ARTICLE

Inclusive Education in the Philippines: Through the Eyes of Teachers, Administrators, and Parents of Children with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

This article is a study on the knowledge and involvement of schoolteachers, school administrators, and parents of children with special needs (CSN) in the implementation of inclusive education (IE). One set of research questions was aimed at determining the participants' concept of IE and how they are involved in its practice. The other set of questions was aimed at finding whether there is a significant difference among the answers given by the participant groups regarding their concept of and involvement in IE. The problems related to IE were approached using grounded theory and quantitative analysis. Utilizing a modified survey questionnaire, data was collected from 91 participants who have a firsthand knowledge of and experience with inclusive schools located in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines. Research hypotheses were tested after open coding had been completed and an answer was given to each qualitative research question. It has been found that the participants neither question nor resist the practice of inclusion in their respective general education settings. They admit, however, that they are not sure whether their understanding of IE conforms to widely accepted definitions. The participants are in doubt whether their claimed practices are potent enough to be responsive to the requirements of high-level inclusive education. No significant difference was noted among the participants' mean scores in the survey of their knowledge of IE and involvement in IE.

KEYWORDS

inclusive education, children with special needs, practice of inclusion, normalization, general education

Introduction

This study stems from the fact that very little is known about the practice of educational inclusion in the Philippines. The absence of a shared approach to education in the country, one that is open to all students, suggests that a strong conceptual basis for inclusive education (IE) remains to be established. This lack of grounding for a sound practice of IE makes it difficult to articulate the reasonable extent of involvement members of the school community must have in the education of children with special needs (CSN). What form IE should take and what requirements must be met (MacBeath, Galton, Steward, MacBeath & Page, 2006) are issues that remain unresolved to the satisfaction of the major stakeholders in IE.

So far, the practice of IE in Philippine basic education is largely determined by Department of Education Order No. 72, s. 2009, an outdated directive which does not specify a stable, clear, and definite process of including CSN in the general education setting. A move to effect high-quality inclusion in Philippine schools is said to be underway, but at present, the Special Education Act (Philippine Senate Bill 3002), which is supposed to determine the practice of inclusion in general education schools, is still under review at the Philippine senate. The continued delay of this bill's passage into law and which standards should be met in its implementation are issues that continue to defy definitive resolution.

Overseas, Freeman and Alkin have observed that debates on IE and its implications for the lives of CSN have been raging (as cited in Fitch, 2003). Many governments have introduced IE into their respective systems as an attempt to find satisfactory and durable solutions to the many problems besetting the practice of inclusion in different contexts. A multitude of actions have been planned, tested, challenged, and overhauled. There are also educationists who are convinced that standards-based schooling is not just for children without special needs (Jesness, 2002). That is to say, having learning problems does not necessarily lead to the inability to meet requirements of high-quality education (Jesness, 2002). As for the difficulty that one may experience in the early stages of learning, Jesness (2002) seems to view such phenomena as a simple fact of learning, something that should not make schoolteachers push their students to attain what may appear to be a remotely achievable goal at the beginning. The road to success in teaching and learning can be tricky, however, and the attempt to get students to where they should be inevitably carries certain encumbrances (MacBeath et al., 2006), especially on the part of inclusive school personnel and parents of CSN. It is not surprising, therefore, if a number of them have questioned the wisdom behind the policy that suggests they are largely responsible for schoolchildren's performance in standards-based tests or in any ordinary general education setting.

In June 1994, representatives from 92 countries and 25 international organizations met at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain,

to promote IE as a global norm. The conference forged and adopted a framework of action that calls for appropriate education for CSN in the general education setting. Arguing that inclusion and participation are human rights, the UNESCO Salamanca Statement asserts that the general education setting should be regarded as a venue of human development open to all schoolchildren, regardless of their physical, emotional, and intellectual states. Inclusive schools are expected to view various categories of differences as a matter of having unique traits that distinguish individuals from each other. This entails teaching and learning that is tailored according to the learner's conditions.

At this writing, over 140 governments have formally expressed their support for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) for the implementation of inclusion policies. IE has become the goal of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and other similar organizations (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). The UNESCO continues to push for the institutionalization of inclusionary practices in more countries with the publication of, *The Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion*. Inclusion International also joined the movement toward inclusion by publishing *Better Education for All: A Global Report*.

Since the promotion of IE in various countries, scholars who have studied its implementation have found that not many school personnel consider this a purely positive development. While the practice of IE is predominantly cognizant of the learners' individual differences, inclusive school personnel, together with the parents of CSN and other professionals, are expected to prepare individualized education programs (IEPs) that suit the unique needs of CSN in a general education school. The whole process of IEP preparation poses a gargantuan challenge to the major stakeholders. Even if the school administration does not go through the whole process of creating standardized and procedural IE and IEPs, the possible failure of students in the context of general education is often blamed on the teacher. And this usually leads to tension among various stakeholders including teachers, administrators, and parents both of CSN and children without special needs. Whether the teacher is accountable for the failure of CSN in the general education setting remains unresolved. Other related disagreements over such concerns continue to generate studies that offer inconsistent, if not contradictory, explanations, theories, and proposed remedies. Consequently, questions such as, "Which proposed solutions to adopt?", "In what context?", and "Why?", become stubborn issues that saddle the practice of educational inclusion.

Despite issues brought about by the practice of IE, new educational approaches in accordance with the principle of education for all were implemented. Such approaches started to evolve in the wake of the institutionalization of inclusion policies. Measures were taken, tested, and revised to address the identified inadequacies of IE approaches. Apparently, IE in many countries that have long

opened the doors of general education to CSN has evolved and has become more responsive to the demands or requirements of high-quality IE.

In this study, high-quality IE is defined as the procedural practice of effecting maximum learning among CSN within the general education setting. The notion of high-quality IE may be illustrated by examining the way IE is practiced in the United States. Inclusive American schools have a relatively uniform way of addressing the needs of students with learning problems (Kritzer, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The approach is commonly referred to as the "Special Education Process". It begins with the classroom teacher's attempt to help the student address his or her learning difficulties. If the teacher's solutions fail, the matter is brought to a team that will likewise try to address the student's learning difficulties. The team—referred to as the "Student Study Team", "Child Study Team", or "Student Success Team"—consists of the following: school principal or a representative; teacher of student with learning problem; parent of the same student; special education expert; school psychologist; nurse; and other professionals, if necessary. The team studies evidence of the student's problems (i.e., sample of student work) before offering solutions. If the proposed solutions later prove to be ineffective, the CSN is recommended for assessment to determine if he or she is eligible for special education services. If the student is eligible, a one-year Individualized Educational Program (IEP) is prepared and this is modified whenever necessary. Parents then are notified of the learning progress of their child, who will then be re-assessed every three years to determine if he or she is still in need of continued special education services.

In the Philippines, what every schoolchild must learn and why it must be learned, regardless of his or her abilities or lack thereof, are issues that have yet to undergo intense debate. Rich and sustained argumentative discussions surrounding IE and special education in the Philippines must be encouraged to discern what is best for all Filipino schoolchildren. Whether the Philippines should adopt the inclusion policy and specific approaches to IE practiced in other countries and which adjustments to make according to the demands of the country's own cultural, economic, and social realities—these are serious matters that need immediate attention, for high-quality education is an entitlement all school-aged Filipino children must enjoy, regardless of what they have or lack.

Some Problems of IE Here and Overseas

The IE movement encourages inclusive schools to establish a continuum of support and services to match the needs of children who require special attention (Salamanca Statement, 1994). Since the institutionalization of IE in different countries, nearly all public schools have been morally or legally stripped of their option to turn away exceptional children whose parents or guardians seek for them to be schooled in a general education setting. This development was further facilitated by many organizations' aggressive call for a satisfactory implementation

of IE. However, it would later be found in various parts of the world, however, the pursuit of high-quality IE poses many challenges. Many school systems are unable to quickly evolve according to the ideals of IE.

In July 2001, South Africa institutionalized IE with the publication of the policy document called, *Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an IE and Training System*. Naicker (2006) acknowledges that the first four years of its implementation proved that it is far from perfect in form and substance. A favorable change in the educational system largely depends on the construction of a strong theoretical framework. To build one, stakeholders should introduce reforms in the area of epistemology, special education theory and practices, curriculum, ideology, and politics (Naicker, 2006). This means that inclusion policy should require that teachers be informed appropriately and equipped with skills that will enable them to pave the way for high-level IE.

In the Philippines, both in the cities and remote or rural areas, many public schools remain ill-equipped. This could be one of the reasons why many general education teachers in the Philippines doubt their capacity to teach in an inclusive school. In a research by Muega and Echavia (2011), 87 in-service teachers said they are willing to handle and work with professionals for the inclusion of CSN in general education classrooms, but their overall response indicates they are not prepared to take on the challenge of handling students with disorders or disabilities. This problem is further aggravated by the difficulty of meeting other vital requirements of sound IE. At this point, teachers in the Philippines, whether trained or otherwise, will have to accept that they will be spread too thinly in an inclusionary setting because the presence of students with special needs in an oversized group of students, if taken seriously, requires the preparation of more than one lesson plan. While inclusion policy has been already adopted in the Philippines, many schoolteachers have yet to fully appreciate the value of IE (Muega & Echavia, 2011).

In Guyana, supporters of inclusion are confronting the same challenges that other developing nations are facing to establish a just and durable IE system. It has been observed that the inappropriate attitude of many toward persons with disabilities remains a major obstacle to IE in Guyana (Adjodhia-Andrews, 2007). Agents of change or educational leaders, however, could work together in order to reconfigure Guyanese society's negative views and attitudes toward people with disabilities and their educational potentials (Adjodhia-Andrews, 2007).

Having sufficient knowledge of IE enables teachers and school administrators to become more flexible and productive (Naicker, 2006). One of the most neglected components of IE, however, is the laying of its conceptual foundations to ensure that general education teachers, administrators, and parents fully understand and appreciate the ground upon which IE is built. Many researchers—including S. Vaughn, J.S. Schumm, J.S. Jallad, B. Slusher, and L. Samuell (1996) and M.M. Ali, R. Mustapha, and M.Z. Jelas (2006)—have established that when inclusive teaching

is not standing on solid knowledge about IE, many teachers are wont to think that inclusion policies are oppressive since they have to operate in a landscape unfamiliar to them (as cited in Khan, 2011). Needless to say, having the right amount of relevant knowledge and skills to get CSN where they ought to be is a necessary condition for the practitioners of IE to succeed in the tricky terrain of inclusion (Adjodhia-Andrews, 2007).

Since 1996, training workshops and other initiatives for IE have been conducted in the Philippines. The required services for children with special needs in general education, however, remain unavailable in nearly all public schools. Dizon (2011) pointed out that tooling up for comprehensive IE requires meticulous planning. Workshop-seminars conducted over a weekend, a week, or even a month are insufficient and will not enable inclusive schoolteachers, school administrators, or parents of CSN to meet the standards of high-level IE. To fully satisfy the needs of diverse learners, especially those with developmental disorders or learning disabilities, a government needs to require that high standards of inclusion be met in schools. Inadequate preparation for IE may actually stand in the way of high-quality inclusion.

Significance of the Study

At present, the entire Philippine education system is lacking in the knowledge and resources required for high-quality inclusion. This research presents an evidence-based picture of how IE is practiced in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines, to give stakeholders in IE an idea of how inclusion is conceptualized and practiced in the Philippines. Since this study identifies important challenges to IE as practiced in Quezon City, having knowledge of such problems can help IE stakeholders, especially in similar developing countries, to decide where to begin and which specific practices to promote and make available if they wish to facilitate the development of a just and durable IE. This study gives the parents of CSN a broader and deeper picture of where a developing country such as the Philippines might be in terms of IE practice. Such vital information is crucial in aiding parents in their attempt to maximize the learning opportunities of their CSN despite the limited external support system for IE. General education teachers will likewise benefit from this study in that the research suggests inclusionary procedures that may be implemented in the Philippines, even if a significant majority of these schools are burdened with very limited resources. Findings from this study can also be used to inform those tasked to revise Philippine Senate Bill 3002 or to institutionalize inclusionary procedures in schools throughout the country.

Research Problems

This study is concerned with the knowledge and practice of IE among schoolteachers, administrators, and parents whose CSN are attending inclusive schools in Quezon City. The following problems were answered: (1) What is the participants' concept

of IE?; (2) Is there a significant difference among the responses of the parents of CSN, inclusive classroom schoolteachers, and inclusive school administrators in terms of their knowledge of inclusion?; (3) How are the participants involved in IE?; (4) Is there a significant difference among the responses of the parents of CSN, inclusive classroom schoolteachers, and inclusive school administrators in terms of their involvement in IE?; and (5) How is IE viewed and practiced?

Research problems 1, 3, and 5 were addressed using a modified survey questionnaire, where the participants were instructed to explain, elaborate, concretize, and/or justify their choice of answers. The themes that emerged from this part of the study are the following: (a) IE equals extra effort to succeed; (b) diversity and education that is responsive to students' individual needs; (c) lack of basic knowledge; (d) trying to adapt according to the demands of IE; (e) collaborate and communicate; (f) doubts about one's work; and (g) practice IE regardless of what and how much we know. To address problems 2 and 4, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. No significant difference was found among the mean scores in the survey of the three groups of participants. This suggests that what has been found in response to problems 1 and 3 are most likely true.

Methods

Research Design

A qualitative–quantitative method of inquiry was employed to answer the problems in this study. Using a customized survey questionnaire, data were collected from respondents or participants who have firsthand knowledge of and experience in inclusive schools in Quezon City. Participants include: inclusive schoolteachers, inclusive school administrators, and parents whose CSN are attending inclusive schools. Using ANOVA, each of the research hypotheses was tested only after open coding had been completed and an answer was given to the relevant research question that had been addressed using the grounded theory approach.

Sampling and Respondents

There were 91 participants in this study who were selected by convenience sampling. They have been divided into the following groups: parents (20 participants) whose CSN are attending inclusive schools; inclusive schoolteachers (57 participants); and inclusive school administrators (14 participants). Although 15 participants have no special education background, 8 have some background from their special education master's or doctoral studies, 29 have taken special education courses, and 39 have knowledge from discussions and readings in special education. Among the survey participants, 33 were bachelor's degree holders and 58 were either graduate students or graduate degree holders. Participants are inclusive schoolteachers, administrators, and parents who send their CSN to inclusive schools in Quezon City. Names of participants and schools are not mentioned in this article for ethical and privacy reasons. Instead, each participant was given a number code (same as

their ID number) and are referred to as "P" plus their number code.

A total of 35 survey forms were collected from 10 private schools in Quezon City. Contact persons in these institutions were requested to facilitate the distribution and collection of the customized survey instruments to the inclusive classroom teachers, administrators, and parents of CSN. There were 9 survey forms answered by participants who were identified through referrals. The rest of the 47 survey forms were answered by in-service inclusive schoolteachers, inclusive school administrators, and parents of CSN who were then attending different graduate classes in a teacher education institution in Quezon City. There were 45 survey questionnaires discarded as they were from respondents who did not finish answering the forms, were not inclusive schoolteachers or school administrators, or were not parents of CSN. Among the participants, 20 were parents whose CSN are attending inclusive schools, 57 were inclusive schoolteachers, and 14 were inclusive school administrators. There were 33 participants with bachelor's degrees and 58 were either graduate students or graduate degree holders. There were 15 male and 76 female participants.

The Research Instrument

The research instrument allowed for the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions for this study. The instrument used was one customized survey questionnaire answered by all the participants. The survey items are subdivided into statements regarding the participants' knowledge of and their involvement in IE. Each survey item in the questionnaire is followed by an instruction and/or open-ended questions that are to be addressed by the respondents in order to describe, clarify, justify, and/or explain their answers to the survey items. This feature of the instrument made it possible to gather data that could be cited as additional evidential support for the general findings and observations in this study. The open-ended questions in the survey instruments were prepared and developed with the advice of a full professor of special education and assistance from a jury of four special education experts (PhD holders) who commented on the first draft of the instrument. The final instrument was developed after a pilot interview was conducted with two parents of schoolchildren with special needs, two inclusive schoolteachers of CSN, and two inclusive school administrators.

To secure the informed consent of the respondents or participants in this study, the customized survey questionnaire opens with a letter describing the study. The respondents were instructed that they were free not to participate in the study and should they answer the survey instrument, they were assured that their and their schools' identities would be treated with utmost confidentiality. The participants answered the survey questionnaire from January to March 2014. The development of the instrument started in March 2013 and it was finalized and reproduced in January 2014. It had been subjected to reliability analysis, which

yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .865. The questions in Table 1 are a summary of the various sections of the original interview instrument, which has been converted into a customized survey questionnaire.

The customized survey questionnaire was developed from a set of open-ended interview questions that have been subjected to a series of revisions according to the comments of a special education professor and a jury of experts. In the final instrument, respondents were asked to rate their agreement or lack of agreement on the items regarding their knowledge of and involvement in IE. The respondents were instructed that they might explain or substantiate their answers to the survey item. This qualitative feature of the survey instrument was added in order to ensure clarity in the answers of respondents, and to give them the opportunity to describe, clarify, qualify, justify, and/or explain their answers to the survey items. This qualitative feature of the instrument was quite helpful in the formulation of a more accurate interpretation of the data, which were processed using the grounded theory approach. Table 2 below is a set of sample survey items and additional instructions/questions under each item:

TABLE 2 — KNOWLEDGE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Encircle only one answer on the right side of this questionnaire.	1	2	3	4	5
I can name some defining elements of inclusive education.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
Name some if you answered in the positive.					
My idea of inclusive education is my personal understanding of it rather than based on scholarly books or articles.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
Explain your answer.					
I can clarify the defining elements of inclusive education.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
Clearly define at least two elements.					

Grounded Theory Approach

The grounded theory approach was used to analyze and process the participants' follow-up answers (e.g., descriptions, explanations, justifications, etc.) to their answer choices in the customized survey questionnaire. Grounded theory research design was employed in this study to allow for a deeper understanding of the participants' concepts, beliefs, and views about IE and its implementation in their respective contexts. Grounded theory is a research method that is often described as the opposite of the traditional approach, where hypotheses are tested. Grounded theory research does not take off from any possible theory about or explanation to

a particular phenomenon. It begins without citing any event as a possible result or effect of another variable. In grounded theory research design, one does not offer any suspicions or hunches that have to be verified. In the words of Strauss (1987, p. 30): "believe everything and believe nothing." Thus, this study started off from the ground with an analysis of the participants' answers in order to build a theoretical picture of their concepts, beliefs, and views about IE and their place in or their practice of it. Needless to say, the theoretical picture that was constructed for this study was "grounded in the data from participants who have experienced the process" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008, p. 429).

Relevant data were collected using a customized survey questionnaire, in which the respondents were instructed to describe, qualify, justify, clarify, and/ or explain their answers in the survey part of the instrument. Following the coding methodology of Strauss and Corbin (1998), examples of participants' words or statements from their descriptions or explanations of their responses were extracted from the survey. The stages of the development of theory about the delivery of IE in the venue of this study are the following: (1) data gathering using the customized survey questionnaire; (2) organization of data or grouping of examples of the participants' expressions or beliefs (descriptions or explanations of responses in the survey) according to their crisscrossing resemblances; (3) citation of the crisscrossing resemblances of the examples of the participants' expressions or beliefs under the headings "knowledge of IE" and "involvement in IE"; (4) open coding or fragmentation of the data to summarize what has been observed among the participants' expressions under the same headings in 3; (5) axial coding or categorization of the data to articulate the observed link between the open codes; and (6) selective coding or integration of the data using axial codes (done in preparation for the construction of a theory from the "ground" or what has been observed). This procedure is best suited for answering the qualitative questions in this study as these problems are mainly concerned with participants' concepts, beliefs, and views regarding IE and their involvement in it. All the participants had first-hand knowledge of and experience in IE in Quezon City.

Statistical Treatment: One-way ANOVA

This study goes beyond the limits of grounded theory approach. Quantitative analysis was also used and it yielded results that suggest that the observations about the participants' knowledge of and involvement in IE similarly apply to all their groups. To confirm this, the quantitative data from the survey was examined. This data was encoded before being subjected to one-way analysis of variance or ANOVA. The stages of quantitative analysis that was carried out in the study are the following: presenting the research hypotheses (see hypotheses); setting criterion for rejecting the hypotheses at $a=0.05$; encoding of data; computing the observed values; and interpreting the results. It should be noted, however, that since the sample was not random, the results of the statistical tests must be interpreted as simply indicative.

Scope of the Study

This study has three groups of participants: inclusive schoolteachers, inclusive school administrators, and parents whose CSN are attending inclusive schools in Quezon City. Data was gathered from participants who work in or send their CSN to private schools. The research is both qualitative and quantitative in substance and form to ensure stronger support for whatever may be found or observed in the study. The following were considered in limiting this study to respondents and participants from private schools or whose CSN are attending private schools: inclusion of CSN (diagnosed) in the general education setting; availability of IE resources; and potential to give relevant and informative answers to questions that were written in English. The participants in this study do not include teachers and administrators from and parents of CSN attending public schools in Quezon City.

Results and Analysis

Participants' Knowledge of IE

"Knowledge of IE" in this study is associated with the following: ability to name some defining elements of IE; research- or literature-based understanding of IE; ability to define elements that are central to IE; ability to identify factors that make the general education setting inclusive; and level of familiarity with the concept of IE. The participants stated their knowledge of IE with the awareness that it requires extra effort to succeed and that IE goes beyond the scope of general education that includes only students without special needs. The participants believe that IE places a premium on diversity and on education that is responsive to students' individual needs. Whether the schoolteacher participants have the required training to facilitate the preparation of differentiated instruction for CSN is, however, another matter. Though supportive of IE, the participants spoke of differentiated learning with the admission that they are lacking in basic knowledge about their claimed inclusive practices. They believe that they practice IE, but they are not quite certain whether the conceptual basis of their practice is sufficient to meet the standards of high-level inclusion. These observations are further substantiated with verbatim citations of some participants' answers in the customized survey questionnaire. It was common among the participants to describe IE as an activity requiring additional effort to attain its practitioners' goals.

IE Equals Extra Effort to Succeed

("Additional teacher training, collaboration, and strong administrative support are pre-requisites of successful IE.")

The participants would point out that special training and materials are necessary to satisfactorily meet the demands of an efficiently responsive IE. The following are direct quotes from selected survey participants (P):

- P42 (inclusive schoolteacher): "Regular school setting can be inclusive if teachers are well-trained and well-equipped when it comes to inclusive education."
- P64 (schoolteacher): "The use of different accommodations and modifications of some lessons/tests for CSN can make the regular school setting inclusive."
- P10 (parent of CSN): "It is essential that CSEN should learn alongside their same age peers (although with a different content). They must be helped to access the Gen Ed curriculum as much as possible using differentiated instruction and supports."
- P6 (administrator of inclusive school): "Classes which provide facilities, lessons and personnel who oversee that CSN are educated together with their regular peers."

Diversity and Education that is Responsive to Students' Individual Needs

("Diversity and individuality are strongly tied to IE.")

The participants also expressed their idea of IE with the belief that it values diversity and is sensitive to the individual needs of students. This is very much in contrast with the principle of mass education where children are schooled as though they are of the same mold, and are therefore taught in the same fashion. The following passages from participants' answers in the customized survey questionnaire illustrate the observation that, for them, diversity and individuality are necessary conditions of IE:

- P71 (inclusive schoolteacher): "The child with special needs is included in the regular classroom… He/she is given differentiated instruction according to his IEP."
- P10 (parent of CSN): "Staff and students welcome and embrace diversity."
- P7 (administrator of inclusive school): "…differentiate instruction to accommodate the needs of students."

"Differentiated learning" was repeatedly mentioned by the participants as a necessary ingredient of IE. Moreover, a well-calibrated IE requires thorough knowledge of children's development (Flem, Moen & Gudmundsdottir, 2004). It was later found that one of the barriers to highly inclusive education in the participants' respective contexts is their tendency to be skeptical about their ability to facilitate differentiated learning. P. Paliokosta and S. Blandford (2010) argue that the "difficulty or inability of teachers to differentiate within a classroom setting" (p. 11) stands in the way of successful inclusion. In other words, although the participants, especially the teachers, know that differentiated learning is a vital component of successful IE, they are also aware that they are lacking in the ability to secure the same. As Paliokosta & Blandford (2010) point out, "differentiation was presented in practitioners' utterances as an important factor for inclusive

practice, without necessarily presupposing its effective implementation" (p. 11). They were, however, quick to add that, "it would be unfair to demonise teachers without investigating facts that underpin their attitudes and practices" (p. 12) as it is, of course, possible that there are other barriers to inclusive education beyond the control of ordinary teachers.

It may be said that the educational situation in the Philippines is lamentable, especially in comparison to those in developed nations, given that classes in the country, even in private schools, are mostly oversized (i.e., 40 or more students). Time is likewise too short to accommodate everyone's needs, since most Filipino schoolteachers do not have access to support from teaching assistants, much less from special educators and other specialists who, in developed nations, are readily available when the need arises.

Lack of Basic Knowledge

("We do not have sufficient knowledge of IE.")

Despite their claimed familiarity with IE, the participants expressed doubts regarding their conceptions and practice of IE. This is not a startling observation as there is no law or educational policy in the country requiring pre- or in-service education majors to take even one subject on IE. C. Forlin, C. Earle, T. Loreman, and U. Sharma (2011) emphasize that "preparing pre-service teachers in inclusive schools requires universities and colleges to ensure that their curriculum covers sufficient detail to enable newly graduating teachers to cater for the increasing diversity of student needs" (p. 58).

While the participants could tell what is and what is not IE, evidence shows that they were unsure as to the acceptability of their definitions. This was examined as it is necessary for participants to be well-informed regarding the distinctive features of IE as these are standards by which the level of inclusiveness in a certain school could be ascertained. The response of Participant 32 (inclusive schoolteacher) expresses the general view of nearly all participants regarding their knowledge of the defining traits of IE: "I have read some books about inclusive education but I do not have any in depth research on it. Thus, my ideas about it are basically based on my personal understanding and interpretation."

It may be argued that no one, not even the teacher, can avoid interpretation. Everyone uses a specific lens or perspective (i.e., philosophical, ideological, cultural, economic) when trying to make sense of what he or she reads or conceptualizes. But there is often a wide chasm between the interpretations of a student and someone who has studied a body of knowledge well enough to teach it. Teachers or experts in special education do specialized research and work in this discipline in order to teach it and to satisfactorily answer questions from non-experts and students who have varying depths and breadths of knowledge for IE. Drawing from S. Symeonidou and H. Phtiaka (2009), Forlin et al. (2011) emphasize that: "In many instances, pre-service teachers' conceptualizations of

inclusion are problematic and teacher preparation courses fail to take into account their sentiments, attitudes, and concerns" (p.58).

When those who are closely working with CSN in an IE setting begin to reveal their uncertainties regarding basic knowledge, they may likewise be expected to show ambivalence about the validity of their practices. Below are some admissions that participants are unsure about the acceptability of their idea of IE.

- P12 (parent of CSN): "My limited understanding is not enough to enable me to elaborate."
- P20 (parent of CSN): "I have very little experience and practically no knowledge from books in this area."
- P6 (administrator of inclusive school): "I practice it. And is still striving to be better at what we do."

In sum, the participants could distinguish between inclusive and non-inclusive school settings, but they are unsure of whether they have captured the essence of IE well enough.

Parents of CSN, Inclusive Classroom Schoolteachers, and Administrators: Their Knowledge of Inclusion

There is no significant difference between the responses of the parents of CSN, inclusive classroom schoolteachers, and inclusive school administrators in terms of their knowledge of inclusion. The highest possible mean score in this part of the survey is 25 and the participants' actual mean scores are 15 to 16. These 91 participants were divided into three groups: inclusive classroom schoolteachers; administrators of inclusive schools; and parents of children with special needs. They all answered the survey on their knowledge of IE. Variances among the mean scores of the participants in this part of the survey were assessed with one-way ANOVA. The ANOVA was insignificant, $F(2,88)=1.081$, $p<.05$, $\eta2=.02$. Evidence indicates that the participants could spot the difference between inclusive and non-inclusive educational arrangements, but they are uncertain as regards the acceptability of their knowledge or concept of IE. The participants' mean scores of 15 to 16 also lend support to the observation that their concept of IE is relatively narrow in scope. This suggests that their currently held views about IE are not comprehensive or thorough, or both—not enough to describe what may count as a sound practice of IE.

How are the Participants Involved in IE?

The participants' "involvement in IE" is associated with the following: active participation in IE; doing one's best to address the challenges of IE; consistency of one's practices with IE; collaborative effort; and having recent knowledge of CSN.

The participants claim to have exerted extra effort to make adjustments according to their understanding of the additional requirements of IE. They

collaborate and communicate with the other members of the school community. It has been noted again, however, that they have misgivings with the way they perform their supposed roles as IE players. They also voiced uncertainties on the issue of whether they have maximized their efforts toward IE. These observations are substantiated with the verbatim citations below of selected participants' answers in the customized survey questionnaire.

Trying to Adapt According to the Demands of IE

("Know the case of CSN and respond to their needs.")

The participants said that their approaches are determined by the learning needs of their students. This is an indicator that aside from having knowledge of IE, the participants seem to have accepted the fact that IE, as a global movement, is founded on widely acceptable principles. The selected passages below, taken from the customized survey, suggests that the participants respond to the educational needs of CSN despite their claimed uncertainties regarding the acceptability of their knowledge about IE.

- P78 (inclusive schoolteacher): "I know which students are in our SPED-IE program at the stat of the school year and I am able to come up with modifications in instruction and assessments in consultation with our SPED teachers and the shadow teachers. CSEN are included in performance-based assessments and musical performances in school, whether in signing, playing of instruments or dance."
- P10 (parent of CSN): "I provide SPED intervention to him. Also, I advocate and explain to his teachers how best to make him benefit from his learning environment."
- P (administrator of inclusive school): "As an administrator, I am in a position to create changes in the structure, organization. I feel that these are certain accommodations we have done to allow this to some extent depending on what the school is already allowed to extend its help to a certain extent."

Collaborate and Communicate

("Inclusive teaching is not a single person's job; teachers, parents, and administrators must communicate and work together.")

Participants see the need for communicating and collaborating with the other members of the school community, including those specialists whose findings are vital to the preparation of a sound individualized education program. Not a single participant even hinted that he or she could work alone effectively. Nonetheless, their answers to the customized survey questionnaire show that the different schools within Quezon City, the venue of the study, do not have a unified approach to ensure large-scale success in the practice of IE.

- P38 (inclusive schoolteacher): "I inform parents, subject teachers, and administrators of the development of the child and the behavior modification strategies used."
- P74 (inclusive schoolteacher): "I confer with shadow teachers and parents regarding ways to improve attention span, increase learning."
- P18 (parent of CSN): "Yes, they are aware of our visits with doctors and therapists and have secured copies of our reports and evaluation."
- P12 (parent of CSN): "I have regular meetings with the teachers discussing his current class standing (academically and socially). They are also furnished with his assessment, emphasizing the recommendations as to how to handle him in the classroom."
- P1 (administrator of inclusive school): "I coordinate with the guidance office regarding the concerns of my students and in chosen activities I talk to parents."
- P2 (administrator of inclusive school): "We have coordination efforts and linkages with other offices that help support this (like psychologists, family counseling center, psychometricians) to help increase our support to the needs of the students."

The participants claim they take time to inform each other on how to make their strategies effective. They are all concerned with the outcomes of their role in the training and education of CSN in the general education setting. Participants' awareness of the vital importance of collaboration and communication in IE, however, are again clouded with doubts as to whether best practices are being implemented in school. This may be explained by the absence of a law that would guarantee the uniform and systematic application of communication and collaboration procedures to address the needs of CSN in a general education setting. Unfortunately, there is no consensus among Filipino education theorists on how communication, collaboration, and procedures for IE must be carried out in school. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) warned that, "Ineffective communication between adults can be a serious barrier to the development of inclusive cultures and practices and seemed to be a problematic area in all settings as it has serious implications on the notion of responsibility" (p. 14). Paliokosta and Blandford also added: "Resources' limitations, thus, are not only related to financial issues, but also to the way adults liaise with each other in the school" (pp. 13-14).

Doubts About One's Work

("Have I done my best?")

Despite the participants' belief that IE requires teamwork in order to yield best results, it has been observed that they are in doubt as to whether they have done their best for IE. This indicates that participants are likewise not in possession

of high-level inclusionary standards that will enable them to assess their own performance in the course of attempting to facilitate the learning advancement of CSN. Here are some claims from participants:

- P28 (inclusive schoolteacher): "I am not sure if I am still pursuing inclusive education, since I am or our school already practice inclusive education, and it is already accepted"
- P13 (parent of CSN): "I am uncertain because I can only do so much due to other concerns."
- P4 (administrator of inclusive school): "Due to limited knowledge on inclusive education, I could not share or articulate any idea relevant to my role vis-à-vis my concept of inclusive education."

In sum, while the participants are not rejecting IE, they are not certain whether their involvement in it has given rise to best inclusionary practices. Perhaps it is not unreasonable to further conclude that participants could not tell for sure whether they are succeeding or failing in their attempt to embrace IE within their respective schools.

Parents of CSN, Inclusive Classroom Schoolteachers, and Administrators: Their Involvement in IE

There is no significant difference between the responses of the parents of CSN, inclusive classroom schoolteachers, and inclusive school administrators in terms of their involvement in IE. The highest possible mean score in this part of the survey is 25 and the participants' actual mean scores are 17 to 18. The 91 participants were divided into three groups: inclusive classroom schoolteachers; administrators of inclusive schools; and parents of children with special needs. They answered the part of the survey that inquires about their involvement in IE. Variances among the mean scores of participants in this part of the survey were assessed with one-way ANOVA. The ANOVA was insignificant, $F(2,88)=.704$, $p<.05$, $\eta2=.02$. Evidence suggests that the participants are actively engaged in IE, but they have doubts on whether their involvement has yielded the best results. Evidence further shows that they cannot decide with certainty whether their inclusionary practices are failing or succeeding. The participants' mean scores of 17 to 18 indicate that their involvement in IE is barely satisfactory. This could mean several things, such as: they do not have the criteria to answer the issue; they do not consistently practice IE; and they do not know what to do exactly.

How is IE Viewed and Practiced?

It may be said that IE is being practiced within the venue of the study. The participants themselves, however, are aware that they work only within the limited scope and very general knowledge of what they think IE means.

Accept and Practice IE Regardless of What We Know

("The matter is choosing the lesser evil between two
evils rather than between good and evil.")

Along with the participants' knowledge of what they lack in inclusion, it has been found that a number of them, including teacher participants, have expressed concern over the lack of IE training among many teachers in the schools that accommodate CSN. Administrators, too, have admitted that there is a need, at this point, to outsource the services CSN must avail for themselves in order for the teacher to develop a sound personalized lesson plan.

It is quite noticeable, however, that the participants are not strangers to the idea of improvisation. That is to say, evidence shows that what they lack in resources, they make up for in the courage to proceed despite their limitations. What is worth noting here is that the participants are well aware of what they do not have, which is a good starting point for problem-solving.

Emergent Framework

The major categories of participants' responses in the customized survey questionnaire suggest that inclusive schoolteachers, school administrators, and parents whose CSN attend inclusive schools neither question nor resist the practice of inclusion in their respective general education situations. At the same time, it is common among participants to admit that they are not sure whether their conceptions of IE conform to widely accepted definitions. This admission has been cited in this study to explain the participants' doubts regarding the potency of their inclusionary practices. These observations are consistent with what has been noted in the study of Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) who said:

> The different factors that have been identified as barriers to change are discussed empirically and lead to a view of levels: barriers occur at the level of the system, for example lack of flexibility of secondary schools and limitations in teacher training (Mittler, 1995; Davies and Garner, 1997; Slee, 1999; Garner, 2000; Booth, Nes & Stromstad, 2003) which counts for the general population of schools, the sub-system, e.g. resources, funding, time management, which counts for many schools, and the micro-system, e.g. lack of communication, which counts for specific schools. The barriers encountered in the contexts investigated do not all operate at the same level, even if they operate at the same time with one complicating the other. (p. 6)

E.I. Dizon (2011; 2012; 2013) would repeatedly emphasize that inclusive education is not a simple matter of placing CSN inside the general education classroom. Schools should find ways to give justice to CSN, who are fit to grow and develop in a general education setting (Dizon, 2011; 2013). While participants in this study shared these views, they also accept that they face the gargantuan

challenge of removing great barriers to inclusion, such as the lack of resources and proper training for stakeholders. Not a single participant considered the obstacles to high-level inclusion as insurmountable despite the many factors that continue to saddle the participants' attempts to fight unwarranted segregation or separate special education. Evidence shows, however, that the struggle against the exclusion of CSN from general education remains an uphill battle. It may not mean an impending defeat, but it is not an easy task to win the struggle against exclusion without ensuring that IE practice stands on solid ground—by having adequate knowledge of IE, by practicing a sound and just IE ideology, by playing an active role in the education of CSN, and by having the resources required for inclusion.

Evidence shows that the participants accept IE as a necessary pursuit. It must be offered to every deserving child regardless of physical or mental condition. Participants agree that IE is against the sort of discrimination that violates the right to education of any student who could show proof that he or she belongs to the general education setting.

An inevitable consequence of high-level IE is the promotion of diversity, which is supposed to place the CSN in a general education setting, enabling the student to find a way to live a normal life. Diversity was actually a recurring theme all throughout the answers of survey participants. Not one of them ever questioned or cast doubt on the idea of diversity. But it was not treated as an end-goal of IE either. Instead, participants suggested that diversity is a defining element of IE. This means that for the participants, diversity is a necessary ingredient of IE. Without room for diversity, general education cannot be considered inclusive.

Overall, while the participants showed varying degrees of thoughts, views, or knowledge about IE, the responses from participants make it evident that the movement is virtually unopposed within the venue of the study. While it may be pointed out that the qualitative responses of the participants to the modified research instrument are not solidly bound by a single thematic thread, the results of the statistical analysis support the observation that the three groups of participants are united by similar views on their knowledge and involvement in IE.

Conclusion

Advocates of inclusion often emphasize that IE is not the simple physical accommodation of a student with special needs in a general education school alone (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). Beyond the mere presence of CSN in the general education classroom, appropriate adjustments must be made so that CSN can genuinely participate in the learning activities that happen in school (MacBeath et al., 2006).

IE in the venue of this study has found considerable support from schoolteachers, administrators, and parents whose CSN are attending inclusive schools. Even if there was a discernible tone of apprehension and reservation among the participants over how their or their children's schools are adopting the principle of

inclusion, they consistently referred to IE as an opportunity that must be afforded to all children regardless of their physical and mental condition. This observation finds support in the study that was conducted by M.J. Meynert (2014) on inclusive education in Sweden. Perhaps this study's participants could sense that though they may not be able to articulate it, there are good reasons to embrace IE even if the Philippine's education system is generally ill-equipped compared with those of highly industrialized countries.

IE promotes diversity and is primarily aimed at normalizing the lives of CSN. It must be pointed out again, however, that while IE is being practiced in the schools of the participants or in schools attended by CSN, much remains to be done in order to deliver a just case of inclusion. Apparently, the issue is not whether the participants are involved in the practice of inclusion. Inclusion has already penetrated private education in the Philippines, but whether high-quality IE is implemented in Quezon City is an entirely different matter.

It is likewise important to raise the matter of whether IE, as practiced and advocated by the participants in this study, is not a futile effort to help CSN attain the level of a highly normalized life within a reasonable span of time. As noted earlier, the US has laws governing the procedural practice of IE. Due diligence in the attempt to address the learning needs of a special needs student must be exercised first before any assessment is carried out, in case preparation for IE is necessary.

The participants in this study believe that they practice or are involved in IE, but they admit that they operate only within the scope of their limited and very general knowledge of inclusion. The scant IE resources and practices that are available or accessible to the inclusive private schools and CSN families that participated in this study in no way resemble or even approach the Special Education Process implemented in the U.S.

It has been observed that the participants are worried about the lack of IE knowledge and training among many teachers of inclusive schools. The lack of IE training among general education teachers is indicated by their admission that they are wanting in competence to facilitate high level inclusion of CSN. The malaise they have registered regarding this admission is not without reason, for even the best-equipped inclusive education system in the world finds real challenge in its own practice of inclusion. As was described above, the Special Education Process of the US is comparatively more thorough and systematic than IE practices in the Philippines. But J.B. Kritzer (2012) is quick to add: "The special education process for children with learning disabilities, in the United States, can be a cumbersome exercise, with much paperwork to keep in order to stay in compliance with existing laws and regulations."

The good thing, however, about such guided practice of IE, Kritzer (2012) argues, is that "it has ensured a consistency across the country with regard to the services provided."

The general terms with which the participants attempted to state what IE is indicate that they can tell if CSN are not enjoying high-quality IE. This means that participants are relatively informed as to what CSN ought to avail for themselves beyond the simple case of being physically present in a general education setting. Nevertheless, they are not fully convinced that their definition of IE is clear and precise, or logically tenable enough to be widely acceptable. This deficiency is alarming as ignorance of the nature of IE practice may affect one's attitude toward CSN. "Attitudinal blocks may take the form of misconceptions, stereotypes, or labeling" (Heyne, 2003). It is thus reasonable to urge education leaders to require all the participants, as well as themselves, to acquire "accurate information about disabilities" (Heyne, 2003). Simply put, it would be tremendously unfortunate, if not dangerous, if, "[s]taff may not understand the concept of inclusion and what it represents in terms of people's rights and opportunities" (Heyne, 2003).

That diversity is one of the central ideas of IE was a recurring theme in the study. Participants, however, did not say that the concept of diversity in education prescribes the active participation of CSN in the general education setting. Despite the participants' general idea of IE, nearly all of them admitted that their notions of its distinctive features are limited. How far should it go, what are its procedures, and what resources must be made available are issues for which they offer no clear and confident answers. The participants almost always tie IE to the necessity of having to exert extra effort to attain its goals. They say that teachers must have special training and additional materials to facilitate the learning of CSN, and according to participants, these are among the very requirements they lack. This problem, of course, is not endemic to the Philippines. It has also been observed in other parts of the world, especially in China by researchers including F.C. Worrell and K.S. Taber (2009), L. Deng and A. Harris (2008), Y. Pang and D. Richey (2006) (as cited in Kritzer, 2012). Even if it is practiced in highly-industrialized countries like the U.S., M.D. Lieberman (2012) argues that, "…the barrage of curriculum materials, syllabi, grade-level expectations for performance, standardized achievement tests, competency tests, and so on, continue to overwhelm even the most flexible teachers" (as cited in Thompkins & Deloney, 1995).

Participants in this study made it apparent that one of the major problems is the lack of teacher training in IE. Such training should begin at the pre-service level of teacher training and education. This may sound easy, but high-quality training may only be realized if the teacher education institution has the necessary resources to fully equip inclusive schoolteachers.

There was no apparent resistance among the participants against the practice of IE in the Philippines. Perhaps no strong argument could be found to prevent the emergence and development of IE in the Philippines and around the globe. In fact, there appears to be a consensus that the wisdom behind inclusion is, indeed, a noble thing (Thompkins & Deloney, 1995). Beyond this study, it seems only the most reprehensible character would, for the sake of argument, raise doubts

about the Philippine government's move to welcome IE into the country. Whether reluctantly or eagerly, there simply is no question that the participants in this study are involved in IE practice.

The participants claim to have made some adjustments according to the demands of IE. Such efforts are imperatives that they have clearly accepted even if they are not fully familiar with IE. They work with each other toward the attainment of IE goals, even if they express misgivings about the way they perform their respective roles in IE setting.

While it is possible that stakeholders in IE are inclined to accept the principle and practice of inclusion, this study has demonstrated and provided proof that IE practitioners in Quezon City—perhaps this is likewise true for the wider local or national context—are not confident that their knowledge and involvement in it has given rise to best practices. Such doubt often leads to the creation of real barriers (e.g., negative views and attitudes) to the inclusion of CSN into mainstream society (Drame & Kamphoof, 2014), a vital part of which is the enjoyment of maximum learning in an IE setting. Such obstacles must be removed rather than merely overcome. Simply hurdling these barriers may eventually lead to exhaustion and the continued existence of complications brought about by the tension between inclusive and exclusive forms of schooling.

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