrated in the classroom program.*
- *The Special Education Service Providers were helpful and we had teachers who helped with specific programming. However, teachers need to be aware of the specific problems.*

Practising Teachers

Participants

A total of xx practising teachers currently working in schools across xx boards of education participated. Of these participants, xx are employed as special education teachers, with the remaining xx teaching in the regular classroom. The average years of experience for these teachers was xx. Of the teachers who responded, xx had received training in special education.

Methodology

Pen and paper surveys were sent via the school coordinator of the pilot project and distributed. Each teacher was provided with a cover letter explaining the purpose of this project as well as providing instructions on how to complete the survey, which asked the following:

- What are your recommendations for pre-service and continuing education in this province over the next decade?
- What are/would be some of the most effective methods of professional development for you?
- If you are a classroom teacher: what factors would encourage you to enter special education? What factors would prevent you from entering special education?
- Given the factors that you cannot change, what are the most significant challenges to programming for students with learning disabilities?
- Please list supports that you would like to see in place in your school, school board, and community with respect to working with students with learning disabilities.

Responses

Pre-service and Continuing Education

Suggestions for professional development: In the area of ongoing professional development teachers expressed a desire to have more choice and control over the types/subject areas of professional development they chose to engage in. The format of short, practically based, subject-specific workshops was noted as being a preferred type of professional development. It was suggested that allowing practitioners to meet and share expertise and discuss concerns would enhance ongoing professional development.

- *Continuing education for teachers must be self-directed.*
- *Special interest courses should be available as opposed to university level.*
- *Allow teachers to take courses relevant to their teaching assignments and grade level and interest.*
- *Provide effective workshops of hands-on information and techniques in dealing with learning disabilities.*
- *Early literacy home/school connections, discipline, anything with hands-on ideas that can be taken back to the classrooms.*
- *Emphasis on early identification training should be available to JK/SK, grade 1, 2, and 3 teachers.*
- *Workshops on various difficulties with hands-on examples of strategies.*
- *Opportunities for mentoring, increased opportunities for teacher-to-teacher sharing of best practice, resources.*

While a few participants suggested that special education training be mandatory, other participants disagreed with this view, noting that teachers, in general, need flexibility and should have the right to choose what type of training to pursue.

- *Mandatory special education training for all teachers.*
- *Training for all teachers in Special Education Part 1.*

- *Allow teacher to take courses relevant to their teaching assignments, grade level, and interests. Do not assign courses to be taken.*

Teachers also expressed the desire that resources and topic areas be current and practical in nature. This included ongoing in-servicing not only in effective techniques such as assessment but also in terms of updates on government changes about regulations and expectations.

- *Training strategies and resources should be relevant and current.*
- *Provide effective workshops, “hands-on” information and techniques dealing with special education, learning disabilities.*
- *Keep everyone up to date on government initiatives.*

Improvement of pre-service instruction: Both classroom teachers and special education teachers stated frequently that special education training should be a part of pre-service instruction. Some participants also noted the need for English as a second language (ESL) instruction as a part of teacher education. Participants also focused on the length of the teacher education program, the value of the practicum, and the value of mentoring or being apprenticed in a school setting.

- *Should be mandatory that all teachers receive some experience in special education.*
- *Every teacher should have a special education course in teachers’ college including practical knowledge of assessment and programming.*
- *ESL and special education should be included as part of training.*
- *This should be a two-year program, with one year of internship, so that new teachers can work with veteran teachers in the classroom on a long-term basis.*
- *Continued emphasis on the practicum component in the faculty of education.*

- *Teachers should apprentice a full year before teaching alone.*
- *New teachers need more exposure to students who are not the norm and who require remediation or alternate programming, in their years of training. More exposure to classroom management techniques.*
- *All new teachers should graduate with a basic understanding of current research and accommodations within the regular program.*

Cost of professional development: Both classroom and special education teachers expressed concerns about the cost of professional development. Some felt that the cost of additional training should be offset to some extent but failed to suggest by whom. Others suggested that the cost be covered completely and that considerations such as travel distance and time availability be considered in light of making professional development more accessible.

- *Special education courses offered at no cost.*
- *AQ courses in special education offered at no cost during the day.*
- *Financial support to take an extra course.*
- *It is beneficial but I am not prepared to travel to the other side of Toronto after a long teaching day.*

Programming Challenges

Student diversity: Teachers, especially those in special education, also commented that the diagnosis of “learning disabilities” was in itself problematic. Specifically, special educators expressed concern about the diversity of ability levels represented in any one classroom and co-morbidity with other exceptionalities such as giftedness, Attention Deficit Disorder, and autism. While programming for one of these exceptionalities was

considered challenging, programming for the collective was often perceived as overwhelming. Finally, the presence of increasing numbers of students who speak English as a second language heightened teachers' programming concerns.

- *There is a huge range of needs from gifted through to autism and ADD.*
- *Students' needs can vary greatly and scheduling resource support time with homogeneous groups is difficult.*
- *I have ESL students, students at all levels, and LD students.*
- *The mixed groups they've forced us to develop simply on referrals do not meet the needs of LD students in terms of being able to work primarily on required strategies.*
- *The work and resources for the number of children is too limited and they aren't seen by doctors.*

Difficulty attaining balance: The majority of classroom teachers also commented on the difficulties associated with providing individualized instruction within the context of the classroom, that is, working individually with children while still providing instruction to the other students. The majority of classroom teachers and some special educators also commented that increasing class sizes contributed significantly to the difficulties associated with attaining instructional balance. For some, there was an explicit fear that the time and energy required for programming for students with learning disabilities would detract from the overall quality of instruction provided to the majority of the class.

- *A lot of one-on-one attention is needed with these students. With a class of 25 or 30 this is difficult to do.*
- *Proper programming needs to be individualized.*

- *It is work to find time for working individually with one child and also do the paperwork.*
- *Integrating children with high needs into the regular classroom program takes much time away from the needs of the other children.*
- *Being able to give and modify programs to benefit the child when included in a whole class structure is tough.*
- *It is difficult trying to include them in the “regular” classroom as much as possible while being realistic too. Many of them are working at a much lower level than the rest of the class so they need major modifications to the program.*
- *In a diverse classroom with many other needs it is difficult addressing each student’s needs, LD or not.*
- *It is difficult to have time to interact with them when there is no assistant in the room.*
- *The classroom does not allow much time for special attention and it is difficult to work with special education children as they are too distracted by other kids at activity centres.*
- *Administrative “indifference” (frequently changing schedules) and the ministry concept that every child can achieve at the same level are unrealistic.*
- *There is a great deal of paperwork.*
- *It is difficult to meet the needs of the students with their required continued assistance from special education.*
- *Parents must work hard to see that their child is receiving help.*
- *Convincing teachers to change is difficult as they are frustrated, overworked, stressed, and set in their ways.*
- *Large class sizes make it difficult to get a chance to give LD students extra attention, especially if you are alone.*
- *Class sizes and the time needed for individual attention and programming are contradictory.*
- *Increasing class sizes affect the amount of paperwork (forms, forms, forms) and time for individual student help.*

- *Class sizes are too large and there is not enough time.*
- *Large class sizes are inhibitors to success for all levels of abilities.*
- *Class sizes are too large at our school.*
- *The ongoing assessment of all students within the classroom and the implementation of the many expectations of the Ont. curriculum allow for little time left over to work with special needs students.*
- *Finding the time to work with the lower kids is a real challenge!*
- *It is challenging and very time consuming for planning, test preparation, creating tests, and making up assignments.*
- *Time and scheduling and the ability to change administration thinking are obstacles.*
- *It is tough finding time to meet with the many children who have special needs.*
- *There is not enough time.*
- *Special education teaching lacks enough time to help all who need it.*
- *There isn't enough time to spend with each child. There may be time for small groups but one to one is also necessary at times.*

Student attitudes: When asked to describe challenges associated with programming for students with learning disabilities, some teachers responded that many students possessed negative attitudes about themselves and learning. Specifically, teachers found programming difficult when students believed that they are unable to complete tasks successfully, that they are “slow” learners, and that they are not valued members of the classroom.

- *There is too little time and too many expectations of a five-year-old. Children no longer come with learning disabilities, they come with the inability to learn because of so much emotional and physical need, which leads to being unable to*

learn. In one of my classes only five out of 17 students are in a somewhat secure family situation.

- *Organization and a positive approach to school, especially in the teen years, are affected by self-esteem and social acceptance.*

Lack of in-school support: Both classroom teachers and special educators commented on the lack of available supports. Specifically, teachers expressed concern about the lack of financial resources, materials and equipment, and paraprofessional support for students with learning disabilities. Some participants also responded that there was a lack of parental support. Finally, a select number of classroom teachers commented that in-school support personnel failed to provide adequate support to practising teachers.

- *We lack the appropriate material for older students with learning disabilities.*
- *The challenges as I see them do involve funding and the lack of support and materials.*
- *There are no specific programs for special needs students to refer to.*
- *Lack of materials and software in core subjects is another challenge.*
- *There is a lack of support and EA assistance.*
- *There needs to be a better allocation of funds.*
- *It is difficult to meet all their needs with very little resources, and if their needs are high more than one adult is needed.*
- *Proper resources are not always available.*
- *It is hard accommodating for children with learning disabilities, meaning designated rooms are not available to the student if withdrawn, or they are taken to the staff room.*
- *There is no extra help and help is needed to work with the special ed. kids one on one, to program specific lessons, discuss progress with parents, and plan with other teachers.*

- *There is an inability to access practical information and strategies to implement in the classroom.*
- *There is a lack of low-vocabulary material as most resources are at the middle or high school level.*
- *There is a lack of resources, while time constraints and EQAO demands exist in the class.*
- *It is difficult to find professional resources that I could tap into to find more specific materials and hands-on material for the special ed. room, especially for younger children.*
- *There is a lack of resources and appropriate resources.*
- *There are little appropriate resources to use with students.*
- *It takes time to create and look for resources.*
- *There is a lack of parental support.*
- *There is a lack of support from the school support team.*
- *There is a lack of effective support teams within schools.*

Lack of professional support services: Both classroom teachers and special educators commented on the lack of professional support services available outside the school.

Teachers also expressed their frustration with respect to an inability to communicate and work with school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and social workers.

They also expressed their concern about lengthy waiting lists for psycho-educational and related assessments. Without the results of these assessments, many teachers believed that they were unable to provide optimal programming for students with learning disabilities.

- *Challenges are always related to funding. For example, there are shortages of resources and access to the services of psychologists and there are increasing numbers of pupils to be accommodated.*

- *There are inadequate human resources to support student learning.*
- *There is a lack of support in the form of speech and language pathologists and occupational therapists.*
- *There is a lack of support such as speech and language pathologist, OTs, and PTs.*
- *Accessibility to support services like speech and language pathologists is an issue.*
- *We need more assistance from occupational therapists and increased speech and language services.*
- *There is a lack of availability of school psychologists, in-school help, and intervention by outside agencies like the health unit or children's treatment centre.*
- *We need early intervention and professional experts such as speech and occupational therapists.*
- *Classroom teachers need be in direct communication (given time) with professionals.*
- *We need adequate assessments.*
- *There are long waiting lists for out-of-school help such as speech pathologists.*
- *There are long waiting lists for therapy.*
- *Lists for OTs and speech therapists are over two years.*
- *We need psychologists who do not have waiting lists of one to two years.*
- *Many of the students wait years before being serviced properly.*
- *There is a long waiting time for children to be assessed.*
- *There are long waiting lists for speech and language pathologists and psychologists. Also, many times they won't test children early in kindergarten.*
- *It is hard to get a psychological educational assessment done in a timely fashion.*
- *Funding definitely affects the overall classroom, for example, EAs assisting in the classroom and outside agencies being involved with a child during school hours (i.e., speech pathologists, occupational therapists). There is also a long waiting list in the North for services from the psychologist.*

- *It is difficult to have a student diagnosed by a qualified professional and find the right program and materials needed to teach specific skills.*
- *The assessments are not being done quickly enough and the information one gets from an assessment helps to program and teach.*
- *We need to accurately and quickly assess the students' needs to be able to deliver a sound program based on those needs and in conjunction with the classroom teacher.*

Lack of knowledge: A select number of participants, mostly special educators, provided general statements with respect to a lack of knowledge associated with programming for children with learning disabilities. They identified several areas in which they believed a lack of adequate knowledge existed. For instance, they believed that many special educators, classroom teachers, and related professionals possessed an insufficient understanding of learning disabilities and effective instructional methodologies. Some also expressed concern that parents, too, did not possess sufficient relevant knowledge about the nature of learning disabilities.

- *There is limited knowledge of what constitutes learning disabilities or a particular LD.*
- *There is a lack of knowledge regarding disabilities on the part of the classroom teacher. The classroom teachers are giving Rs on the report cards and not providing accommodations to foster students' abilities (not responding to IEP) and not recognizing that students have ability and deserve respect as valid learners.*
- *There is a lack of knowledge about how to program for all different learning disabilities.*
- *There is not enough training and support.*
- *Schools lack teacher training in these areas and in special ed.*

- *There is an administrative “indifference” (e.g., frequently changing schedules).*
- *There is a resistance and misunderstanding of what the learning disability is or isn't by parents and students.*

Factors that Encourage/Discourage Teachers to Enter/Stay in Special Education

In responding to this question special education teachers discussed a number of frustrations with the current system of special education service delivery. One of these concerns centred on workload and the balance between paperwork and the need to spend time working directly with children. A second source of frustration was the perceived lack of resources needed to teach well. Participants expressed concern over class size, inadequate compensation for their job, and the perception that in some cases their fellow colleagues did not respect their role. Despite these concerns many of the teachers stated that they stay special education teachers because of the joy and fulfillment they receive from working with these children.

Analysis of the responses of regular classroom teachers revealed that many of their concerns were similar to those expressed by special education teachers. The perception that the administrative demands of special education were very heavy, lack of resources and personnel, and issues of class size were noted.

Administrative demands: As noted earlier, a large number of participants stated that the administrative demands of the job (often referred to as paperwork) gave them very little time to work directly with children. Both classroom as well as special education teachers either experienced or, in the case of the classroom teachers, perceived that the amount of

paperwork associated with special education was very heavy. Classroom teachers saw this excess of paperwork as a reason not to enter special education, and special education teachers noted it as a source of frustration. Special education teachers stated that they would be more willing to stay in special education if the amount of administrative demands were reduced and they were allowed more time to work directly with children.

- *Paperwork—it is a continuous cycle and also relentless in the amount. As a result less time is given to the students, who are the reason we are here.*
- *Overload of administrative paperwork.*
- *The feeling of being unable to accomplish anything with students when I have meetings, testing, and paperwork.*
- *Unrealistic deadlines, too much red tape.*
- *The paperwork is getting heavier so there's less time for working directly with students.*
- *My present school was cut back from 1.5 special education resource to 1.0 for this year. I have seen her frustrations with ISA funding, lack of EAs, and too much paperwork.*
- *Less paperwork. I understand there is a tremendous amount of paperwork for special education teachers.*

Lack of resources: Many participants noted the lack of resources as a source of frustration in their current job as special education teachers or a reason why, as classroom teachers, they would not enter the field of special education. This lack of resources revolved around four areas: lack of personnel to work with special education students, lack of materials, inability to access assessments quickly, and lack of training. These concerns over resources were often tied to issues of funding for special education. Interestingly the responses of classroom teachers closely matched those of special

education teachers. While special education teachers noted a lack of resources to carry out their job, classroom teachers are also aware that special education is in need of more resources and support.

- *More support from school support team members, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and social workers.*
- *Increased availability of board psychologists, speech language therapists, etc. to cut waiting time for assessments and services.*
- *Support from speech and language pathologists and special education consultants. It is very frustrating.*
- *Lack of funding for students who would benefit from an EA.*
- *There does not seem to be a great deal of support and resources for special education.*
- *More teaching materials with support.*
- *For the students, more books.*
- *Resources for individual students to meet their needs.*
- *The length of time it takes to have a child identified for help.*
- *Lack of immediate assessment by child psychologists.*
- *Funding for workshops.*
- *Specific and relevant training unavailable.*
- *More professional development opportunities needed.*

Class size: The issue of class size came up a number of times with both classroom and special education teachers. Smaller class sizes were seen as preferable and, in some cases, as an advantage for special education teachers in terms of being able to work more directly with students. In terms of the regular class, both sets of participants noted that

large class sizes in the regular stream make the inclusion of students with exceptionalities very difficult.

- *Working with small groups of children.*
- *Opportunity to work with small groups of children.*
- *Smaller class sizes that allow classroom teachers to successfully address the needs of special education students as outlined in the IEP.*
- *Class sizes make it difficult for classroom teachers to provide successfully for the needs of special education students.*

Compensation: Both special education and classroom teachers noted that training to become a special education teacher requires additional cost. Some suggested that added financial incentives such as higher pay might be considered in attracting or keeping people in the field.

- *Cost of taking special education qualifications.*
- *Lack of money to take additional qualifications courses.*
- *Low pay for the work being done.*
- *Making work conditions more attractive, e.g., a stipend.*
- *Needs better pay.*
- *It should deserve more pay.*
- *Low pay for the work being done.*

Incentive to stay a special education teacher: Special education teachers were consistent in stating that one of the reasons they taught in a special education setting was the satisfaction they felt working with students and “making a difference.” A few

classroom teachers also noted this feeling of satisfaction as a reason they might enter the field of special education.

- *Love of and aptitude with students who have difficulty.*
- *Contact with the children.*
- *It is very satisfying to see your special needs children grow and progress in areas across the curriculum.*
- *Enjoy the feeling that the students can come to you for support and help.*

Incentive to become a special education teacher: While there were a variety of concerns shared by both classroom and special education teachers regarding the perceived difficulties in the field, of special note are the responses of classroom teachers to the question what would induce them to enter special education. Many of the teachers stated that they enjoyed the challenge of their current job and did not want to change. Others stated quite openly that there would be nothing that would make them decide to enter the field. One participant even noted, “Is this a joke? Is that the proverbial flying from the frying pan into the fire?” A number of participants expressed concern that entering special education was not an option because of the perception that once hired for a special education position, it is very difficult to return to the regular classroom.

- *Personally I find it more rewarding to work with a variety of children.*
- *This area has never interested me other than what I can apply in the regular class.*
- *Once you are a special education teacher you are never allowed back in the regular class.*
- *Once you are in there, you are in there for good.*

Not all participants shared this view. A few noted that becoming a special education teacher would enhance their teaching career.

- *It would help me to become a well-rounded educator.*
- *The one factor that would encourage me to enter special education is that I have found working with special needs students and their families most rewarding.*

Respect: While noted by both sets of participants, this theme emerged more often in the responses provided by special education teachers. Even though the number of respondents noting this as an area of concern was not large, the statements indicate that this is an area of concern in terms of the role of special education in the school system.

- *A job that totally encompasses resourcing-frustrated teachers.*
- *Pettiness in other teachers regarding my job. Lack of knowledge, refusal to learn about special education from some teachers, lack of support from some teachers.*
- *Many bosses and teachers won't accommodate time.*
- *Being dumped on to look after every form and every child and much of this is the principal's function.*
- *Isolated classroom, e.g., portable or storage room used as the special education classroom.*

A very small number of participants noted the support from colleagues and administrators as being a positive aspect of their current job.

- *Supportive, proactive principals and colleagues.*
- *Proactive board that has clearly defined priorities of special education and will allocate special education funds and resources.*

Effective Methods of Professional Development

Needs-based relevant instruction: When asked to reflect on preferred venues for professional development, both classroom teachers and special educators commented on the need for “relevant” instruction. In their opinion, instruction based on “real needs” in the classroom was ideal, that is, instruction that would facilitate their current interactions with students. Teachers requested that the instructional sessions include practical information and provide suggestions and recommendations that could be immediately transferred into classroom practice.

- *I need in-services that relate directly to the needs of my students.*
- *Professional development workshops should be practical.*
- *Workshops should be practical and supply classroom strategies that can be implemented easily.*
- *There needs to be practical workshops (i.e., hands-on) that provide classroom strategies and resources that can be easily implemented.*
- *Don't tell me, please show me. Come into my room and show me with real kids how to meet the needs of ALL my students because I am still accountable to all of them.*
- *There needs to be PA days specifically for the needs of kindergarten teachers (e.g., screening and intervention strategies).*
- *Professional development courses in assessment linking to the present Ontario curriculum would perhaps be the most helpful to me at this time, as well as for my colleagues.*
- *I want courses about how children learn and how to tell when they are not learning and why they aren't.*
- *They need to provide practical hands-on learning that directly applies to courses of study.*
- *Professional development days need to address the various specific learning disabilities.*

- *There needs to be a review of the present curriculum for all grades and a review of the amount of homework given to each grade.*
- *There should be workshops on behaviour management, ADHD, autism, and children with extreme family difficulties.*
- *It would be great to get handouts with simple yet effective tips and ideas that work.*
- *These courses need to provide specific strategies for the classroom.*
- *I am presently taking a Reading Part 1 course that offers many valuable sources of information for my classroom. I enjoy learning new things that can help the students in my class. I've been part of several committees for early prevention and feel the strategies are helpful to my teaching career. Hands-on activities that can be implemented without changing an entire program are great.*

Increased professional development, financial support, and site-based instruction: A

number of classroom teachers and special educators commented that it was important to increase the number of professional development opportunities currently available to educators. Furthermore, they were able to provide a number of criteria that would enhance the feasibility of these sessions. For example, some teachers requested that greater numbers of professional development sessions be held during the school day. Others commented that these sessions should be held either within a convenient distance from the school or at the school itself.

- *We need affordable costs.*
- *There should be free courses in special education with an emphasis on accommodations to the regular ministry curriculum.*
- *Make workshops free of charge.*
- *Courses should be paid for by the board of education.*
- *Courses should be free of cost for special education and ESL.*

- *There should be more PA days for professional development.*
- *We need provision of PA days.*
- *We need more PA days.*
- *Workshops during the day and at the home school would be good.*
- *Workshops should be available during the day.*
- *Boards must provide ongoing in-service in areas such as effective remediation for articulation, language development, profiling based on educational testing, and how to set up the classroom for multilevel reading groups (like we did before SERTs were on the scene).*
- *In the South, distance and professional development funds are limited.*
- *We need professional development workshops that are in our own school and/or in our own area.*
- *They should be available within my own school and/or during school time.*
- *Professional development available at home, school, and during the day would be nice.*
- *We need in-school workshops.*
- *We need in-service training at school.*
- *Courses should be free of charge and in locations that are feasible for all.*
- *Teachers in the North need easier access to materials, workshops, professional, and courses.*
- *I recommend local workshops so that we are not out of class too much.*
- *There should be release time for teachers to attend conferences yearly.*

Increased opportunities for networking and collaborating: Many teachers, especially special educators, also expressed a desire to network and collaborate with other teachers. These teachers wanted increased opportunities to observe “master” teachers and visit the classrooms of other educators who worked with similar students. Some also commented on their willingness to develop curriculum materials in collaboration with other teachers.

All teachers believed that by working collaboratively with their peers, the quality of their own instruction would be enhanced.

- *It would be nice to observe special education programs at other locations.*
- *I want to be able to visit an effective classroom with LD children and training which addresses specific disabilities.*
- *Opportunities for teachers in the North to be exposed to the services and seminars in the South should be provided.*
- *Observing master teachers as they work with kids in the classroom would be beneficial.*
- *I would like to observe other teachers in action.*
- *Networking with others in my grade level or division might help.*
- *More opportunities for mentoring and peer coaching.*
- *I would like meetings and seminars to share ideas with peers.*
- *I want opportunities to consult and meet with consultants about my students' specific needs.*
- *Pre-service training should include a six-month experience in the field with associates who know what they are doing.*

Choice of type of instruction: When describing their preferences for professional development, many teachers also commented on the importance of varied learning opportunities. Specifically, teachers believed that instructional types and venues should be varied. For instance, some teachers demonstrated a preference for mini-workshops/presentations, while others expressed a preference for web-based instruction. Others expressed preferences for more individual learning opportunities including professional reading. Finally, many of the participants provided information about who they believed were the most appropriate service providers for such instruction. While some teachers

wanted increased presentations from “outside” professionals including members of local community organizations, like local Learning Disabilities Association chapters, many teachers also called for increased involvement/service from their school boards.

- *I would love to see a mini special education conference with choices of presentations including some for brand new teachers.*
- *Professional development days providing short, focused learning opportunities would be best.*
- *I like activity-based workshops.*
- *I would like to meet over a period of time on a particular skill or concept with peers (i.e., grade-grouped meetings).*
- *We need day or week-long workshops.*
- *I would like to listen to dynamic speakers that get us motivated.*
- *I like self-selected specialized professional development (i.e., I select the relevant conferences and attend).*
- *I enjoy great books and reflecting on how I can implement their ideas in my classroom.*
- *I like professional reading from relevant professional magazines.*
- *I enjoy courses by private study.*
- *Website sources are good for information but a central website for teachers to share ideas, techniques, and strategies would be great.*
- *Online courses for staff chats and resource building would be beneficial.*
- *I would like online access to information and strategies that would be readily available.*
- *I want to see Internet sites to access about disabilities and conferences.*
- *I would like training seminars (three-day workshops) that are very similar to this one presented by the LDAO.*
- *The three-day training workshop was beneficial because it gave us time to listen, discuss, and explore all the areas being introduced.*
- *School board-based workshops would be good.*

- *I want summer institute workshops that run at board levels that address the specific needs of the students in our board.*
- *I would like ongoing consultation with board consultants (i.e., LD, speech and language, psycho-educational) and professional workshops.*
- *We need more resource personnel at the board level to visit and do some in-service on some local or specific challenges or frustrations, and I would love to have more resource help.*

School and Community Supports

More access to assessment: Teachers, both classroom and special education, spoke frequently about the frustration of waiting for assessments to be completed on children. Much of the concern focused on the length of the waiting period between referral and completion of the assessment. Other concerns revolved around the lack of availability of assessments/screening at the early childhood level. Teachers expressed the importance of this early detection (physical, developmental, and cognitive) to obtaining services and beginning intervention early in the student's career.

- *The assessments are not being done quickly, and the information one gets from an assessment helps to program and teach.*
- *Getting a psychological/educational assessment done in a timely fashion.*
- *Lack of assessment by a child psychologist.*
- *Waiting lists for speech and language pathologists, many times – won't treat the children in kindergarten.*
- *More emphasis on early identification.*
- *Hearing and vision tests for all students entering school.*
- *Support screening for three-and-a-half-year-olds; hearing, sight, and speech to be implemented.*
- *Speech is a one-year, at least, waiting list.*

- *Psychologists have a waiting list of one to two years.*
- *Screening for children suspected of having LD, so that support can be provided earlier.*

More support personnel: It was clear that teachers saw a crucial need for more support personnel. The support personnel needed fell into two categories: those professional services generally accessed through a school board or a medical referral, such as psychologists and occupational therapists, and those personnel within the school or board, such as educational assistants and special education teachers and resource persons. Participants were concerned with the lack of personnel and resources needed to provide services in the schools for children who were experiencing difficulties. Along with general requests for more staff, having site-based professionals, such as special education teachers, speech and language pathologists, and physiologists, was seen as important in improving the quality of education for children. Participants also noted that communication and collaboration among professionals are essential to obtaining the maximum benefit from a team approach to special education. Finally, the involvement of community services on an ongoing basis, particularly beyond early childhood, was seen as necessary.

- *Educational assistants in every room—if not in every room then to oversee the class while I work with the special needs children.*
- *More assistant support. Full-time assistants should be mandatory in my school.*
- *Experienced consultants—teachers that will come and work with the classroom teacher to develop programming for LD students.*
- *Resource teachers working in the classroom.*

- *Enough teachers for intensive support for LD students both in and out of their classrooms.*
- *More occupational therapists and speech and language pathologists on a regular basis with consistency.*
- *Staff – speech therapists that are specifically designated to one school.*
- *OT/PT and speech pathologists within the school setting.*
- *Regular interaction between professionals at a specific level.*
- *Continued support beyond kindergarten from outside agencies.*
- *Assistance from the community for speech; more contact with behaviourists, reading specialists, and outside agencies.*

Smaller class sizes: Concerns about class size was a consistent theme across the data collected. Without exception the teachers, both classroom and special education, stated that a smaller class size would help them meet the needs of children considered to be exceptional. Classroom teachers expressed a desire to have both smaller classes and more time to work with students in small groups. Special education teachers reiterated this but also pointed out that the job of the regular classroom teacher to implement an IEP and deal with the needs of children identified as exceptional becomes much more difficult when there is a high pupil-to-teacher ratio.

- *Too many children needing help, too little time.*
- *Smaller class size, more one-to-one time with students.*
- *Smaller class size if special needs students are integrated.*
- *Smaller class sizes that allow classroom teachers to continue to successfully address the needs of special education students outlined in the IEP.*

More professional development: Special education teachers noted the need for more professional development for teachers. They noted the importance of in-servicing and training for themselves, classroom teachers, administrators, and parents.

- *In-service, resources, books, programs, consultation with and among other special education teachers.*
- *Personal and professional development to keep special education teachers current/supported.*
- *Professional development for all teachers in the area of specific learning disabilities.*
- *Professional development for principals and other administrators.*
- *Training and support services for parents.*

More resources: A small number of classroom teachers commented on the need for more resources for dealing with children with exceptionalities. One or two commented that a differentiated curriculum might be helpful.

- *Resources that are practical and that can be implemented easily into the entire program.*
- *Library of resources.*
- *Textbooks written specifically for the LD students that match the ministry expectations in math, history, geography, science, etc. and will be more easily understood and read independently.*

Teachers Enrolled in Additional Qualification Programs

Participants

A total of 82 practising teachers enrolled in special education additional qualification courses across four sites participated, 62 of whom were female and 20 were male. The average age was 35.4. Seventy-eight participants indicated that they worked with students who had learning disabilities (the remaining four participants did not respond to this question). Of those responding, the average number of years teaching special education was 3.44 ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 8.38$). Thirty-two percent said they were currently working in a special education setting, and the remaining participants worked in a variety of settings ranging from JK/SK to high school. Participants reported holding a variety of other types of qualifications including physical education, guidance, computers, math, science, French, and the arts, with only 27% reporting that they held no qualifications other than the special education program they were currently enrolled in. When asked “What was the main reason you took special education additional qualification courses,” 43% of respondents stated a desire to be better able to help the students in their classes, 37% indicated that they wished to improve their knowledge and understanding of special education, and 35% noted that their enrollment in these courses was related to career advancement and opportunities.

Methodology

Focus groups were held in the spring, summer, and fall coinciding with the end of the additional qualification course schedules. There was an assumption that participants in these courses would be involved in some way with special education, be practising

teachers, and, having completed the course, would possess a more in-depth knowledge of the field.

While the questions varied slightly from focus group to focus group depending on the size of the group, the level of interaction, and the timeframe allowed, the following questions led the discussion across all groups:

- Has the information you have been taught in the additional qualification courses (special education) been useful in your daily practice as a teacher?
- What would you STOP, START, and CONTINUE with regard to the courses you have taken in special education?
- What types of support for all teachers working with students who have learning disabilities would you like to see in place in your school? At the school board level? In the community?

Responses

The need for adequate pre-service instruction: While the focus of the discussion was mostly on additional qualification courses, many participants recognized and commented on the link between teacher preparation courses and special education training. They suggested that special education should be part of pre-service programs and that an emphasis should be placed on practicum experiences. They commented positively on those programs that did allow for special education study both as a specific subject area and throughout the program.

- *I think that LD courses should be included in pre-service programs. We find that many teachers do not even know what an IPRC is.*
- *Everyone should do special education/training placement.*

- *Special education should be emphasized as part of all teachers' colleges.*
- *We had weeks in our practicum beyond the mandated weeks so I requested to be in a special education class but was not allowed. Yet I can take an additional qualification course and be hired to teach a special education class.*
- *I find it interesting that the students are not allowed to have it built into their practicum time.*
- *For student teaching we should have placements in classrooms that have a need for special education.*
- *I think we should have a longer program.*
- *In the States it is different than here. Special education there is for one year. You are then placed for half a year. The whole program is almost two years. It was just right. In special education you can see the progress of students with learning disabilities.*

The need for more hands-on/practical versus theoretical learning: A large number of participants agreed that they would benefit from practical strategies that could be used in the classroom being taught in special education additional qualifications courses.

- *Too much theory; there was no practicality.*
- *The practical component should be increased.*
- *Need the experience more than theory.*
- *There needs to be issues covered on things we can do in the classroom. I would rather spend time on stuff we could use.*

While the general consensus was that teaching practical material in additional qualification courses was of great value, some participants noted the importance of also including the theoretical.

- *I want to go beyond what I can talk to my students about but also learn the theory, such as metacognition, etc. I welcome strategies but I have done that before; now I want to go to the underbelly of special education.*

The need to examine and modify the existing structure of additional qualification

courses: While stating some positive experiences, the participants had a number of recommendations about how the additional qualification course structure might be modified to meet the needs of students. Many of the participants suggested that additional qualification courses be divided into divisions, by grade as well as area of specialty. Other participants suggested a reading package that would allow for both a “head start” for the courses as well as more consistency across the courses. A small number of participants suggested that administrative aspects of the course delivery be streamlined.

- *There should be a division (learning resource teachers) for those who want it. Courses related to learning disabilities, others for modifications of programming for the classroom.*
- *We need a variety of assignments, so that we can incorporate our own style of learning and focus on our own interests.*
- *We need more flexibility in the course content.*
- *Must have variety group-to-group according to personnel.*
- *Distribute a survey to the group before class starts to find out what is needed.*
- *It would be better if it were broken down by division. In Core 1 and 2 there's a lot about elementary schools and I am in a secondary school.*
- *I agree that there should be a course based on school division.*
- *I think the AQ classes should be separated by school division especially at the beginning of the Core 1 class.*

- *A package of readings needs to be a prerequisite for the course so everyone has the same knowledge base. Subsequent courses could build on this knowledge base.*
- *Yes, we would like to see a reading package for all AQ courses.*
- *I think that I would like to see the administrative stuff to get into these courses decreased. I sent the same information for each course. Why would it not be on file?*

The need to reduce the cost of additional training: A large number of participants expressed concern about the financial impact of taking additional qualification courses. Some participant felt that either the school board or the Ministry should subsidize or completely cover the cost of courses. Other participants just made general statements that the courses were in their estimation too expensive.

- *The Ministry should make the courses cheaper, especially if the course is mandated.*
- *The cost, if it has to stay so high, the Ministry should pay some of it.*
- *I resent having to pay money to do work for the employer... so the employer should pay for my training when I am learning stuff that I have to use daily, such as IEPs.*
- *Reduce cost.*
- *Difficult to afford additional qualifications.*

A few participants suggested that the courses taken should be more directly related to salary and potential increases in salary.

- *I think the AQ courses are expensive. I think the AQ courses should count towards a Master's degree. That would help with fees.*

- *What is the motivation to take additional qualification courses if you are at top salary? We want to stay in the classroom because we want to better service kids!*

The importance of networking: Participants saw having the opportunity to meet peers in the additional qualification courses as positive. The sharing of ideas, strategies, and common experiences was valued highly as a part of the experience of participating in an additional qualification course.

- *I spend the summer time during the AQ courses in a room full of teachers who want to change things and make a difference. When I go back to school in September I am motivated.*
- *In this class the information that was presented was important, but the experiences from peers was more important. It was just as beneficial to bring together our colleagues.*
- *My main reason for enjoying the AQ course is networking with the other students, debriefing with my peers. It is good to know that I am not alone in the process.*
- *Most people found the networking very important during the years.*

Some participants suggested a widening of the networking system to include parents and others in the community.

- *We need access to personal views of people who are involved with raising children with problems or who have them themselves. We need help on how to discuss their situation with them.*
- *We need to know who to contact for help.*
- *There should be more workshops that have parental involvement. Get guest speakers whose specialties address problems that the teachers have. Teachers should talk about what they enjoy, parents should come in and listen/speak. That way we can get their perspective.*

A number of suggestions and discussion points were made in response to the question “What types of support for all teachers working with students who have learning disabilities would you like to see in place in your school? At the school board? In your community?” Those that directly relate to the theme of additional qualification courses have been included above. What follows are suggestions and discussion points that relate to supports within the school, board, and community setting.

The need for consistency in special procedures at the school and provincial levels:

Procedures that vary and the changes in regulations/expectations were a source of frustration for participants.

- *Schools should have a policy regarding the implementation of IEPs and how the subject teacher and the resource teachers interact.*
- *Some high schools are organized. At the beginning of the year they let teachers know who is LD, needs tracking, etc.*
- *We need consistency.*
- *District school boards spend too much time with classes and the students with learning disabilities are castaways. Each board ends up doing what it wants to do.*
- *Education is like a pendulum. It swings back and forth.*

The need to standardize and provide instruction on the development of Individual

Education Plans: A number of participants were concerned about the lack of consistency/standardization in the procedures for writing Individual Educational Plans for students. Concerns also focused on the lack of time provided for the completion of such plans and, in some cases, implementation difficulties.

- *There should be board-specific presentations for IEPs.*
- *Elementary and secondary schools use different formats for IEPs, so we cannot just use the information from the elementary school.*
- *There should be more time for IEP preparation for teachers.*
- *We have 30 days to complete the IEPs at the beginning of the school year. We need to just do the IEPs.*
- *How many teachers read it? My experience is that teachers just know the student and file the IEP.*
- *We feel that the focus should not be on writing the IEP but rather on the implementation of the IEP.*
- *The IEP is not shared with me. The school I am going to, it is locked in the office.*

The need for more time to accomplish work: Participants noted that with increased demands in their job expectations, lack of time was an important issue.

- *I have to take workshops, so that is more money and time.*
- *Our school board's computer program is so complex we enter less information in the computer than we would have on paper form. The program is so time consuming.*
- *In the Peel Board [IEP writing] is not so time consuming; we do not have to go through the OSR but it still takes one hour and we have to do it with the student.*
- *There should be time for IEP preparation for teachers.*
- *There is not a lot of time to modify for students.*

The need for better communication: The theme of better communication was also touched upon in the participants' responses to the additional qualifications questions.

Many participants discussed a need for better communication between teachers, as well as the value of a team approach to service delivery.

- *Subject teacher awareness of the team is important. Working together is important for success.*
- *There should be a staff meeting for all teachers to discuss LD issues, even just show FAT City.*
- *I am a grade 8 teacher. I think there needs to be a stronger link to secondary school. It is hard to know where the students are going.*
- *There should be a new assessment model. Associations should team up with consultants and the board. There should be a team approach and support for assessment.*
- *The system has master teachers. Use them to help the new teachers coming in. Show them what works.*

The need for professional development: Participants noted the need for more professional development. There were a number of participants who stated that the school board should be responsible for providing these opportunities. Other participants suggested that organizations such as the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) might play a bigger role in providing support and professional development. It is important to note that the reference to the LDAO specifically may have been related to the fact that these focus sessions were hosted by that organization.

- *I think teachers need more in-servicing, more workshops that show us what are common ways to handle or to deal with these kids. We need to know what to do when we encounter these students.*
- *The Ministry has taken away professional development. Teachers need useful material provided for them on professional development days.*

- *We need more professional development in special education in schools so teachers can be sensitized to special education needs whether in the classroom, in the hall, or in the cafeteria. All the teachers in the school have to interact with the LD students. The interaction is not limited to the classroom.*
- *Boards should have responsibility for workshops/upgrades.*
- *Board-offered workshops are very valuable.*
- *I think boards need to give more direction.*
- *The LDAO should take a proactive step.*
- *When you graduate from university, you get interest from everyone. In special education why don't we get put on the LDAO mailing list? Why don't they approach us?*

The need for more resource/support persons in the schools: Participants indicated the need for more support personnel, specifically educational assistants, in the schools. In terms of materials and resources, a few participants noted a need to improve technology. Some participants suggested using the resources already available within the school setting, such as peer tutoring programs; however, they also noted that this solution may pose problems.

- *Increase the number of educational assistants in the classrooms.*
- *We need to have more educational assistants. It has to do with the funding. Sometimes it is a subjective choice as to where EAs go, when a lot of kids need it. In my school we have 400 kids. One class may have three or four educational assistants.*
- *School systems need more EAs and TAs.*
- *We are using an old model to try to fit the school system into without thinking of how to restructure to be more effective. There has to be ways to help all students*

without having more educational assistants. We need to rethink the service of students.

- *More school board funding is necessary. Software needs to be provided.*
- *We are in a technology-based society. There is not enough time and resources to meet the need of the LD student. There are not enough computers.*
- *We need training for peer tutors.*
- *It is difficult to find peer tutors in those subject areas.*
- *We need more screening, as sometimes the peer tutors are LD themselves.*
- *There should be a specific location for peer tutoring.*

The need for better communication between the community and school: With respect to the larger community, suggestions centred on the coordination and communication between community-based centres and schools.

- *When I used community services my school schedule and their schedule did not match.*
- *Maybe a drop-in centre for extra help with homework, or help during exam times, or information on career preparation from people in the community.*
- *Community groups would have to start advocating for more funding.*
- *We send students out to work in the community where the employer/placement does not have training to work with LD students.*
- *There are some good services in the community but there are long waiting lists. It results in more wasted time for kids.*
- *Get involved in the community. Hope that this presence is an indicator of them wanting to participate. Be collaborative with partners.*

Learning Disabilities Chapter Members

Participants

A total of 53 members of local Learning Disabilities Association chapters across the province completed a mail-in survey. Of the respondents, 39 (74%) were parents of children with learning disabilities, 6 (11%) were staff members, 4 (08%) were teachers and the remaining represented various professionals in the community, including a community worker, psycho-educational consultant and school trustee.

Methodology

Pen and paper surveys were sent to the xx local Learning Disabilities Association chapters across the province. Each chapter was provided with a cover letter explaining the purpose of this project as well as instructions with respect to the completion of the survey. Packages were mailed to the executive staff at each chapter with an invitation to have as many chapter members and/or staff as possible complete the questionnaire. As part of the survey, participants were asked to respond to five open-ended prompts. Specifically, participants were asked to elaborate about the most important qualities that teachers should possess when working with children with learning disabilities, the knowledge and skills that learning resource/ISSP teachers should possess, and suggestions for improving communications between home and school. Participants were also asked to express their opinion about how knowledgeable they believed teachers are with respect to working with students with learning disabilities. Finally, participants were asked to describe their personal positive experiences, especially with respect to teacher-initiated best practices, in the school system.

Responses

Essential Teacher Characteristics

Nurturing: The majority of participants (parents, staff and other chapter members) agreed that teachers who work with students who possess learning disabilities need to be “nurturing.” Similar “motherhood” statement included sentiments about possessing a true love for children and teaching, and a desire to make a difference in the lives of children with exceptionalities.

- *They should be open-minded, objective, patient, good reasoning ability, understanding, humble, compassionate, empathetic, willing to extend extra time, employing realistic expectations, encouraging students to maximize their potential, encouraging success, reinforcing effort and determination.*
- *They should accept each child for the special person they are and the wonderful qualities and abilities they DO have.*
- *They should be sensitive to the needs whether diagnosed or undiagnosed.*
- *They should possess a desire and energy to make a difference!*
- *She should love her job and want to work with “different” kids. She should show patience and be objective.*
- *They should know the child not just their academic abilities but the character of the child.*
- *They should have a heart for people and interact in a positive way. They should be caring, compassionate and provide tasks so that some success will be a part of each learning experience.*
- *They should be patience, understanding and have a positive, hopeful attitude. They should have a very positive, happy disposition and be understanding with a caring nature, and willing to give extra time and effort.*

Some participants emphasized that teachers need to be very conscious about the interconnectedness between students’ academic, social and emotional performance and

should express a genuine concern for the social, emotional and cognitive well being of their students. There was specific concern that low academic performance could negatively affect students' social and emotional status in the classroom.

- *A child that struggles with a learning disability may also struggle socially and may not receive the necessary understanding at home. A teacher can have a great impact on a child.*
- *A child needs encouragement. Teachers should focus on the strengths of the students and never single out a student from other students.*
- *Teachers need knowledge of LD and how it affects kids in numerous ways, not just academic, e.g., peers, self-esteem, etc.*
- *Teachers need ways to compensate for deficiencies and to promote self-worth.*
- *Teachers need the compassion to understand that the LD student does not want to be singled out or have any indication that they are different than their classmates.*

Teachers were expected to be good listeners and to demonstrate a great deal of patience and empathy when working with students with learning disabilities. Inherent to the concept of patience was a willingness to provide repeated, varied and flexible programming on an ongoing basis.

- *Teachers need patience — some things need to be taught over and over, but the children do learn.*
- *Teachers need empathy. They have to care enough to put in the energy it takes and be willing to deal with the frustration.*
- *Teachers need empathy. They must picture the world of the child with understanding.*
- *Patience and empathy.*
- *Teachers need patience and respect for individual differences in learning styles.*
- *They also should have the willingness to help that student to the best of their ability. Compassion and empathy are also helpful.*

- *The most important qualities a teacher can have when dealing with learning disabilities are patience, knowledge, and time. Patience to deal with the repeated need for assistance.*
- *Teachers need patience, tolerance and acceptance.*
- *Teachers need patience to allow the child to work at their speed and level.*
- *They need patience, understanding and a willingness to keep trying. They should be encouraging, determined and positive.*
- *They need to be a good listener.*
- *Teachers should take time to meet with parents and listen to parents' concerns. Parents should listen to teachers concerns and ask questions.*

Teachers were also expected to maintain a sense of humour when working with students who possess learning disabilities. All participants (parents, staff and other chapter members) identified humour to be a critical coping skill for both teachers and children. Collectively, teachers who possess these characteristics were believed to demonstrate respect for students and their families.

- *Teachers need patience, compassion, to be even tempered, and have a tremendous sense of humour.*
- *Teachers need a sense of humour. They must have a very positive, happy disposition, be understanding and have a caring nature. They must be willing to give extra time and effort.*
- *Teachers must have a sense of humour.*
- *Teachers need a great sense of humour and a great deal of patience.*
- *There must be respect. We're all different but equal.*

Knowledgeable: There was a belief that knowledgeable teachers are effective ones.

The majority of parents and other chapter members expected teachers to possess a firm working knowledge about the nature of learning disabilities. Especially important was that teachers recognize how such disabilities affect the learning process and how to program for students with learning disabilities.

- *Teachers must have a firm understanding of the various disabilities and how these disabilities impact a child's development if not administered properly in the classroom setting.*
- *Teachers must have knowledge and understanding of what an LD is. Not all learning disabilities are the same and teachers must know how to facilitate learning with these students.*
- *Teachers need knowledge of how to teach to that disability, and have the time to do it.*
- *I feel that the most important qualities a teacher can have when working with students with a learning disability is to be educated on the diversity of a learning disability.*
- *Teachers need an understanding of learning disabilities and an understanding of subject matter.*
- *Teachers need a sound understanding of what it is like to have and live with a learning disability. They should also be familiar with the Education Act and Special Needs.*
- *Teachers need an understanding what a learning disability is and is not.*
- *They need expertise in understanding specific learning disabilities, expertise in different learning styles and expertise in different learning strategies.*
- *They need considerable knowledge, expertise and an attitude of lifelong learning with respect to how learning disabilities reveal themselves throughout school but particularly in the early grades.*

Finally, some participants further qualified that teachers needed to accept learning disabilities as an authentic disorder.

- *They need to be willing to believe in learning disabilities.*
- *They need to be accepting for the fact that students with LD are not able to grasp concepts other students can grasp in the same way.*
- *They need acceptance of the fact that learning disabilities actually exist.*
- *They need acceptance of the LD and the accommodations that have been recommended by the experts.*

There was also an expectation that teachers be willing and ready to extend their knowledge base about learning disabilities.

- *They must be open-minded and have the desire to learn. LD is such an expanding area new things happen all the time.*
- *They must be willing to keep learning themselves.*
- *They must be eager to learn and continue learning.*

Associated with the acquisition of new knowledge, participants called upon teachers to be receptive and open to information provided by parents and other professional service providers.

- *They need to be willing to learn and be accepting of wisdom offered by parents, community service providers, and professional resources.*

Individual programming: Chapter members also called upon teachers to know their students as individuals. Specifically, there was an expectation that teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. Closely associated with this expectation was a call for flexible, creative and innovative programming. Participants wanted teachers to share in their belief that students with learning disabilities were capable of learning but often required “nontraditional” programming. Accordingly, chapter members

wanted teachers to persevere across multiple formats of instruction in an attempt to provide meaningful instruction for these students.

- *They need an understanding of each child's needs and also their individual strengths so that these can be utilized in learning.*
- *They need to realize what they (the child) can and cannot do.*
- *Teachers need to try to find out early what the students strong points are to help build up the weak ones.*
- *They must have the ability to teach using a variety of approaches and methods to meet not only the LD child but all children.*
- *They must be creative to be able to explore and try new methods of teaching and be able to test the students in the way in which it best suits the student.*
- *They must be willing to teach the student in a way that enables them to learn. Many of these students learn in a different way and the teacher must be willing and able to find and use different styles to reach these kids. If the teacher expects to use one style only, then the teacher will fail to teach these kids so they can learn to their fullest potential.*
- *Teachers must have flexibility. They must not need everyone in the class to do the same thing in the same way.*
- *They must have a willingness to be innovative.*
- *They must have versatility and perseverance.*
- *Another good quality would for the teacher to be very creative on different ways to teach their lessons. A LD child can learn the same lesson, but usually, they learn in different ways.*
- *They need to be understanding and use different approaches to teaching someone with a learning disability. They must have the time and have the knowledge of different methods of teaching and finding out what works and what is successful for that particular individual's learning style.*
- *They must have flexibility, and creativity. Teachers must have a clear educational objective towards which they are guiding students. With this in mind, teachers can use a wide variety of tasks, activities, materials, etc. to achieve this goal.*

Finally, participants expected teachers to honour the instructional recommendations provided by other professionals in the field. That is, there was an expectation that teachers provide students with accommodations and/or modifications that were consistent with recommendations provided by psychologists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists.

- *The teacher must be willing to take the initiative to help these children. They must be willing to follow the recommendations of professionals who are testing students, i.e., for ADD, CAPS. Actually it is the teacher who requests the tests be taken. So far the tests seem to be used to provide teachers with excuses not solutions.*

Advocacy: Some parents commented that they wanted teachers to act as advocates on behalf of their children. Specifically, these parents believed that teachers should advocate for appropriate resources for children with learning disabilities. Furthermore, teachers were expected to act as “spokespersons” for these children when interacting with others in the educational system. This was especially true when interacting with other teachers who were either less knowledgeable or less tolerant of children with learning disabilities.

- *Teachers must be an advocate for students and speak up within the school system to get the child the help needed.*
- *Some teachers are not as accepting as others. Teachers need to speak for the students*
- *Teachers must be strong advocates for students. They need assertiveness skills with other teachers.*

Teacher Knowledge

Limited to poor knowledge: When asked whether they believed that teachers possessed relevant knowledge about learning disabilities, the majority of participants answered negatively. Specifically, these participants believed that teachers possessed neither a basic understanding about the nature of learning disabilities nor an understanding of appropriate Intervention and effective programming. Many participants held this belief across all teachers including resource and special education teachers. Others qualified that while resource and special education teachers may possess relevant knowledge, extended waiting lists and lack of time made them largely inaccessible.

- *The teacher's knowledge is poor to none. Example: Even with a lengthy report by an expert the teacher insisted our child had NO LEARNING DISABILITIES. What it came down to was she had no knowledge of learning disabilities.*
- *The general teachers do not understand, even the resource teachers maybe confused.*
- *I was shocked to find out recently however that our part time resource person did not know what a basic term like dyscalculia meant and that the entire staff was unfamiliar with strategies other than drilling, for teaching children with dyscalculia and memory problems.*
- *They are not knowledgeable at all except for special education teachers.*
- *Teachers have very generalized knowledge but not the specifics for providing classroom accommodations and strategies that will help each student be successful.*
- *Their understanding is limited. To my knowledge a degree in education does not include a course on LDs as a requirement. Further my experience with resource individuals is limited.*
- *They have very minimal knowledge about learning disabilities. Intervention even less – special needs children are very much clumped into what ever pattern a teacher is used to.*

- *I don't believe that teachers know what is necessary to help children with learning disabilities. I don't believe that a lot of them want to put forth the extra effort these children need, it's easier just to teach.*
- *Those teachers who have no training in the field are all ready to write the child off. Just get him/her through the year so he/she will no longer take up space in the classroom.*
- *Most teachers have little knowledge. Even many special education teachers lack enough training.*
- *From experience when working with students and parents there seems to be a lack of up-to-date knowledge/information on effective methods to help students with learning disabilities.*
- *I think it is improving but there is lots of room for growth in this area. I don't believe that teachers have a good understanding. I attend school case conferences for many families to help advocate for their child or the student. I am constantly faced with teachers who really do not have any knowledge in the area or very little. It comes out in the communications blaming etc. Intervention is an even less known area.*
- *Most knowledge is with the Special Education teacher. Classroom teachers don't want to answer special education questions even if they are knowledgeable. Basic answers can be hard to get without special education appointments. Then looking into things then maybe setting something up, months are lost in the academics for the child.*

In order to emphasize their beliefs, many participants reiterated negative instances where they found their children's teachers to be lacking in appropriate knowledge about learning disabilities.

- *I do not think the average teacher is very knowledgeable at all about with learning disabilities or Intervention. My first contact with LD was with my son in grade 2. I did not even know there was such a thing as a learning disability. As I have slowly educated myself over the past 8 years I have many, many times felt*

that I had more insight, knowledge and interest than many teachers whose paths I crossed.

- *At times teachers criticized my sons handwriting and he cried. They should have known better and frequently could have provided alternative teaching strategies to meet his needs.*

More concerning, some participants described instances where teachers attributed either negative intellectual or personal attributes to students when explaining their academic and social performances.

- *Based on comments made by staff (e.g., lack of understanding dysgraphia is a real thing, not just laziness, etc.).*
- *Perhaps more emphasis could be put on the fact that behavioural issues often result because of the frustration on LD child may be experiencing, particularly before a formal diagnosis is made.*
- *No knowledge whatsoever, e.g., “his biorhythm must be off,” “ maybe it is his hormones.” After 9 years of horrible experiences with teachers and principals, the only one to spot the possibility was a principal who had a daughter with a LD, i.e., personal experience. The good teachers could describe the aspects but did not recognize it for what it was or as something that needed follow up (“he’s a walking encyclopedia... we just have to figure out how to get it out”). I haven’t met anyone yet in the system who has been able to help us with a math problem or keyboard.*
- *I have educated myself through a variety of means and have many, many times found teachers to be indifferent, uneducated and even at times apathetic towards my son’s academic difficulties.*
- *Teachers learn about LD students when they first encounter them in the classroom; then they are seen as behaviour/classroom management problems, not learning-related issues.*
- *Some don’t want to know and believe kids are just lazy.*

Others provided additional comments describing instances in which teachers appeared to be insensitive and unsympathetic to the emotional stress experienced by these children and their families. Similarly, some participants found their teachers to be unwilling to communicate with them, dismissing any of their suggestions and recommendations.

- *They are aware of the syndromes, symptoms, and disorders; however, they don't appreciate the depths of our concerns and responses. I believe they are knowledgeable but lacking in the areas of response.*
- *I also don't believe that they understand that simple requests make a huge difference.*
- *They are not very knowledgeable at ALL. In fact, they are not willing to accept that you as a parent are very knowledgeable and instead of using our knowledge and suggestions we found that they are resentful and see us as interfering as opposed to helpful (which is all we are trying to do in order to make it smoother and easier for all concerned).*

Varied knowledge: Other participants, however, expressed caution when answering this question and stated that there was a danger in over-generalizing across all teachers. These individuals argued that while some teachers possessed limited knowledge about learning disabilities, others were very knowledgeable and provided exceptional high-quality instruction for these students.

- *In general, many teachers are not as knowledgeable as I hoped. However, a few teachers have been outstanding.*
- *This varies greatly! While about 50% have inadequate knowledge of LD, 25% do fairly well. The other 25% are an absolute gift to the families they serve.*
- *It depends greatly on the teacher, and the particular disability.*

- *There is a wide range of knowledge and experience*
- *Some teachers are very knowledgeable and others have not yet seen a need to become informed about LD or to use various Intervention.*
- *Some are very knowledgeable, some know very little. There is a wide variety of knowledge and expertise that speaks to a lack of pre-service information.*
- *Some resource and primary teachers are very knowledgeable. Some classroom teachers seem quite unaware as reported by parents.*
- *I have found that there can be varying degrees of expertise.*
- *Quite variable. Some teachers have knowledge. Others have very little. Some don't feel a need to acquire more knowledge but rather depend on the special education teacher.*
- *Most do not know enough. The ones who are aware often take extra courses but the ones who need it don't seem to want to be bothered.*

A few participants further qualified that the teachers they perceived to be especially knowledgeable about learning disabilities, were those that either knew a child with a learning disability on a personal level or had multiple experiences working with these students in their classroom.

- *Some of the most knowledgeable teachers I have met had someone close to them who has a disability of some kind. It appears that this made them seek out information and try to understand.*
- *I think they know about LD, but as for Intervention I doubt they are knowledgeable unless they have had several students. Each student is unique and brings different challenges to the classroom.*

Constrained knowledge: Some participants also stated that even when teachers were knowledgeable about learning disabilities, there were many extraneous constraints that made it either difficult or impossible for them to provide effective training for students

with learning disabilities. For instance, chapter members were especially concerned that there was insufficient time for teachers to work with students with learning disabilities and plan for changes in their programming. Similarly, chapter members expressed concern about a lack of resources, either material or personnel, available to teachers.

- *Generally, they could be more knowledgeable and the few that are knowledgeable have to fight against the system by which they are employed to be able to provide what is needed for LD students.*
- *Fairly knowledgeable — they have neither the time nor the staff to implement some of the IPRC's suggestions.*
- *Some have no knowledge, even in these times, most are knowledgeable but don't make the Intervention because of time and budget constraints.*
- *In general teachers don't have the time to help the LD students.*
- *I don't think the regular schools have the time or the practical knowledge to actually teach our special kids.*
- *There is no doubt that more financial resources could make testing more readily available.*
- *Very limited due to a time factor involved. It is up to the parents/guardians to completely inform all teachers dealing with your child.*
- *I believe most teachers are aware and prepared to assist learning disabled children. Whether they have time in a regular classroom to fully assist them is another story, as we well know!*
- *These are people, not "cases." It can be very emotional for families expecting professional help but not receiving it.*
- *Sensibility training for the teachers, the teachers may have 30 students to deal with but the parents are dealing with a special needs child, their only concern is that child and his/her needs.*

Ongoing professional development: While reflecting on their beliefs about whether teachers possessed sufficient knowledge of learning disabilities, many participants stated that special education should be a mandatory component of teacher education programs. Furthermore, these participants elaborated that the nature of special-education training be more extensive than it is currently, and that there be a greater emphasis on learning disabilities. Other participants commented that teachers needed greater opportunities to participate in in-service sessions education.

- *Not very knowledgeable. They should be LDA members so they have access to meetings changes in special education and get involved with LDA. Workshops should be offered when they have PD days.*
- *They should be required to have special education courses and updates. They need to be taught to identify learning disabilities and taught what strategies are needed. They need knowledge on how LDs affect behaviour.*
- *It would be great if Special Education about learning disabilities was required for teacher certification and upgrading was required for those already in the system.*
- *Boards of education need to run more professional development days geared specifically to LD. Faculty of Education needs to make a learning disability course mandatory last the whole year to help new teachers to now how to cope.*
- *More teachers need an understanding of learning disabilities.*
- *They need to have in-service provided on how to identify LD, ADHD etc. There needs to be greater initiative on teacher's parts to work with resource teachers and seek advice.*
- *Teachers and schools need to be educated on leaning disabilities. Only then can parents and schools really communicate.*
- *School personnel need more professional development on special needs issues.*
- *Have it taught at teacher's college. Make it a mandatory course.*
- *Educate the educators.*

- *I think that dealing with these children should form part of teachers' curriculum. This is not a once off — they appear every year and in every class.*

Qualifications for Resource/ISSP Teachers

Specialist training: While a few participants admitted that they knew little about required qualifications or available programs for resource teachers and other in-school support persons, the majority of participants responded that these teachers needed concentrated training in special education with an emphasis on learning disabilities. Many participants explicitly identified Ministry of Education Additional Qualification courses (i.e., Special Education Parts I, II, and III, Learning Disabilities specialist) as essential requirements for these teachers.

- *Should have special training on LD.*
- *Special education specialist.*
- *Special Education Parts 1 and 2 and specialist.*
- *All teachers should have Special Education Part 1. Resource teachers should have their specialist.*
- *I expect a resource teacher to have graduated from a learning disabilities course.*
- *Special education.*
- *For Ontario teachers, additional qualifications course in special education.*
- *Certified in area of special needs.*
- *Obviously courses in special education.*
- *Special education courses given by teachers colleges.*
- *Highest level of special education studies.*

Other participants recommended that teachers take courses in specific subject areas including language development, developmental psychology, social development, abnormal psychology, behaviour management and early childhood education.

- *Sensitivity training, child psychology.*
- *University courses in behaviour, learning strategies, etc.*
- *University courses concentrating on the exceptional child.*
- *Specialized certification in language and social skills.*
- *University courses specific to learning disabilities. Perhaps this should become a masters level specific to the area. Knowledge about technology and community resources.*
- *Some university courses in development, education, abnormal psychology and psychology of perception.*
- *Early childhood education.*
- *Psychology courses in child development.*
- *Knowledge about psychological educational assessments.*

Regardless of the specific nature of the educational program, there was an implicit belief that through these educational experiences, teachers would acquire essential knowledge and skills needed for assessment, evaluation and instructional programming.

- *Extensive training in what learning disabilities are and how to teach children with learning disabilities.*
- *Their assessment and implementation skills should be up to date. They must have patience and persistence as some of these children do not have parents with the ability/knowledge to fight for what their child is entitled to. Better understanding of the programs and support offered outside the school system.*
- *They should know what LD is!*
- *Knowledge of alternative learning strategies i.e. number lines, visual and auditory aids, shortcuts for learning etc. Infinite patience.*

- *I feel they should have up to date knowledge of their techniques of teaching and should probably be open to suggestions or information given by parents on outside agencies, i.e., periodicals, etc.*
- *They should have a full knowledge and understanding of all learning disabilities and how they affect a child's learning and all the best ways to help a child learn.*
- *Design a program for every teacher so that before they become qualified to be a teacher that they truly understand what a learning disability is and they are taught concrete examples of what to do in their classroom. Every classroom teacher should have this knowledge and skills. Because every class is going to have at least one or two LD children in it.*

Ongoing professional development: Participants also reinforced their belief that all teachers, including resource teachers and in-school support persons need, to participate in continuing education programs. Some members suggested that this training be provided at an in-service level, while others suggested that teachers be provided with opportunities to attend professional conferences and workshops outside the field. A few participants acknowledged that in order to attend such sessions, teachers would require greater financial, time and personnel support than they were available presently. Some participants also suggested that relevant advocacy groups, like local Learning Disabilities Association, become more involved in teacher education. Specifically, teachers were called upon to become members and develop closer professional relations with local Learning Disabilities chapters. Participants also believed that these teachers would benefit from attending workshops and other information sessions hosted by these organizations.

- *Continuous in-service and upgrading; they should have more knowledge about programs and services available outside the traditional school environment and be able to pass the information on to parents/ caregivers.*
- *Should have some basic certification at a college level, with annual updates in learning disabilities. They need to have access to new information. They need more staff and funding so they have TIME for our kids. Especially in small schools where resource is often a HALF-TIME position.*
- *Extensive training in LD issues with regular upgrading.*
- *They need to keep abreast about new developments in the area. They need to be able to recognize successes.*
- *On going attendance at AGMs/conferences/symposiums of professional interest/advocacy groups. Broad variety of courses in many subject areas to provide background required to be effective subject resource.*
- *Workshops provided by LDAO chapters.*

Lived experience: The majority of chapter members also commented that while knowledge was a necessary requirement, practical, lived experiences were also critical for resource teachers and other in-school support personnel. While a few participants suggested that these teachers take part in some form of special-education internship or practicum program, the majority of participants believed that “regular” classroom teaching would satisfy this requirement. There was no clear consensus with respect to how much time specialists required in a classroom setting, although a few participants ventured that they should have a minimal of at least a few years.

- *I am not sure what courses are involved but I think experience or exposure/placements to students who have had these difficulties.*
- *They must have hands on experience working with LD kids to really see and understand the variety of signs and symptoms they may see in these children.*

- *At least special education level 2 with a one-year internship, mentored by an experienced resource teacher. After that, the teacher can practise solo.*
- *Special education class teachers should have a minimum of one year teaching in a regular class before taking on a special education class, no matter what qualifications they have.*
- *Should have experience.*
- *An applied co-op component to these courses so that the knowledge isn't strictly based on theory.*
- *A resource teacher should have at least five years teaching experience, and a proven track record of post-graduate education for special needs, and hands on experience in working with all disabilities, before taking a resource position.*
- *Should have had a few years teaching in a classroom to understand the dynamics of a classroom and the social issues.*

Improved Communications Between School and Home

Focus on student: When asked for suggestions about how to improve communication and professional relations between the home and school, many chapter members responded with a prerequisite for any communication. Specifically, these members cautioned that all parties must remember that the purpose of any such dialogue should also center on the well being of the child. Accordingly, neither parents nor teachers should adopt defensive or confrontational approaches when entering these discussions.

- *Disregard defensive attitudes, to remember the primary objective is to respond to the needs of the student.*
- *Keep comments positive and in the best interest of the child.*
- *Conversations should center on what is best or optimal for the student.*

- *Teachers need to be reassured that this is a working relationship for both school and parent, in the best interest of the child. Where there is a will from BOTH parents and teacher there is a way.*
- *Any tension that does not surface between school and parents must not be taken out on the child in order to “punish” the parents.*
- *The school must understand that if we criticize on approach and suggest another way that we are not criticizing the individuals as persons or are we challenging them as educators.*
- *The relationship needs to be seen as helpful rather than adversarial. It is important to remind parents and teachers that everyone wants to see the child succeed and that each person involved in the education of the child is there for that purpose.*
- *All should take ownership for helping each child reach their potential.*
- *Keep comments positive and in the best interest of the child.*
- *I believe the lines of communication are already wide open but that doesn’t automatically ensure that home or school will act upon what’s been communicated. Home and school need to adopt an attitude of mutual respect and service.*
- *There must be an honest willingness of all parties to communicate positively and to focus on the success and needs of the child. All must listen to each other and not take comments personal. School must understand that if we criticize n approach and suggest another way that we are not criticizing the individuals as persons or are we challenging them as educators.*

The need to be heard: All chapter members also discussed the need to be heard. There was a general concern that teachers perceived parents as “meddling” and their presence in the school as “troublesome.” Furthermore, many chapter members, especially parents,

believed that their questions and recommendations were often discredited – that teachers failed to “truly” listen to their concerns and lived experiences.

- *Our experience has been teachers and schools do not listen to and value parents’ observations and understanding of their own child.*
- *The teachers and schools must listen to AND hear the parents when they express their concerns about their son or daughter. So often the parents are only paid lip service and not really heard. A parent’s intuition is probably very significant and must not be ignored or brushed away. Parents must be viewed as the students’ advocate — not as a nuisance or threat to the teacher.*
- *As a parent, I do not want my presence at school to invariably indicate bad news.*
- *Recognition of the fact that most parents know their child better than anyone else resulting in mutual respect during conversation rather than a “talking down to” approach I have sometimes experienced. Be open to suggestions — they may work.*
- *We are with our children and know them far better than a school. Educators need to listen to parents and believe them. Also they need to involve parents every step of the way.*
- *Many parents have years of practical experience using certain skills that students only learn in a decontextualized classroom environment.*
- *Always openly welcome parents into the school; invite parents to team meeting and let them know how welcome their thoughts and ideas are.*
- *Parents should feel welcome in their child’s school and be included and consulted when available.*
- *Always take the time to chat with the parents you see in the hallway and out in the yard or the community.*
- *Opportunities for dialogue are important. Encouraging parents to have confidence to initiate dialogue is not easy.*

Need for regular communication: Many chapter members commented about the need for regular communication with their children's teachers. Although some chapter members identified that such correspondence required extensive time on the part of teachers, there was a firm belief that this level of communication was valuable and ultimately time saving (e.g., addressing minor instances proactively versus waiting for a major instance and responding in a reactive manner).

- *All parties must make a concerted effort to communicate with each other when things go well. This is very time consuming, but I believe it would foster mutual respect and support.*
- *Keep lines of communication open daily. Monitor communication using a daily journal and constant feedback from teacher, meet with teacher often.*
- *There should be regular bi-weekly/weekly/monthly parent-teacher conferences.*
- *I believe set meetings at regular intervals between teachers and parents are necessary. It is necessary for both the teacher and the parent to stay on top of what is happening academically and socially with their children. Be honest and upfront, both parents and children.*
- *For students with learning disabilities a meeting early each term or semester with the student, parents, teachers to discuss appropriate expectations, strategies, and accommodations.*
- *I think this is a money-based issue, when the funding increases there will be better or more positive communication.*
- *More regular communication is needed — not twice a year for 10 minutes.*
- *Be proactive rather than reactive. Don't assume ask. Be inviting in regards to visit and phone calls.*

There was a belief that telephone conversations and personal meetings were effective methods of communication, with some members also citing journals and other written formats as effective.

- *Make use of a planner. This helps for added communication; extra time given during interview would also be helpful.*
- *Communication books are mandatory. Daily planners for students utilized by the teacher for most classroom activities and assignments *ORGANIZATION*.*
- *Daily communication through the child's journal or day planner.*
- *Phone calls between both parties not only for concerns but for the positives too. Monthly meetings between the parties.*
- *A daily planner with homework assignments for the child to take some responsibility for success.*
- *If parents have concerns re. the child's school work and vice versa the teacher has concerns about the child's behaviour or quality of work a diary should be send back and forth for dialogue.*
- *Face to face meetings.*
- *Schools could send home plain language memos.*

Involve all stakeholders: Elaborating on the need for regular communication, chapter members called upon other service providers to attend these meetings on a regular basis. Specifically, many chapter members believed that communications with the school would be more effective if such “third-member” parties including principals, resource teachers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists and other relevant community organizations (e.g., Learning Disabilities Association) also attended these sessions. There was a perception that while these professionals possessed critical knowledge with respect to the successful programming for students with learning disabilities, these individuals were often inaccessible to parents and sometimes teachers.

- *I found it helpful to have the principal involved in some of these meetings so the parent and the teacher feel satisfied we are covering all bases.*

- *The “team” psychologist appeared to have the most understanding and information but was the most distant and difficult to access ... improve access. No direct communication was “allowed” (by the school or psychologist). “Third parties” may actually be necessary in some meetings so teachers are accountable for what they say to parents.*

Parents as Advocates: There was general agreement among chapter members that parents of children with learning disabilities needed to become involved in their children’s school experiences. Specifically, chapter members suggested that parents needed to serve as advocates for their children in the school.

- *I have always called and visited my child’s school and teachers. I never wait for them to call me first. A parent needs to be a very pro-active advocate.*
- *If you could get parents involved more ...but how can we force that????*
- *This is so difficult. Parents must learn to advocate (not nag) for their child. There are so many children in the system to look after, parents must understand this and not leave matters to the system.*
- *Parents should be asked to do some serious thinking about what they want for their child.*
- *I am forever advocating on my child’s behalf.*
- *Parents need to be more involved but since school is often a difficult and sometimes unhappy place for their child they become alienated. I don’t know a solution.*
- *The onus is on the parents once they are aware of disabilities.*
- *Parents need to be just as aware of their child’s abilities, as well as the teacher.*

In order to facilitate parents’ roles as advocates, chapter members believed that school personnel needed to do more to inform parents about relevant issues in their children’s education. For instance, there were suggestions that information pertaining to

special education and relevant support services and community organizations be made readily available to parents. Furthermore, this information needed to be presented in a format that was “jargon-free” and readily understood by parents.

- *Provide parents with as much information as possible.*
- *Information nights for Special needs programming that bring together parents, resource teachers, classroom teachers, consultants, and EXPERTS with filed knowledge of LD. These could be board wide as well as individual schools.*
- *Special education services should be included in all school handbooks. types of resources available/phone numbers etc. Special education books, CDs, and videos should be available in the school library.*
- *If all parents had the New Curriculum requirements for each subject and grade level, they would be better aware of how, what and why the teacher is teaching. Maybe if these books were handed out to students at the beginning of the year, the parent s would know what to expect for the year.*
- *Perhaps education for the parents on jargon of the teachers so that everyone understands each other.*
- *Offer designated workshops at the school for the parents and teachers to attend.*
- *I think that the Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton having a greater presence at the school level (whether it is through PD for teachers or programs for kids or advocacy for parents) can make a big difference in the relationship between the school, the teachers and the parents.*
- *Always inform parents of conferences and workshops that may assist them with their child.*

Positive experiences: When asked to reflect on their positive school experiences, a few of the participants reported that they had no experiences of this nature to date. The majority of the participants, however, were able to provide at least example of a positive

instance. When deconstructed, all these instances contained elements of the characteristics reported above. That is, chapter members perceived these teachers as caring, knowledgeable and respectful individuals who were willing and unable to provide assistance and advocacy for their children.

Students in Provincial Demonstration School and Undergraduate Programs

Participants

Approximately 20 students from each of the four provincial demonstration schools in the Province of Ontario (Amethyst, Centre Jules Lege, Trillium, and Sagonaska) participated in these focus sessions. Students ranged in age from 12-16 years. Also included in this section was information collected from students from two self-contained learning disabilities classes in the public education system. Ages of these students ranged from 8-13 years.

In addition undergraduate students attending one of two Ontario universities participated in focus group sessions held at their university. Undergraduate students were recruited through disabilities support services and had been identified with a learning disability prior to beginning postsecondary studies.

Methodology

All students were asked to respond to four open-ended questions as part of the focus group sessions. First, participants were asked to reflect on their positive elementary-school experiences and describe the factors that made them so. They were also asked to reflect on their negative elementary school experiences and describe the factors that made them so. Finally, participants were asked to comment about the information and skills that they believed teachers needed to possess when working with children who had learning disabilities.

Responses

Factors that Promote Positive School Experiences

Nurturing: When asked to reflect on positive elementary-school experiences, all the participants described interactions with teachers whom they perceived to be nurturing. Specifically, these teachers were described as patient educators – ones who were willing to repeat information several times and several ways without becoming agitated.

- *The teacher stuck up for students.*
- *The teacher had patience. Students may not get a concept right away and may need the teacher to repeat the instructions or information and the student may become irritated.*
- *The teacher had patience. For me and other people it takes extra time to figure out what I am doing. Without patience to wait, she may get mad and always want to help you move along.*
- *I liked a teacher with patience a willingness to repeat concepts more than once.*
- *A teacher needs patience to simplify a complex concept, changing the representation and stripping the concept to bare bones.*

Knowledgeable: In addition, teachers appeared to possess a firm understanding about the nature of learning disabilities. More importantly, these teachers demonstrated sensitivity when interacting with students who had learning disabilities. Some students elaborated that when teachers who demonstrated such sensitivity did not draw attention to individual students, yell at them, or express anger towards them.

- *Teacher should have some concern for the kids. Talk with them and make sure they understand. Don't yell at them if they don't understand.*

- *Make sure that they understand that a learning disability means that you learn differently. The students are not stupid. When I was young I thought I was dumb until I got older and realized I am not dumb.*
- *A teacher who knows what to do is good.*
- *A teacher who tries to understand what I am saying is nice.*
- *Good teaching in general is so kids don't feel singled out.*
- *I find now with my daughter that the teacher in class has no time to work with individuals so they bring in a resource teacher. They should move around and not single anyone out unless the student wants to be. My daughter takes part in all-star reading with other students there. The help is good when the teaching is for a lot of kids so that she doesn't feel different.*

Encouraging: Students also stated that effective teachers were encouraging ones. While some students equated encouragement to the use of extrinsic reinforcements or rewards, most discussed how these teachers provided encouragement at the personal level. Specifically, teachers were praised if they were willing to assist individuals complete a task (but not complete it) and who provided appropriate reinforcement for each successive component.

- *I liked teachers who were encouraging.*
- *The teacher wouldn't mother me but would give encouragement, but would not do your work for you. This is important because you have to learn by yourself not by teachers doing it for you.*
- *A teacher I remember gave everyone a book. I couldn't read it but she helped me to read and then let me keep the book. This made me feel good because somebody actually believed in me.*
- *A teacher in grade 6 would always put in a reward system to encourage me to participate. I had stickers on my desk for putting up my hand and answering*

questions. A green one if the answer was wrong and a red star if the answer was right. This encouraged me to participate more.

- *In my early years I got on-on-one attention at the appropriate level and then more group work later.*
- *In the early years I was just in another classroom where teachers knew all the students had LD and came around to spend time with each student.*
- *All my best experiences came from private tutors.*
- *I had a private tutor who was a linguistics professor. It was very costly but was very effective.*

Accommodations and adaptive technology: Participants also discussed how the use of instructional accommodations and adaptive technology enhanced their educational experiences. A few participants spoke of selective instances where teachers provided specific accommodations and supports (e.g., additional time, verbal testing and reporting, educational assistants) that improved their schooling experiences.

- *In grade 4, I realized I wasn't dumb because I was allowed to do oral tests.*
- *A teacher's aide was always there to answer my questions but did not sit right beside me.*
- *In grade 6, my teacher introduced me to a new way of writing. She showed me something like TOWER to help me organize my thoughts.*
- *More accommodations should be available like computers and stories read out loud. If a student were going to school who had no arms, they'd get a computer. If you're LD, told to write it yourself.*
- *Students should have use of a computer to write essay portions of exams. This happened from grade 9 to OAC and continued during my 2 years at Fanshawe College.*
- *Segregation from others during test and exams which occurred throughout high school and when I was in college (I have a diploma in ECE).*

- *Extra time and texts being read to me are helpful.*

Participants from the Provincial Demonstration schools were especially positive about the use of voice recognition systems, with all participants commenting on the effectiveness of computers.

- *I did everything on a tape recorder because I was better verbally.*
- *I received accommodations only when I came to the Demonstration School like extra help and the use of technology.*
- *Technology like Dragon Naturally Speaking Preferred helped me.*
- *In grade 7, I got my own computer. Even though it was old it had a word processor and a printer and I had something to use every time I had to write something.*
- *Dragon Naturally Speaking or Dragon Classic helped me to become more independent in my writing.*
- *TextHelp Read and Write helped me.*

Individualized instruction: Finally, students provided a further qualification that effective teachers were those that provided instruction based on individual needs. These students reflected on the importance of individual instruction, with some participants elaborating on the value of paying for individual lessons/tutorial sessions. Participants also discussed the value of small group instruction and small class sizes.

- *I liked smaller groups for reading.*
- *We were never alone and always worked in a buddy system.*

Factors that Promote Negative School Instances

Misconceptions and misunderstandings: Participants were able to identify at least one negative instance with respect to their elementary school experiences. When asked to

deconstruct these experiences, most participants commented that teachers lacked relevant knowledge and/or a true understanding of the nature of learning disabilities. Many participants, especially those currently completing undergraduate studies, commented that teachers had often ascribed negative behavioural and personal attributes to students with learning disabilities. Specifically, students reflected that their learning disabilities were often attributed to a physical disability or a fault in character such as being “disruptive” or “lazy.”

- *The only disability is when a teacher doesn't understand how you learn and thinks that you are only doing it for attention.*
- *They thought that I was deaf. I'm not deaf I have a central auditory processing problem. Some didn't want to know and others didn't seem to care about LD or they engaged in blame-the-victim-behaviour.*
- *My grade 6 teacher thought if he belittled you that it would motivate you. He made fun of me. They look at you and think that you are a cute kid but you can't do much because of the LD. They thought I wouldn't amount to anything.*
- *Teachers don't understand what LD is. They think you're just being lazy or stupid. If your problems aren't behavioural and disruptive they ignore you so that you need to act up in class to be noticed and helped.*
- *Teachers don't know what LD is and can deal with behavioural problems, attention problems, skipping classes but don't recognize LD among them.*

Segregation: These participants also expressed sentiments of being “singled out” or ostracized by classroom teachers. Participants explained that these teachers behaved in a manner that identified them as “different” from other students in the class in a negative manner. Some participants elaborated that they were led to believe that they were holding their classmates back and many commented that they were subjected to public ridicule.

- *I didn't like being yelled at.*
- *They used to isolate me, to place me aside from the others.*
- *I don't like when teachers make me read aloud in front of the classroom because it makes me nervous.*
- *When I was in grade 8, the teacher would yell out, "Everyone in the class do #1 to 20 but X only has to do 5." The other kids always got angry with that.*
- *What bothered me the most is when we had to go out of the room to sit in the hall because we couldn't do something. They felt we were slowing down the class.*
- *I didn't like them putting me on the spot.*
- *Sometimes they were making fun of me for being LD. "You can't do this? Ha!"*
- *In grade 5, I studied calculus and part of the accommodation was to separate the test into two parts (separate times for the two parts and/or space of time in between). In the middle of the test, the teacher interrupted the class asking for scissors. When she found a pair, the teacher cut the test into several pieces.*
- *Don't make the children stand out from the others especially in younger grades. They have enough trouble with social skills and making friends. It only adds to their feelings of stupidity and worthlessness.*

Inappropriate work level: Participants also claimed that part of their negative school experiences included being provided with inappropriate tasks or assignments.

Specifically, some students spoke of being provided with work that was below their level and that was perceived as "babyish" in nature. One participant spoke of being responsible to complete all work disseminated in the classroom even while attending remedial sessions. Another commented that he was "mothered" in the classroom by being inappropriately rewarded for completing minimal tasks.

- *If you withdraw the student make sure that you are really teaching the student, not just giving them easier work.*

- *One teacher just gave us the work and expected us to work on our own. Don't just hand out a book and page number and expect us to do it. It requires explanation and teaching.*
- *I didn't like when they took us out of class and did not teach us at grade level and had us do much simpler work.*
- *I had the same teacher for three years and she mothered me. She gave me too many rewards. After three years, I expected rewards every time I got something right. Rewards are good but only up to a certain point, like when you have done something new.*
- *Being pulled from the regular class for special education and then expected to catch up on all the work missed is hard.*

Lack of appropriate accommodations and modifications: Consistent with the concept of inappropriate levels of work, participants also commented that teachers were often unwilling or unable to implement appropriate accommodations and modifications in their classrooms. Some participants also complained that their teachers had been “too busy” to provide them with extra clarification or direction during instruction even if they had previously told students to seek clarification. Alternatively, some students suggested that the clarification provided was insufficient, with teachers assuming that provided verbal reiterations would result in enhanced learning. Finally, one participant commented that he was made to feel uncomfortable when he acted as an “advocate” for himself, seeking clarification and/or guidance from other students.

- *Also make sure that the student is really taught a lesson in the withdrawal period. Often the students are left to do drill and practise on their own.*
- *I think that some people should learn how to advocate for themselves. Maybe when I am talking to someone, I am not talking to get into trouble I am asking my*

friend for help. Some teachers make you feel insecure about advocating for yourself.

- *When a teacher says don't ask anyone but me for help and then says that they are too busy to help when you ask. That confuses me.*
- *Teachers refuse to make accommodations. The VP looking after special education told my daughter (7 years old) that she'd have to learn to work harder. Regular teachers think that LD students just need to get over the attitude of not understanding.*
- *Most teachers figured if you needed extra help, they could talk for 5 minutes about your question and assume the answer was understood. They should check learning rather than assuming. Learning is not reinforced enough.*
- *When recognized as LD, valuable accommodation was one-on-one sessions, still within the classroom. In group work, learned from peers but learned the harsh way — peers are very unforgiving. When left on own, I was lost and didn't get anything done.*

Essential Knowledge and Skills for Working with Students with Learning Disabilities

Accurate knowledge: When asked to comment on the knowledge and skills that teachers needed to possess when working with students with learning disabilities, these participants identified that teachers needed to possess relevant and accurate knowledge about learning disabilities. Furthermore, many students suggested that having teachers participate in some forum of “practicum” or “observation” in a specialized setting would be the most effective venue for this instruction.

- *The teacher must understand what a disability is and know how to work with it.*
- *Teachers need to know that it is not what a student can't do that is important but what they can do.*

- *They should build more schools like the Demonstration Schools. Teachers who are in training should come to this school for a couple of years and then go to their school.*
- *Have the teachers go out and do a placement with students with learning disabilities.*
- *Teachers should send their students to Trillium.*
- *Teachers should show students the Fat City movie.*
- *There are lots of clues in the classroom and teachers need to recognize signals earlier.*
- *All teachers need training about LD and learn ways to adapt to LD students. Teachers must learn about all aspects of LD.*

Instructional repertoires: Associated with the concepts of accurate and relevant knowledge, participants commented that teachers also needed to possess extensive repertoires of teaching methodologies and learning strategies. Specifically, these participants commented that teachers needed to be more conscious of using multiple modalities when presenting information and reinforcing concepts, with many discussing the effectiveness of visual and kinesthetic formats of instruction compared to didactic-only approaches. Others also spoke to importance of providing effective reading and writing instruction.

- *Teachers should be trained how to teach us to read.*
- *Teachers should be trained in many teaching methods.*
- *Teachers should be someone who knows what to do when the student has a learning disability.*
- *They should be knowledgeable in writing and reading.*

- *Teachers used to talk and talk and talk and then write it on the board and before I came here I didn't know how to ask them to change this style. I can't read handwriting.*
- *DI classes and phonological awareness are beneficial.*
- *Young children need hands on stuff. Don't give them a book and tell them to spit it out to me in a book report because they don't learn that way. With direct involvement with teachers they will retain more.*
- *LD and drama-kids can express themselves through drama. LD students have poor self-esteem and this can empower them because they have some control over it. For example in history class using drama can help students learn better.*
- *There are difficulties doing math where there is a right and a wrong answer. Drama and creativity gave hope and it teaches a lot. For example, I learned about Africa that way. Sometimes the curriculum has to be adjusted. They haven't realized that you can put drama into math and have lots of fun with it. LD students need hands on learning. They are visual learners and need stuff that relates to life. For example, going to the market and doing problem solving questions there.*
- *The accommodations could be focused on the LD student but involve the whole class. Include other students so the LD student can learn from others on their terms.*

Sensitivity training and acceptance: Other participants spoke to the need to include sensitivity training as part of teacher preparation. They also expressed the sentiment that teachers needed to readily accept children with learning disabilities into their classrooms and be willing to provide appropriate programming for these students. Finally, participants selected that teachers needed to be forthright when discussing the nature of learning disabilities with students, with teachers be called upon to help all students develop positive and healthy perspectives about those with learning disabilities.

- *They have a plan for the year and teachers don't like getting off their plan to help the students with learning disabilities. They don't want to deal with anything different.*
- *Teach teachers to be empathetic. They don't realize that what they think of the student reflects the way they will treat that student. As soon as teachers got my file they panicked and made assumptions. They need to realize that just because you have LD it doesn't mean that you are weak. It means you have to help them a little more. We have to stop them from thinking that this child won't amount to anything. If you look at the strengths of the student you can help with their weakness.*
- *Important to understand how teachers think of child and how parents think of the child but why can't we ask the child what they think about what they are doing? I know it's hard for a child to give concrete and precise answers but you don't need a degree to see if there are problems.*
- *A good teacher makes the learning environment more comfortable. If you worry less, you learn more.*
- *It is not the child's problem to facilitate accommodations it's the education system's problem.*
- *I don't envy teachers, it's hard work but this baggage comes with teaching.*
- *For every accommodation that is a tool, the sooner the child uses it the better. The child should learn to use all things that are available.*
- *As early as possible, help the child understand the nature of the problem or disability and later on they will figure out exactly what the problem is. It took a long time to explain to friends and today some still don't even understand.*

Professional Support Services and Special Services

Participants

Sixty-two professional support staff responded to the teacher education working group survey. They represented three professions: psychology, speech and language pathology/audiology, and social work. Within each profession, participants were identified according to their place of employment. These were generalized into two categories: school board-based employment and non-school board-based employment. Demographic information included years in practice, years with present employer, position titles, and level of professional training.

Twenty psychologists responded to the survey (12 school board-based, 8 non-school board-based). Number of years in practice ranged from 5 to 34 years. School board-based psychologists averaged 12 years with their present employer, while non-school board-based psychologists averaged 10 years. Titles included chief psychologist, behavioral consultant, and psychometrist in the school boards and clinical and research psychologists, and psychology associates. Training was evenly split between MA (10) and PhD (10).

Twenty speech and language pathologists/audiologists also responded to the survey (5 school board-based, 15 non-school board-based). Number of years in practice ranged from 2 to 22 years. School board speech/language pathologists averaged 12 years with their present employer, while non-school board speech/language pathologists averaged 5 years. Titles included department head, speech language pathologist, and audiologists. All participants held an MA in their field.

Twenty-two social workers responded to the survey (9 school board-based, 13 non-school-based) Number of years in practice ranged from one to 34 years. School board based social workers averaged 19 years with their present employer and non-school board based social workers averaged 6 years. Titles include therapist, case manager, educational service advisor, counsellor, and social worker. There were 22 MSW-trained social workers and one PhD.

Responses

The need for better understanding of the role of professional special services: All three professional services identified a need for explaining the level of training associated with their profession and the relationship of that training to the field of pedagogy. Speech/language pathologists were especially strong in their wish that teachers understand the high level of training in their field and its application not just language disorders, but also to language development, reading skills and writing skills.

All three professional services felt that teachers need to know that their profession not only assess children, but also has classroom appropriate Intervention.

All three professions expressed a need for teachers to understand that the professions work out of a collaboration and team model, and not just a referral model. The theme of teamwork was common throughout the survey.

All three professions felt that teachers perceive the professional service provider within a narrow framework. Social work specifically identified cross-field skills in sociology, psychology and counseling) Psychology also identified the need to inform

teachers of the multi-services that they provide. These included Intervention, programming and counseling skills.

Psychology and social work expressed a need for teachers to understand professional services' role as part of a systems approach to children's education. They felt that teachers' did not take advantage of the their profession's skills in bringing parents into the process.

Medically based social workers expressed that need for teachers to be aware of learning disabilities associated with medical Intervention and treatment protocols (i.e., heart surgery, cancer/leukemia) as well as co-morbidity issues around substance abuse and mental illness.

Social workers expressed a need for teachers to understand that emotional issues are a big part of learning disabilities and social workers help students develop coping skills and self-advocacy skills around their disability

All three professional support services identified topics that they believed was important to teacher education including child development, language and speech development, cognitive development and emotional development

There was consistency amongst all three professions around the need that teachers understand normal child development. Language and speech development, cognitive development and emotional development were identified. It was felt that this would help teachers establish appropriate social and educational milestones for students

There was consistency amongst the three professions that teachers understand the reading process. Phonological awareness, reading development and the relationship between oral language and written language were common topics.

There was consistency amongst all three professions around the need for teachers to understand the professional reports that are written and how to integrate them into an IEP.

There was consistency amongst all three professions that teachers need to develop communication skills and collaboration skills.

Mental health issues: Psychology and social work identified a need for teachers to understand mental health issues in their students. Child development, reading acquisition, understanding and applying reports, mental health and communication/team work were consistent throughout the survey. Otherwise, suggestions suggested professional biases: Social workers suggested basics psychodynamic and psychotherapy; psychologists suggested systems theory; and speech/ language pathologists suggested understanding classroom acoustics. All suggestions specific to each profession were valid, but could not be realized simply because of the limitations of pre-service programs.

Identified roles: All three professional support services identified a role for their profession in the delivery of essential courses and content knowledge. A distinction was not made between pre-service and in-service participation. All three professions

suggested the following delivery models: workshops, conferences, case studies and curriculum development

Improved communication: All three professional services identified a need to improve the communication system between teachers and the service providers. About 75% of the participants in the survey acknowledged that there was room for improving the effectiveness of communication between teachers and support staff. Suggestions were primarily around using new technologies such as email and teleconferencing. Other suggestions included structured and scheduled reporting, checklists for Intervention and outcomes and September orientations between teaching staff and professional support providers.

Appendix A — Members of the Volunteer Steering Committee, Promoting Early Intervention Project

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Appendix C — Essential Skills and Knowledge for Teachers Working with Students with Learning Disabilities

The Teacher Education working group believes that all teachers, as well as school and board administrators, should possess and endorse the specific knowledge and skills outlined by such international, national, and provincial organizations as the Division of Learning Disabilities – The Council for Exceptional Children (DLD/CEC), the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), the Ontario Association for Students at Risk, and the Ontario Subdivision for Learning Disabilities. The following tables provide a synthesis of the knowledge and skills recommended by these organizations.

Table 1: Essential Knowledge

	DLD/ CEC	OCEC	NJCLD (all teachers)	NJCLD (LD teachers)	Integra	Ontario Assoc. for Students at Risk	Ontario Subdivision for LDs
Knowledge related to:							
Nature and needs of students with LDs	X	X					
• Relevant LD research	X	X					
• Current definitions of LDs	X		X	X	X	X	X
• Characteristics of LDs	X	X	X	X			
Skills in academic support areas	X	X					

• Study skills	X	X		X			
• Consumer skills	X	X					
• Career/vocational skills	X	X					
Curriculum development/ modification	X	X					
• Social skills curricula	X	X		X			
• Career/ vocational curricula	X	X					
K-12 regular class curriculum	X		X	X			
Alternative curriculum models	X						
Assessment/ evaluation methods, use and interpretation	X	X	X	X			
Basic classroom management/ assessment	X	X		X			
Principles of collaboration with students/ parents/ community	X	X	X	X			
Consultation techniques	X	X					
Specialized instructional strategies	X	X	X	X			
Technology resources	X	X					
Historical aspects of LDs	X	X		X			
Legal aspects of LDs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Theories/ practices related to LDs that have limited documentation	X						
Selecting/ implementing		X			X	X	X

appropriate teaching/ learning processes							
Community resources					X	X	X

Table 2: Essential Skills

	DLD/ CEC	OCEC	NJCLD (all teachers)	NJCLD LD teacher	Integra	Ontario Assoc. for Students at Risk	Ontario Subdivision for LDs
Skills:							
Modifying curriculum	X	X			X	X	X
Adapting curriculum	X	X			X	X	X
Administering/ interpreting assessment tools	X	X	X	X			
Designing learning environment for active participation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Communicating with students/ parents/ community	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Collaboration with students/ parents/ community	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Staying current on educational issues that require collaboration	X						
Modelling/ demonstrating	X	X					
Selecting methods/ materials across subject areas	X	X		X	X	X	X
Adapting methods/ materials across subject	X	X		X	X	X	X

areas							
Evaluating instructional materials/ strategies	X	X			X	X	X
Evaluating new LD theories	X						
Incorporating problem-solving/ reasoning strategies	X	X			X	X	X
Field experience	X	X					
• Interacting with students with respect	X	X			X	X	X
• Individual and group instruction	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
• Observational procedures	X	X			X	X	X
• Developing IEPs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
• Providing instruction	X	X	X	X			
• Classroom management techniques	X	X	X	X			
Intervention Strategies					X	X	X
Positive behavioural management					X	X	X
Demonstrating a positive attitude towards students		X	X	X			
Incorporating/ integrating technology		X			X	X	X
Utilizing community resources					X	X	X
Creating/ maintaining LAP							
Instruction of effective					X	X	X

student portfolios							
Providing opportunities for social interaction with all students			X	X			

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Appendix D — Proposed Provincial Practicum Checklist for Teacher Candidates

Over the course of the pre-service year it is essential that teacher candidates participate actively in the delivery of services to children with suspected or identified exceptionalities, in particular those with learning disabilities. With this in mind, the following checklist has been developed to assist teacher candidates to participate in and learn from a variety of practices that will enhance their teaching skills in this very important area.

Teacher candidate: _____

Practicum dates: _____

_____ Observe and/or instruct students who have learning disabilities.

(Observation and practice should take place within the classroom setting and/or be supplemented with experiences with special educators outside the classroom, including learning resource teachers.)

_____ Develop and implement accommodation and programming modifications for students with special needs, including those with identified or suspected learning disabilities, as part of daily lesson plans and unit plans.

_____ Develop and deliver evaluation and assessment procedures for students with identified or suspected learning disabilities.

_____ Access IEP and IPRC documentation for students with identified or suspected learning disabilities.

_____ Participate in in-school teams related to the development and implementation of IEP and IPRC processes.

_____ Observe and/or participate in the delivery of services provided by professional support persons including school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, social workers and occupational therapists.

_____ Observe and/or participate in the delivery of services provided by paraprofessional support persons such as educational assistants.

_____ Observe and/or participate in parental communication sessions/conferences (e.g., parent-teacher, in-school support team-parent, professional support person-parent), especially those who relate to the academic and socio-emotional well being of students with learning disabilities.

Appendix E — Action Plans for Identified Stakeholder Groups and Organizations

Teacher Candidates

Participants and Recruitment Processes

We plan to hold one to three focus groups of approximately 15-20 teacher candidates at each of the eleven faculties of education in Ontario. Invitations will be sent to potential participants enrolled in primary-junior education programs. The invitation will be disseminated through the pre-service administrative assistant at each institute. Teacher candidates will be provided with a copy of a letter of invitation/information outlining the primary purpose of this initiative as well as the specific information being gathered here. They will also receive a copy of the focus group questions and prompts, the demographic and personal opinion survey and the informed consent form.

Where and When

The focus groups will take place at the pre-service students' home university at a location and a time that is convenient to the students. In keeping with confidentiality and the well being of the participants, the location will be private and secure (e.g., an empty classroom). Focus groups will occur before the students leave for their final teaching block this year.

Procedure

Each focus group will last for approximately 90 minutes. A professional facilitator provided by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) will host the focus group. Participants will be asked to record their initial reactions and responses to the

focus group questions as well as the demographic and personal opinion survey, prior to attending the session. During the session, they will be supplied with pen and paper to add additional comments and emerging insights to these notes as the discussion evolves.

These notes will be collected from those willing to submit them. Focus groups will not be taped, nor at any time will students be requested to identify themselves. All focus groups will be transcribed as they occur by a professional transcriber provided by LDAO.

Participants will be provided with an opportunity for additional comments after the focus group is finished. Participants will be given another copy of the focus group questions and prompts so that they can record any additional comments and insights. These additional comments can be dropped off at their faculty of education office for us to pick up at a later date. Again participants will not identify themselves.

Focus Group Questions and Prompts

The following are the focus group questions and prompts that the facilitator will use and will be forwarded to the participants prior to the actual focus group.

- Does your pre-service program require you to take a course on special education or exceptionalities?
- Does your pre-service program require you to take a course on learning disabilities?
- Please describe any instruction about special education or learning disabilities you have received in your current program.
- Please describe the length and content of any special education courses you have taken in your current program.
- Please describe the length and nature of special education/learning disabilities covered in Language Arts, Mathematics and Educational Psychology.

- Did you gain any experience with special education/learning disabled children during your practicum?
- What skills and or guidance did you gain from the practicum regarding special education/learning disabilities?
- What teaching strategies did you use in your practicum to address all the learning needs within the classroom?
- What are learning disabilities?
- What are warning signs, indicators or characteristics of a learning disability a primary teacher may see?
- What modifications or adaptations can be used in a classroom?
- What are some implications for your teaching style and the child's learning style if the child is learning disabled?
- Where you required to modify any lesson or unit plans during your current program?
- Is there an (if so what) area of learning differences you would like to learn about?
- Do you plan to take and additional qualification courses in special needs in the future? (If so, when?)
- Please share your experiences collaborating with others on learning disabilities.
- What resources are available to aid you with special education/learning disabled children in your community and in the schools?
- Do you know of any organizations that provide assistance for learning disabled students to classroom teachers, students and their families?
- How did you become aware of such resources?

Demographic Questions and Personal Opinion Survey

The following are the questions to be included on the demographic form:

- Gender
- Age
- Are you in the concurrent or the consecutive program?

- If you are in a consecutive program, when did you graduate with your undergraduate degree?
- What is your undergraduate degree?
- If you worked between the time you graduated from your undergraduate degree and entered the pre-service program, in what occupation were you employed?
- Do you have children?
- Do you have a child with a learning difficulty?
- Have you worked with learning disabled or special needs children prior to entering the pre-service program?

Practising Teachers

Participants and Recruitment Processes

We plan to electronically survey a representative number of practising teachers within the Ontario school system. Surveys will be sent to schools currently participating as Promoting Early Intervention Pilot Sites. In addition to the survey, we will forward an information letter to the participants outlining the primary purpose of this initiative, as well as the specific information being gathered.

Where and When

Brief surveys will be sent to the schools by November of 2001. The survey will be sent electronically. We anticipate the replies to be returned to us by December 15, 2001.

Board staff and principals will be asked to encourage participants to participate in the initiative. Questionnaires will be completely voluntary.

Procedure

School principals will be sent a letter detailing the initiative. The principals will be asked to encourage their teachers to complete the survey. The survey will be forwarded

electronically to the principals, who will distribute a copy along with the information letter to teachers. Participants will not be required to identify themselves on the surveys. Completed surveys will be forwarded electronically or by fax to the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.

Upon receiving the completed survey the electronic address of the respondent will be destroyed. Return of the questionnaire will be indicative of participants' informed consent.

Survey Questions

1. What are your recommendations for pre-service and continuing education in this province over the next decade?
2. What are/would be some of the most effective methods of professional development for you?
- 3.a. If you are a special education teacher:
 - i. What factors would encourage you to stay in special education?
 - ii. What factors would make you leave special education?
- 3.b. If you are a classroom teacher:
 - i. What factors would encourage you to enter special education?
What factors would prevent you from entering special education?
4. Given the factors that you cannot change (e.g., funding), what are the most significant challenges to programming for students with learning disabilities?
5. Please list the supports that you would like to see in place in your school, school board and community with respect to working with students with learning disabilities.

School Boards

Participants and Recruitment Processes

We plan to electronically survey a representative number of school boards in Ontario.

The purpose is to gather a collective report on the status of education resources of students with learning disabilities. Along with the survey will we forward an information letter to the participants outlining the primary purpose of this initiative, as well as the specific information being gathered. The information is confidential. There will be no direct comparison of school boards and no board will be identified by name in the report.

Where and When

Surveys will be sent to the Elementary Level, to the attention of Directors and copied to Superintendents of Special Ed. by January 10, 2001. The survey will be sent electronically. We anticipate the replies to be returned to us by the beginning of February 2001. Directors will be asked to encourage participants to participate in the initiative. Questionnaires will be completely voluntary and will be translated for francophone boards.

Procedure

Directors will be sent a letter detailing the initiative. Directors will be asked to encourage their staff to complete the survey. The survey will be forwarded to staff by the Director with a copy of the information letter. Participants will not be required to identify themselves on the surveys. Completed surveys will be forwarded electronically to the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.

Upon receiving the completed survey the electronic address of the respondent will be destroyed. Return of the questionnaire will be indicative of participants' informed consent.

Special Education Additional Qualifications Candidates

Participants and Recruitment Processes

We plan to hold focus groups in all the faculties of education across Ontario. In the focus groups, we anticipate that no more than 20 additional qualification graduates will attend any one session. Invitations will be mailed to potential participants through the administrative assistant of the Department of Continuing Studies at each institution. Special education additional qualification graduates who have completed an elective course in learning disabilities will be provided with a copy of a letter of invitation/information outlining the primary purpose of this initiative as well as the specific information being gathered here. They will also receive a copy of the focus group questions and prompts, the demographic and personal opinion survey and the informed consent form.

Where and When

The focus groups will take place at the home university at a location and a time that is convenient to the graduates. In keeping with confidentiality and the well being of the participants, the location will be private and secure (e.g., an empty classroom). Focus groups will occur throughout the spring, summer and fall of 2001.

Procedure

Each focus group will last for approximately 90 minutes. A professional facilitator provided by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) will host the focus group. Participants will be asked to record their initial reactions and responses to the focus group questions as well as the demographic and personal opinion survey, prior to attending the session. During the session, they will be supplied with pen and paper to add additional comments and emerging insights to these notes as the discussion evolves.

These notes will be collected from those willing to submit them. Focus groups will not be taped, nor at any time will graduates be requested to identify themselves. All focus groups will be transcribed as they occur by a professional transcriber provided by LDAO. Participants will be provided with an opportunity for additional comments after the focus group is finished. Participants will be given another copy of the focus group questions and prompts so that they can record any additional comments and insights. These additional comments can be dropped off at their faculty of education office for us to pick up at a later date. Again participants will not identify themselves.

Focus Group Questions and Prompts

The following are the focus group prompts the facilitator is to use and will be forwarded to the participants prior to the actual focus groups:

- What are learning disabilities?
- Describe indicators, characteristics or warning signs of a child that might have learning disabilities?
- Has the information you have been taught been useful in your daily practice as a teacher?
- Do you know what resources regarding learning disabilities are available to you?

- Describe modifications/accommodations in a classroom.
- Do you feel more prepared to teach children with LD?
- What would you STOP, START and CONTINUE with regard to these courses you have taken in special education?

Demographic Questions and Personal Opinion Survey

The following are the questions to be included on the demographic form:

- Gender
- How many years have you been teaching?
- Has any of this experience been as a special education teacher?
- What are you currently teaching?
- Do you hold any qualifications, other than special education, beyond your regular teacher training?
- What was the main reason you took special education additional qualifications courses?

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario Chapter Members

Participants and Recruitment Processes

Parents of four- to eight-year-old children who have learning difficulties will be contacted through the Learning Disabilities Associations in Ontario. Letters will be sent to local chapters of the Learning Disabilities Associations of Ontario describing this initiative. We will request that each local chapter of the Learning Disabilities Association forward the letter of invitation/information to parents in their membership. Included in this invitation will be information outlining the primary purpose of this initiative as well as the specific information being gathered here. Parents will receive a series of questions that can be responded to in print and/or as part of a focus group session. The package will also contain the demographic and personal opinion survey and informed consent form.

For those parents interested in participating in a focus group the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario will make the appropriate arrangements.

Where and When

The focus groups will take place at the offices of the various chapters of the Learning Disabilities Associations of Ontario. We will use a location and a time that is convenient to the parents. In keeping with confidentiality and the well being of the participants the location will be a place the parents feel is private and secure.

Procedure

Each focus group will last for approximately 90 minutes. A professional facilitator provided by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) will host the focus group. Participants will be asked to record their initial reactions and responses to the focus group questions as well as the demographic and personal opinion survey, prior to attending the session. During the session, they will be supplied with pen and paper to add additional comments and emerging insights to these notes as the discussion evolves.

These notes will be collected from those willing to submit them. Focus groups will not be taped, nor at any time will parents be requested to identify themselves. All focus groups will be transcribed as they occur by a professional transcriber provided by LDAO.

Participants will be provided with an opportunity for additional comments after the focus group is finished. Participants will be given another copy of the focus group questions and prompts so that they can record any additional comments and insights. These additional comments can be dropped off at their local Learning Disabilities Association chapter for us to pick up at a later date. Again, participants will not identify themselves.

Upon receiving the questionnaires from the local Learning Disabilities Association chapters, parents will be directed to return the completed questionnaires in the provided self-addressed return envelope. Parents who elect to return the questionnaires will not be asked to identify themselves, with their returned questionnaire being indicative of their informed consent.

Focus Group Questions and Prompts

The following are the focus group prompts the facilitator is to use and will be forwarded to the participants prior to the actual focus groups:

- What skills and knowledge, to best meet the needs of learning disabled children, do you think classroom and resource teachers should have?
- How does (if at all) the school meet your child's learning needs?
- Do you feel your child's teacher is aware of your child's strengths and weaknesses?
- What other information do you feel teachers and the school should know about your child?
- How do you and the school communicate?
- Is this method of communication effective?
- How does your child's teacher communicate your child's strengths and weaknesses to you?
- Do you provide the school and teacher with information and concerns relating to your child?
- Are you pleased with your child's academic progress?
- What, if any, types of accommodations/modifications are being used to facilitate your child's learning?
- What, if any, types of curriculum modifications are implemented for your child?

Parental Survey

- What is your marital status?
- How many children do you have?
- What are their ages?
- What is the age of the child(ren) with the learning difficulty?
- How old was your child(ren) when you first saw signs of learning difficulty?
- How many schools has your child attended?
- How long has your child been attending school?
- How long has your child been attending her/his current school?
- Does your child have an identified learning disability?
- Does your child have difficulty learning?
- Does your child have a learning disability?
- How old is your child?
- What grade is your child in?
- What type of school does your child attend? (Private/public/separate/home-schooled)
- Is your child placed in:
 - A regular class with monitoring
 - A regular class with resource or withdrawal
 - Self-contained (small segregated class)
 - A provincial or demonstration school
 - A Section 19 classroom, care and treatment
- What skills/knowledge do you think teachers and resource teachers should have to best meet the needs of learning disabled students?
- Do you feel your child's teachers are aware of your child's strengths and weaknesses?
- How does (if at all) the school meet your child's learning needs? Please explain how your child's needs are met or in what manner your child's needs are not met?

- What other information would you like the school and the teachers to know about your child? Please explain why you feel this information would benefit your child's learning experience.
- How do you and the school communicate?
- Does this mode of communication work for you? If not, please explain why and how you would like to change the communication method.
- How does your child's teacher communicate your child's strengths and weaknesses to you?
- How do you know your child is learning?
- Are you pleased with your child's academic progress? Please explain why or why not.
- What, if any, types of accommodations are being used to facilitate your child's learning? Please describe the accommodations used.
- What, if any, types of curriculum modifications are implemented for your child? Please describe the modifications.
- Space for parents to add any additional comments.

Demographic Questions and Personal Opinion Survey

The following are the questions to be included on the demographic form:

- What is your marital status?
- How many children do you have?
- What are their ages?
- What is the age of the child(ren) with the learning difficulty?
- How old was your child(ren) when you first saw signs of learning difficulty?
- Does your child have an identified learning disability? If so what is his/her learning disability?
- What type of school does your child attend? (Private/public/separate/home-schooled)
- What is your child's placement?
- How many schools has your child attended?

- How long has your child been attending school?
- How long has your child been attending her/his current school?

Professional Support Services (Psychologists, Speech and Language Pathologists, Social Workers)

Participants and Recruitment Processes

We plan to electronically survey a representative number of members of professional associations who provide support services within schools in Ontario. The members will be social workers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists and audiologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. Surveys will be sent to participants via the applicable professional associations. In addition to the survey we will forward an information letter to the participants outlining the primary purpose of this initiative as well as the specific information being gathered.

Where and When

Brief surveys will be sent to the professional associations by mid-April of 2001. The survey will be sent electronically. We anticipate the replies to be returned to us by the beginning of June 2001. Professional associations of support services for the school boards in Ontario will be asked to encourage participants to participate in the initiative.

Questionnaires will be completely voluntary.

Procedure

Professional associations will be sent a letter detailing the initiative. The professional associations will be asked to encourage their members to complete the survey. The survey will be forwarded electronically to participants by the professional associations

with a copy of the information letter. Participants will not be required to identify themselves on the surveys. Completed surveys will be forwarded electronically to the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.

Upon receiving the completed survey the electronic address of the respondent will be destroyed. Return of the questionnaire will be indicative of participants' informed consent.

Survey Questions

1. Please identify your current work place:
school board _____, hospital _____, agency _____, private practice _____, other _____
2. How many years have you been working in your current capacity?
3. What is your employment status with your current employer?
4. How long have you been employed by your current employer?
5. What is your level of education?
6. What is your role in the school system?
7. What do you think the special education teachers should know about your role in the school system?
8. In your practice do you work with children who are identified with learning disabilities? Yes/no
9. If yes please elaborate.
10. Does your practice have implications for your clients' performance in the classroom?
Yes/no
11. If yes, please elaborate.

12. What do you believe special education teachers who work with your clients should know about your profession's Intervention regarding children with learning disabilities?
13. From your profession's perspective, do you see topics that should be part of teacher training in the area of special education?
14. Do you see a role for your professional association in the training of special education teachers? Yes/no
15. If yes, please elaborate.
16. How do you communicate with classroom teachers?
17. Do you think the communication system is effective?
18. What improvements can you recommend to increase the effectiveness of the communication system?
19. How does your role manifest itself in the classroom?

Post-secondary Students with Learning Disabilities and Students at Provincial Demonstration Schools

Participants and Recruitment Processes

We plan to hold focus groups at several post-secondary institutions in Ontario. Invitations to participate will be forwarded to all universities and major colleges. In the focus groups, we anticipate that no more than 20 post-secondary students will attend any one session. Letters will be sent to the disabilities services offices at prospective institutions, which will in turn forward them to potential participants. This letter will specify that potential participants should be 18 years or older and have identified themselves as having a learning disability.

Students at each institution will be provided with a copy of a letter of invitation/information outlining the primary purpose of this initiative as well as the

specific information being gathered here. They will also receive a copy of the focus group questions and prompts, the demographic and personal opinion survey and the informed consent form.

Where and When

The focus groups will take place at the home university or college at a location and a time that is convenient to the students. In keeping with confidentiality and the well being of the participants, the location will be private and secure (e.g., an empty classroom). Focus groups will occur between the spring and fall of 2001.

Procedure

Each focus group will last for approximately 90 minutes. A professional facilitator provided by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) will host the focus group. Participants will be asked to record their initial reactions and responses to the focus group questions as well as the demographic and personal opinion survey, prior to attending the session. During the session, they will be supplied with pen and paper to add additional comments and emerging insights to these notes as the discussion evolves.

These notes will be collected from those willing to submit them. Focus groups will not be taped, nor at any time will students be requested to identify themselves. All focus groups will be transcribed as they occur by a professional transcriber provided by LDAO.

Participants will be provided with an opportunity for additional comments after the focus group is finished. Participants will be given another copy of the focus group questions and prompts so that they can record any additional comments and insights. These

additional comments can be dropped off at their faculty of education office for us to pick up at a later date. Again, participants will not identify themselves.

Focus Group Questions and Prompts

The following are the focus group prompts the facilitator is to use and will be forwarded to the participants prior to the actual focus groups:

- Try to think back to when you were four to eight years old.
 - Can you think of a teacher who was really helpful to you?
 - What qualities did the teacher have?
 - What qualities did the teacher have that were particularly helpful to the learning disabled students?
 - Can you think of teachers who were not helpful to you?
 - What qualities did the teacher(s) have that bothered you the most?
- What do you think should be included in a teacher-training program for new teachers to ensure the new teachers would be able to effectively teach very young students with learning disabilities?

Demographic Question and Personal Opinion Survey

1. What is your current level of education?

2. Parents' level of education:

Mother _____

Father _____

3. Parents' occupation:

Mother _____

Father _____

4. What is your marital status?

5. Marital status of parents:

(During your kindergarten to grade three schooling)

6. What type of school did you attend (private, public or separate)?

7. How many schools did you attend during kindergarten to grade three?
8. If more than one, did you change school type? (Private, public or separate)
9. Did you attend kindergarten?
10. If so, was it half day or full day?
11. Did you have accommodations/modifications?
12. Elementary and Secondary
13. If so, describe the accommodations/modifications.
14. Elementary and Secondary
15. What accommodations/modifications worked the best for you?
16. What grade level did you initially receive accommodations?
17. Please describe the place or setting where you were first able to learn successfully?
18. Did you work with a special education teacher during kindergarten to grade three?
19. When did you first think you had difficulty learning?
20. What events or occurrences made you think you had trouble learning?

Appendix F — Timeline and Activities of the Teacher Education Working Committee

May 1999:

- Budget announcement by Cabinet to fund the LDAO Promoting Early Intervention (PEI) initiative.

June 1999:

- Developed PEI's activities and timelines, which included five streams, one of which was the examination of teacher education in Ontario.

October 1999:

- PEI's outline and timelines approved by Cabinet and the LDAO Board.

January 2000–March 2000:

- Dr. Sheila Bennett and Dr. Vera Woloshyn, Faculty of Education, Brock University, accepted the invitation to co-chair the working group.
- The co-chairs met with Carol Yaworski, Executive Director of LDAO, and Kate Lloyd, Project Manager, to discuss potential membership of this group.
- Potential members contacted and invitation to join the working group extended.
- Each member was asked to submit one or two recent journal articles that reflect their perspective on learning disabilities and/or particular area of interest as it relates to teacher education in Ontario.
- This material assisted members in learning about each other's perspectives.
- All submissions were compiled in a binder that members received and that formed an excellent primer on the issues related to effective teaching pedagogy.

April 2000:

- The Ontario College of Teachers was approached to join the working group and declined.

- The College believes that serving on the working group would be a conflict of interest.
- However, they have agreed to offer support and resources to the working group in more of a consultative fashion.

April 17, 2000:

- Meeting with College of Teachers to establish foundations for a consultative relationship.

May 18, 2000:

- The working group held its first meeting.
- Several subsequent meeting were scheduled for the year.
- Delineation of task begun with the goal of maintaining a balance between what is realistic and what is ideal.
- Identification of gaps in membership and the need for additional front line educators to balance out the number of members from the faculties of education.
- Literature review began.
- Primary mandate of group established:
 - Examination of the current status of teacher education (pre-service) offered by faculties of education across the province.
 - Study teacher training at the school board level (additional qualification).
 - Make recommendations for effective venues for incorporating the findings of all the working groups into teacher education programs.
 - Develop a questionnaire to be distributed to all school boards in the fall of 2000 regarding:
 - Boards hiring practices for specialist and how current realities and availability have compromised or impacted their hiring practices;
 - What kind of support they provide for special education teachers;
 - What boards require in terms of professional development.

October 2, 2000:

- Second meeting of the working group.
- Focus on three major areas:
 - Increasing the amount of training in special education and learning disabilities that new teacher receive through the faculties of education;
 - Increase the availability and quality of special education and learning disabilities AQ courses;
 - Addressing the overarching question of how to engage the teacher in a career-long learning process.
- Brainstorming session around the following three questions:
 - What do classroom teachers and special education teachers need to know?
 - What do they need to be able to do?
 - How do they get there?
- The working group continues to refine their questionnaire to be distributed to all school boards in the winter of 2000.

November 20 and 21, 2000:

- Working group's third meeting.
- Speaker: Dr. Susan Elliot re: The Reflective Practitioner.
- Speaker: Mr. Aryeh Gitterman re: Teacher-Testing Policy Development.
- Formulation of official response to the Ministry of Education on policy.
- Review of literature and small group working sessions around three fundamental questions:
 - What do teachers need to know?
 - What should they be able to do?
 - How do we get there?
- Identification of relevant stakeholders for teacher professional development:

Practising Teachers	Pre-service
Additional Qualifications	Federations
LDA Chapters/Parents	Ministry of Education

Support Services

Aboriginal Authorities

Directors

Students

- Establishment of small working groups associated with stakeholder groups.
- Development of tentative action plans/timelines relevant to soliciting information from these stakeholder groups.
- Submission for an ethics review to the Research Ethics Board at Brock University.

January 2001:

- Questionnaire distributed to all school boards.

February 19 and 20, 2001:

- Fourth working group meeting.
- Finalization of Action Plans.
- Targets:
 - Students
 - Directors, Superintendents, and Principals
 - Additional Qualifications
 - Support Services
 - Chapters/Parents
 - Pre-service
 - Federations
 - Practising Teachers
 - Ministry of Education

March 26, 2001:

- Ethical approval received from Brock University.

May 14 and 15, 2001:

- Fifth working group meeting.
- Carried out Action Plans.
- Ms. Patricia Goldblatt, from the Ontario College of Teachers, presented to the working group information regarding the process and issues identified as part of the revision to Additional Qualifications – Special Education that the College of Teachers has undertaken.
- As a result of her presentation, members of the working group raised issues and concerns. The working group felt that:
 1. The mandate of this project fails to recognize the role and responsibility of all teachers to address programming for exceptional students.
 2. There has been limited consultation in the development of the recommendations.
 3. There is evidence of a lack of a comprehensive vision of teacher education to address the range of students needs throughout the province.

May 22, 2001:

- A letter was written to Mr. Joe Atkinson at the College of Teachers outlining the working group's concerns and detailing what the group felt should be the process for establishing guidelines for additional qualification courses.
- Development of focus group questions for identified stakeholders:
 1. Given the things that cannot change, e.g., funding, what are the biggest challenges dealing with students with LDs?
 2. What would be the most effective method of PD for you?
 3. What are your recommendations for teacher education in this province over the next decade?

August 27, 2001:

- Sixth working group meeting.
 - Carry out Action Plans.

October 2001:

- Teacher orientation for the PEI Pilot Sites.

November 12, 2001:

- Seventh working group meeting.
- Updates from small group stakeholders.
- Review teacher focus group questions and survey items.
- Survey will be sent to all participating pilot schools with the suggestions that they pass it on to as many of their teachers as willing to participate.
- All 160 pilot site schools will receive the written survey.
- Review information from school-board survey with Dr. Adam Lodzinski.
- Review of pre-service focus group sessions and interview themes.
- Brainstorm around blueprint for where education needs to go.

December 15, 2001:

- Due date for the Issues and Concerns in Teacher Education Survey.

January 14 and 15, 2002:

- A draft response for the Additional Qualification Course Guidelines as they relate to Special Education 1, Special Education 2 and Special Education Specialist provided to the working group for comment.

January 31, 2002:

- Response to the Additional Qualification Course Guidelines as they relate to Special Education 1, Special Education 2 and Special Education Specialist provided to the Ontario College of Teachers.

March 2002:

- Recommendation from the working group will be generated and submitted by the end of March.

Appendix G — Teacher Education School Board Survey Summary

Total number of surveys completed: 50 out of 72 (69% response rate).

Breakdown by Provincial Region

	GTA	NE	NW	SE	SW
N in Sample	11	7	10	10	12
% of Sample	22%	14%	20%	20%	24%
N in Province	15	10	12	16	19
% of Province	73.3%	70.0%	83.3%	62.5%	63.2%

General Caveat:

Although the overall response rate (69%) and regional representation is good, respondents tended to leave many questions blank. Readers are therefore cautioned to take note of the number of boards reporting when examining the results of this survey.

A. Elementary Student Demographics

	Average Number of Full-Time Equivalent Students (Elementary Only)	Average Number Of Students for Whom Communication/LD Is the Formal Identification/ Diagnosis	Average Percentage LD
	19,998	509	3.8%
Boards Reporting	48	42	40

Breakdown by Provincial Region

	GTA	NE	NW	SE	SW
Average Elementary FTE Students	50,120	4,650	3,565	12,143	19,646
Average C/LD Students	1,179	145	84	461	604
Standard Dev. (s.d.)	971.6	112.9	51.2	245.5	471.7
Average Percentage LD	2.7%	3.5%	3.3%	6.1%	3.8%
Standard Dev. (s.d.)	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.03

B. Delivery Models

Delivery Model(s) Applicable to Students with Learning Disabilities

Primary Division (K-3)

	Fully Integrated		Average Number of Formally Identified LD Students	Resource Support/ Withdrawal		Average Number of Formally Identified LD Students
	Yes	No		Yes	No	
		42	1	45.0	39	1
Boards Reporting	43		16	40		15

Junior Division (4-6)

	Fully Integrated		Average Number of Formally Identified LD Students	Resource Support/ Withdrawal		Average Number of Formally Identified LD Students
	Yes	No		Yes	No	
		41	0	112.2	38	0
	41		17	38		15

	Primary Division			Junior Division		
	Self-Contained Classes for LD		Average Number of Classes	Self-Contained Classes for LD		Average Number of Classes
	Yes	No		Yes	No	
		14	3	8.3	17	2
Boards Reporting	17		12	19		17

Primary Division: Other Special Education Classes That Contain Students with Learning Disabilities

- "Home school" classes; social Skills classes; gifted classes.
- An early intervention service for students with suspected learning disabilities staffed and supported by an itinerant teacher for the learning disabled is due to commence in the fall of 2001. It will operate on a resource withdrawal model.
- Behaviour; gifted; language/LD; also could be in deaf/hard of hearing, physical disability, blind/low vision.
- Certains élèves ayant des troubles d'apprentissage se retrouvent dans des classes distinctes pour élèves ayant une lenteur intellectuelle.
- Classe ordinaire, classe-ressource, adaptation sociale, communication.
- General special education in home school if parent doesn't want student to leave community.
- Learning Centre Program.
- Possibly in behaviour classes.
- Primary behaviour classes = 3 primary special classes = 14.
- Primary language; multiple exceptionalities classes; behaviour assessment classes; primary diagnostic.
- Primary/junior special education class; low enrollment; ungraded; same class.

- Resource assistance classes.
- Yes, but LD would not be the primary identification.
- We have one self-contained classroom where students with severe LD would access the programs. We are in the process of changing this access.

Primary Division: Other Programs

- 1. Reading recovery 2. Early language literacy groups.
- 2 Primary classes for students with LD or language impairment.
- Primary diagnostic; kindergarten intervention programs; reading recovery.
- Project success; academy of reading; speech/language pathologist support.
- Remedial literacy.
- Section 19 programs.

Junior Division: Other Special Education Classes That Contain Students with Learning Disabilities

- Academic Learning Centre 4.5 classes. Students are on regular register of classroom and go to an LD expert 49% of their day for math/language. 12 students in class. Gr. 4, 5, 6.
- Behaviour; gifted; language/LD; also could be in deaf/hard of hearing, physical disability, blind/low vision.
- Classe ordinaire, classe-ressource, adaptation sociale, communication.
- Home school classes; social skills; gifted classes.
- Home school general special education (MID/LD combination).
- Junior behaviour = 7 Junior special classes = 28.
- Junior/intermediate special education class; low enrollment; ungraded.
- Learning Centre Program.
- Mixed exceptionalities; communication.
- Mixed exceptionality class A LEP (behaviour).
- Multiple exceptionalities; behaviour assessment classes.
- Possibly in behaviour classes.
- Resource assistance classes.
- Secondary modified program; some LD students have accessed social skills classes.
- Self-contained – undifferentiated.
- Yes, but LD would not be the primary identification.

Junior Division: Other Programs

- Currently, three elementary age students attend the provincial demonstration school – Sagonaska.
- Junior Links Program.
- Project Success; Academy of Reading; speech/language pathologist support.
- Section 19 programs.

Access Special Education Programs and Services

	Yes	%	No	%
Do students need to be formally identified (IPRC) to access special education <u>programs</u>?	16	35%	30	65%
Boards Reporting	46			
Do students in your board need to be formally identified (IPRC) to access special education <u>services</u>?	6	13%	40	87%
Boards Reporting	46			

Comments: *IPRC and Access to Special Education Programs and Services*

- Certains élèves seront suivis en récupération pour avoir le temps de mieux juger leurs forces et faiblesses. S'il n'y a pas au peu de progrès le cas sera probablement référé au comité IPR.
- Children may get programs and services on a short-term basis, e.g., early literacy programs provided by Resource Teachers, without being identified; however, any child who needs extensive, long-term programs and services is identified.
- Formal identification required for placement.
- Identification, however, guarantees a yearly review of the program; provides IEP that outlines services provided.
- If recommended by their school-based Special Education Team as needing special education programs and services, this is discussed with the parent as is provided

education programs and services, this is discussed with the parent as is provided.

- IPRC is necessary for special education placements. Not necessary for IEP.
- It is very difficult to assess all children suspected of having a learning disability. There are no agencies in the Timmins area that provide services to those children. If there are multiple needs, we access ISNC when the child has multiple needs. The board does not employ a psychologist but purchases some services...
- No. However, there is an increasing emphasis on this process, particularly in relation to assessment data gathering for programming purposes.
- Prior to '99 - Students were eligible to receive sp. ed. services without an IPRC. Now we have limited their access to 2 years. This period is considered to be an "assessment/programming" phase. To continue to receive sp. ed. service, further assessment(s), i.e., psychological, would be required. At that time if the student is identified as LD, services will continue.
- Resource teachers work with identified and non-identified at-risk students.
- Some students are being tracked, e.g., gifted modules offered to gifted students first, and then offered to students being tracked or benefiting from enrichment. For self-contained programs and learning assistance centres, students are identified.
- Speech and language services are available to non-identified students in their early primary years.
- Students may be involved in resource/withdrawal programs without being formally identified.
- Students who require an IEP receive additional services. They do not necessarily proceed to IPRC.
- Technically, yes, in order to access and receive ISA funding; however, our special education teachers also act as a classroom resource. Also, some of our IEPs students are not IPRC'd, but their programs are modified to meet their individual needs.
- The need for formal IPRC to access spec. ed. programs usually only applies to spec. ed. programs for kindergarten students. Spec. ed. service is provided immediately for students with physical or behaviour or developmental needs - cases usually go to IPRC eventually.

- Those placed in self-contained classes are all identified. IEP is prepared only for identified students. At risk have SERT support, but it is primarily for identified.
- Tous les élèves identifiés par CIPR ou à risque peuvent avoir accès à des services d'éducation de l'enfance en difficulté.
- We have always been fairly consistent in this regard.
- We have programs for identified and non-identified students based on level of student need along with a host of other considerations.
- While the vast majority of students receiving special services are identified, it is not essential - we have a number of students receiving such supports that are not identified through IPRC.

Elementary Special -Education Teacher Demographics –
As of Oct. 31/2000:

		Average	sd	Low	High	Boards Reporting
(i)	Number of full-time equivalent special education teachers (elementary only):	118.2	243.8	2.5	1540	44
(ii)	Number of elementary special education teachers teaching LD students in a self-contained class:	19.9	52.5	0	303.5	45
(iii)	Number of elementary special education teachers teaching LD students on a resource support/withdrawal basis:	63.6	90.7	0	458	37
(iv)	Number of system itinerant special education teachers:	7.6	12.5	0	67	44
(v)	Number of special education consultants/coordinators:	5.8	10.0	0	59	48
(vi)	Of the number identified in (v), how many are assigned solely to the area of learning disabilities?	0.4	1.1	0	6	47
(vii)	Number of special education positions, vacant as of Oct. 31/2000	0.6	1.8	0	9	40
(viii)	Number of special education positions, vacant as of Oct. 31/2000 for learning disabilities	0.4	1.9	0	12	40

	Average	sd	Low	High	Boards Reportin g
Number of special education staff who:					
Retired in the past 2 years	5.7	5.7	0	20	39
Will retire in 2000/2001	4.6	5.0	0	23	38
Will retire in Year 2001/2002	4.6	4.6	0	20	34

D. Teacher Qualifications:

Minimum Qualifications required for Special Education

Teachers Working with Students with Learning Disabilities

Special-Education Resource Teacher				Self-Contained Classroom Teacher			
Required				Required			
Qualification	Yes	%	Boards Reporting	Qualification	Yes	%	Boards Reporting
Special Education Part I	46	100	46	Special Education Part I	25	100	25
Special Education Part II	“Yes” = 1 “Preferred” = 1	-	2	Special Education Part II	“Yes” = 2	-	2
Special Education Part III	“Yes” = 2 “Preferred” = 4	-	6	Special Education Part III	“Yes” = 4 “Preferred” = 1	-	5
	“Yes” = 4	-	8	Special	“Yes” = 6	-	9

Special Education with Learning- Disabilities Option	“Preferred” = 4			Education with Learning- Disabilities Option	“Preferred” = 3		
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Other – Special-Education Resource Teacher	Other – Self-Contained Classroom Teacher
5 yrs teaching experience, 3 divisions preferred	All positions are posted as requiring specialist, but some have been hired with less due to scarcity of teachers with qualifications
A cause de la penurie de prof il y a des cens en poste qui sont en train de se qualifier. Ce n'est pas le meilleure situation mais c'est mieux que rien	Language specialist
All positions are posted as requiring specialist, but some have been hired with less due to scarcity of teachers with qualifications	Nous n'avons pas de classes distinctes. Tous nos eleves sont indegres
Early Primary Specialization	on exige seulement la 1ieme partie. Plusieurs personnes ont Partie 2 et 3
Fluency in French is required if the student's language of instruction is French (e.g., Early French Immersion Program)	Temporary Letter of Approval from OCT
Further qualifications are desired for specific programs, e.g., TTR, Blind, LD optional - but not mandatory.	
On exige seulement la 1ieme partie. Plusieurs personnes ont Partie 2 et 3	
Temporary Letter of Approval from OCT	

E. Who Receives In-service About Learning Disabilities

- All resource teachers and principals
- All special education teachers
- Administrators, resource special education teachers and classroom teachers
- Aux educatrices et educateurs
ressources
- Aux enseignants de classes distinctes et a retrait
- Aux personnes ressources
- Classroom Resource Teachers (CRTs), regular classroom teachers
- Classroom teachers, special ed. teachers, administrators, educational assistants
- Classroom teachers, students, parents, SEAC teachers
- Consultants, special education teachers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists
- Coordinator, SERTs, ESPs
- Core teachers; part-time LD teachers, ed. assistants, classroom teachers
- D'abord au personnel des centres de ressources qui recoivent les eleves ayant des troubles d'apprentissage sur une base quotidienne. Au personnel enseignant en general lors de journees pedagogiques.
- Directions, enseignant(e)s - ressource en enfance en difficulte, enseignant(e)s de classe reguliere
- EA and teachers
- Language resource teachers, special education resource teachers, classroom teachers
- Learning support teachers, educational assistants, teachers - special ed course
- Les personnes ressources en EED et les enseignants titulaires ont recu des formations l'an dernier
- Mainly special education resource teachers
- Parents, classroom teachers, special education teachers, principals, coordinators
- Personne ressources, enseignants, directions d'ecoles
- Resource
teachers
- Resource teachers and classroom teachers
- Resource withdrawal teachers, for special education teachers,
for regular class teachers

- Resource, classroom, LD teachers
- SERTs, special education classroom teachers; regular classroom teachers via SERTs and consultants as needed; optional workshops
- Several years ago self-contained classes for learning disabilities became part of Mixed Exceptionalities classes; since that point, very little in-service has been done in this area
- Special ed. resource teachers
- Special education resource teachers
- Special education resource teachers, classroom teachers
- Special education teachers and educational assistants
- Special education teachers and educational assistants
- Special education teachers; classroom teachers
- Specialized internal staff and Amythest School and Out of District Conferences
- System resource staff
- Teachers and principals
- Teachers on invitational basis
- Teachers, educational assistants
- Teachers, educational assistants, resource teachers
- Teachers, support staff, administrators
- Teaching staff and educational assistants
- This year we provided a one-day in-service for LS, SERTS and others – over 200

Frequency of In-service About Learning Disabilities

- .5 journee a 1 journee/mois; enseignants: .5 a 1 journee par annee (journee pedagogique)

et autres au besoin du MEO et finances; directions d'écoles: au besoin

- 1-2 a
year
- 1 x every school
year.
- 1 x per year
- 1 x per year
- 1 x per year formally and consultation or mini in-service as needed. Our geography is a challenge for board-wide in-service.
- 10 x
year
- 1-2 yr - After school
sessions
- 1-3 times per year
- 2 to 4 times a
year
- 2 x par annee
- 2 yr in-service plan being developed by own LD steering committee for year 2001-2, 2002-3.
Inclusion workshop - Shared Excellence workshop series
- 2-3 PA days; sp. ed. teachers - focused in-service throughout the year; on going on a 1-1
basis
- 2-3 times a year or upon
request
- 2-3 yr - A few workshops
- 3 x per year
- Approx. 10x/yr - very difficult to track as data is not stored
centrally
- Approximately once a month there are workshops offered after school for anyone who
wishes to attend.

Many classroom teachers as well as spec. ed. teachers come to those at the Ed centre.

There are frequent workshops at schools as well, as requested. LD facilitator does at least 5 per month.

- As money permits - once a year formal workshop; optional after-school workshops 2x/year
- As needed; as requested by individual teachers, assistants
- As often as possible
- As often as possible
- As presentations become available
- At least annually
- At least two times per year specifically on LD, several other times in-services on IPRC/ISA/IEP/assessment strategies and procedures
- At our monthly meeting usually once or twice a year this is a workshop topic. Also our support staff, principals/VPs
- Ceci varie d'annee en annee. Cette annee, les enseignants en classe distincte de difficulte d'apprentissage ont eu 4 jours de formation. Pour l'annee 2001-2002, nous prevoyons 8 jours de formation pour les enseignants-ressources (classe ordinaire avec retrait)
- Directions/Ens. De classe reguliere - environ 1 ou 2 jours/annee; Ens-ressource en enfance en difficulte - environ 3 ou 4 jours/annee
- Format on sur le diagnostique en lecture, ecritiere et mathematique selon les besoins des ecoles
- Frequency varies depending on needs of individual schools, number of new teachers hired.
- Minimum once per school year - specifically to LD, e.g., IEP, IPRC, Assessment and Evaluation – also offered on annual basis
- On a professional development cycle
- On a regular basis
- On rencontre 3 a 4 fois x annee le personnel d'enfance en difficulte en groupe, de facon individuelle plus frequemment.
Le personnel enseignant du regulier - 1 x l'annee
- Ongoing throughout the school year. Local LDA provides excellent opportunities as well

- Ongoing, board level, school level and outside sources
- Ongoing, intermittent
- Ongoing, two system PD days each year
- Part of all inservice sessions
- PD sessions, courses, e.g., Reading Association - yearly
- Professional development days, special CRT in-service sessions (during school day, after school), bi-monthly, with other topics and areas as well
- Regularly by itinerants - students - grouped at the school. For sessions with itinerant parents, SEAC - as requested
- Resource teachers meet monthly and LD issues are usually on the agenda. Classroom teachers have had two workshops offered this year specifically on LD
- Upon request and as outlined in yearly objectives (a few each year)

Providers of In-service on Learning Disabilities to Special Education Teachers

School Board		School Based	
Source	Number of Respondents Indicating This Source	Source	Number of Respondents Indicating This Source
Psychological Services	34	Inservice by School Based Personnel	35
Special Education Personnel	49	Mentoring	19
Speech and Language	37	Principal	24
Other - See comments below:	-	Team teaching - See comments below:	11

Additional Comments Regarding Other School Board Sources of In-service

- At our focus day we had speakers from provincial schools and other boards as well as our own
- Community professionals
- Conferences, workshops - local and provincial
- Coordinator
- Dorothy Turner (Sagonaska)
- Formation en cours d'emploi

- Guest speakers
- HSC Dr. Lovett has 8 pilot/satellite classes within TCDSB
- Inter-disciplinary team
- Itinerants
- La coordinatrice
- LDAO - Demonstration Schools, Sagonaska, Trillum Integra Foundation
- Multidisciplinary team approach
- Networking; in-school education team
- Partnership with Sagonawka consulting staff
- Provincial Demonstration School
- Provincial School Resource Dept.
- Provincial school staff
- Provincial School Teacher Diagnostician
- Psychologists from the University of Guelph
- Sagonaska Provincial School
- Special education coordinator
- System resource
- Teachers and EAs attend outside workshops of interest to them

Additional Comments Regarding Team Teaching as a Source of In-service

- Classroom teachers plus language resource teachers and special education resource teachers
- Itinerant teachers to staff
- Regional centre staff
- ~~networking~~ Special education resource team
- System resource meetings
- Team meeting process

Who Should Provide Information on Learning Disabilities

Source	Number of Respondents	Percentage Out of 40	Additional Comments
Ministry of Education	40	100%	Definition Definition and criteria to be established by ministry Relating to ministry definition, program standards, changes to regulations, special project initiatives
College of Teachers	29	73%	Set standards for content of additional qualification courses Training for new graduates
Teacher Federations	24	60%	OSSTF, ETFO It would be wonderful if the unions got involved! OECTA
Universities			
Pre-service	39	98%	
Additional Qualifications	38	95%	
Graduate – Masters	24	60%	
Graduate – Doctoral	17	43%	

Universities – Other:

- College-level in-service courses; educational assistant courses
- Community colleges, universities on accommodating post-secondary LD students
- Faculty of education; mandatory sp. education courses
- Research; support for individuals with learning disabilities
- Special education should be part of the faculty of education's teacher training program
- Teacher experts
- Teachers' college needs to have a whole section on special education that is more than what teacher training is offering now

Community Agencies:

- LDAO identified by 20 of 29 boards
- LDAO chapters identified by another 6 of 29 boards

Other Community Agencies Identified:

- CCAC (identified by 3 boards); Association for Community Living
- CEC (identified by 2 boards)
- Community colleges through educational assistant training
- Community Living Associations; MCSS Agencies - Invisible Disabilities; Children's Access Centre
- Developmental pediatricians; hospitals
- Hospital for Sick Children
- Integra Foundation
- Integrated Services for Northern Children (identified by 3 boards)
- Medical Centres, e.g., Chedoke McMaster
- OPA, OSLA
- Provincial schools
- Services sociaux - suitant parce ce qui est des habiletés sociales

Others Identified:

- Community Living
- Conseil scolaire avec l'appin du MEO
- Demonstration Schools ASCD - through web/video conferencing
- Online: SNOW/LDAO - good for remote areas; parents of LD students
- Orthophonists; psychologies
- Parents and/or support group (advocates)
- Provincial schools
- Provincial schools publishers of LD information/products; speech and language professionals; doctor and other health personnel; special ed. consultants/facilitators. Every teacher - they all need to be knowledgeable! Parents of LD students
- Provincial Schools; Trillium
- Psychologists with expertise in this area
- School board; community college programs through ECE, DSW, CYW courses. Community college to students with learning disabilities. College of Physicians and Surgeons; Ontario Speech and language Association
- School boards – however, staff needs to be in place and time for teachers to attend
- SEAC
- Services specialise au niveau regional ex: service consultative

F. Teacher Experience (for Those Who Work with Learning Disabilities):

Previous Classroom Experience					
			Range		Boards Reporting
	Average	s.d.	Low	High	
Special Education					
Resource Teacher					
Less than 1 year	8.7	15.7	0	57	16
1-5 years experience	13.5	21.2	0	75	13
More than 5 years	33.8	47.1	2	205	23
Self-Contained					
Classroom Teacher					
Less than 1 year	3.2	5.2	0	16	8
1-5 years experience	7.9	11.7	0	37	9
More than 5 years	12.0	15.4	2	53	10
Previous Special Education Experience					
Special Education					
Resource Teacher					
Less than 1 year	12.7	16.8	0	57	15
1 – 5 years experience	18.4	29.6	2	114	15
More than 5 years	25.0	26.2	3	96	19
Self-Contained					
Classroom Teacher					

Less than 1 year	9.2	13.5	0	31	6
1 – 5 years experience	14.4	18.4	0	45	8
More than 5 years	15.9	26.0	1	76	9

F. Board Policies, Guidelines or Administrative Procedures Regarding Hiring and Assignment

Activity	Yes		No		Number of Boards Reporting
		%		%	
Hiring of Special Education Teachers					
Informal	24	63%	14	37%	38
Formal	12	48%	13	52%	25
Hiring of Special Education Teachers Specific to LD					
Informal	14	37%	24	63%	38
Formal	7	28%	18	72%	25
Assignment of Special Education Teachers					
Informal	22	59%	15	41%	37
Formal	10	43%	13	57%	23
Assignment of Special Education Teachers Specific to LD					
Informal	9	28%	23	72%	32
Formal	6	22%	21	78%	27

Additional Comments re: Board Policies, Guidelines, etc.:

- Board recommendation in hiring LD teachers is to request LD qualifications. Self-contained classes in our board represent a classroom whereby identified LD students will access programming to meet their needs. It does not mean students accessing LD 100% of school day.
- If no one is trained we may have to waive the requirements.
- Guidelines - school population 0-499 = 1 special education teacher; 499-699 = 1.5 special education teachers; 699-899 = 2 special education teachers; 900+ = 3 special education teachers. Teaching requirements preferences - specialist in special education; 5 yrs. classroom experience.
- Included in board plan through recommendations from SEAC to board.

*Special Note: There is a huge concern that even with in-service, pre-service, AQ, there is no approach of understanding of the difference between mild intellectual, borderline, slow learner, LD. We have experienced the need to clarify for staff enrolled in courses. We believe this to be a significant and critical component of training.

- Information specific to what you seek is not necessarily available within the TDSB as the 7 former boards that make up TDSB had various central or department databases with varying fields. We are continuing to move toward implementation district-wide and all areas you requested are not available. As well, the report Oct. 31/00 you referred to is not available for individual use at this time.
- Relatif a l'entente collective du personnel enseignant. Les procedures administratives sont les suivantes: a) qualification de base - partie 1 - enfance en difficulte - b) entrevue - obtenir une moyenne de 70% (aptitudes) c) mise en disponibilite du personnel specialize.
- Selon les politiques d'enbranche. Au service a l'eleve nous avons une equipe de 5 conseillers pedagogique au niveau des difficultes d'apprentiastage.
- Surveys are difficult to accurately portray programs and services. Time is certainly a

factor here.