GRADE-LEVEL INCLUSION TEAM MEETINGS: HOW DIALOGUE SHAPES TEACHER PROBLEM AND RESPONSE CONSTRUCTIONS

By

PAMELA WILLIAMSON

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By

Pamela Williamson

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Chair: James McLeskey
Cochair: Dorene Ross
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The purpose of this study was to better understand what kinds of problems of practice are presented at grade-level inclusion meetings, and how interactions during these meetings influenced problem and response constructions. Teams were comprised of general education teachers, special education teachers, leadership team members, and other professional educators. Data included verbatim transcripts from eight inclusion meetings and 21 follow-up teacher interviews. Two data analysis methods were used including inductive analysis and discourse analysis. Research questions guiding this study included the following: What kinds of problems are described at inclusion meetings? What kinds of responses are developed by the group in response to problems presented? What value do these meetings have for teachers? How does dialogue constructed during inclusion meetings shape problem construction and group responses?

Two domains of student problems emerged: problems with academics and problems with behavior. Teachers described two types of students with academic problems: students who worked hard but were failing to progress and students who exhibited inconsistent effort. Teachers described four kinds of challenging student behaviors including attendance problems, behavior problems with academic problems, persistent annoying small behaviors, and aggressive behaviors. Responses to these problems from teams included responses at the family-level, classroom-level, and school-level.

Discourse analysis revealed two kinds of problem constructions: parallel problem constructions in which inclusion meeting participants discussing the same student constructed different problems, and coconstructed problems in which meeting participants, through modalized exchanges, constructed the same problem.

Responses to problems were constructed in a variety of ways. Unproductive responses were unfocused, tense, or generated ways to address problems that were inconsistent with the problem itself, whereas productive responses were focused, supportive, and matched the problem presented by the teacher with a concomitant solution. Discourse features of unproductive dialogues included high numbers of assertive and evaluative statements that were not modalized, whereas much of the productive talk during inclusion meetings was highly modalized and tentative. In addition, unproductive talk contained premature terminations of problem and solution constructions, whereas productive talk brought problems and solutions to logical ends. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The move toward including students with disabilities in general education classrooms has been one of the more significant school reforms in recent history. Empirical evidence from studies examining state-reported data from the *Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* suggests that more students with high incidence disabilities were placed in general education classrooms during the last decade than in previous years (Danielson & Bellamy, 1989; Katsiyannis, Zhang, & Archwamety, 2002; McLeskey, Hoppey, Williamson, & Rentz, 2004; Williamson, McLeskey, Hoppey, & Rentz, 2006). Mandates in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (2002), which require schools to ensure the adequate yearly progress (AYP) of students as measured by state accountability programs, will likely serve to continue trends toward inclusive placements in regular education classrooms into the foreseeable future (Ysseldyke, Nelson, & Christenson, 2004). This leaves general education teachers with the challenge of learning how to meet the academic and social needs of an increasingly diverse group of students.

Evidence suggests that teachers find it challenging to work with students with disabilities in general education classrooms, as they often feel they lack specific knowledge to do so effectively (Bondy & Williamson, 2006; Brownell, Yeager, Sindelar, vanHover, & Riley, 2004; Chalfant, Pysh, & Moultrie, 1979; Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, 1996). Professional development is certainly an important vehicle to

remedy this perceived gap in teacher knowledge (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002); however, scholars have argued that teachers need more than short-term professional development to meet the day-to-day challenges of diverse classrooms. For example, Little (2003) argued that "conditions for teaching and learning are strengthened when teachers collectively question ineffective teaching routines, examine new conceptions of teaching and learning, find generative means to acknowledge and respond to difference and conflict, and engage actively in supporting one another's professional growth" (p. 913). Similarly, Supovitz (2002) asserted that interactions among small groups of teachers (e.g., teams) "will not only maximize their collective knowledge and skills but facilitate their curricular and pedagogical strategies and the influences of these efforts on student learning" (p. 1592). Thus, teams may create ongoing opportunities conducive to teacher learning and problem solving (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Darling Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Little, 2003; Pugach & Johnson, 1989; Supovitz, 2002).

Teams have long been used to address problems in education such as reducing the numbers of students referred for special education services (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990; Safran & Safran, 1996; Sindelar, Griffin, & Smith, 1992) and addressing the unique needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Harris, 1995; Hoover & Collier, 1991). Further, teams have also been used to support teacher learning, for both preservice or early career teachers (Brownell et al., 2004; Sutherland, Scanlon, & Sperring, 2005) and in-service teachers (Englert & Rozendal, 2004; Little, 2003; Supovitz, 2002). Evidence suggests that teachers have strongly endorsed the use of teams to assist with in-classroom problems (Bahr, Whitten, Dieker, Kocarek, & Manson, 1999; Kruger, 1997; Kruger, Struzziero, & Watts, 1995; Safran & Safran, 1996; Sindelar et al., 1992). In addition to strongly endorsing the use of teams, a study of 161 teacher assistance teams

revealed that teacher satisfaction with collaborative problem solving was related to teachers' perceived notion that they were helping themselves or their colleagues (Kruger et al., 1995). This suggests that teachers appreciate the opportunity to help each other.

Some research evidence suggests that the support teachers receive through teams may be instrumental to establishing contexts that engender teacher learning (Brownell et al., 2004; Friend & Cook, 2003; Kruger, 1997; Kruger et al., 1995; Safran & Safran, 1996). Brownell and her colleagues (2004) found that teacher participants in teacher learning cohorts benefited from both psychological and instructional support as they were learning how to teach students with disabilities. Other studies have suggested that social support is important (Kruger, 1997; Kruger et al., 1995). Social support can be defined as "the extent to which organizational conditions help facilitate the implementation and outcomes of an innovation" (Kruger et al., 1995, p. 204). Using surveys, Kruger (1997) examined the relationships between the types of social support teachers experienced when asking for help with challenging classroom dilemmas through teacher assistance teams (Kruger, 1997). Evidence suggested that teachers felt the most efficacious with respect to overall problem solving and planning in-class interventions when they perceived the teams' appreciation for the worth of their efforts. This suggests that each team member must feel valued by his or her colleagues. Thus, while these studies identify important contextual information (i.e., the kinds of supports needed to facilitate teacher learning), they offer little description of the kinds of learning opportunities interactions among teachers afford.

Perhaps, most importantly, evidence suggests that when teachers participate in teams that focus their efforts on student learning, changes in practice and improvement in student achievement do occur (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2006). However, evidence

suggests that when the focus of teams is not on student learning, student achievement is unaffected (Supovitz, 2002). Thus, it is important to examine factors that enable that kind of focus.

Teachers have suggested that teams offer them chances to learn about teaching (Snow-Gerono, 2005). However, current research sheds little light on what teachers learn and the kinds of interactions that facilitate teacher learning. Little (2003) set out to examine the contents of the "black box" (p. 915) of teacher interactions during team meetings of high school teachers. Using discourse analysis, Little described how teachers represented their classroom practice in out-of-classroom talk. She justified looking at teacher-to-teacher interactions as a means for better understanding teacher learning, noting that if these contexts create teacher learning, "it ought to be evident in the ongoing encounters that teachers have with one another" (Little, p. 914).

Findings revealed that learning opportunities during meetings were influenced by (a) the kinds of situations teachers brought to meetings, (b) the language teachers used to talk about their work, and (c) group dynamics. Specifically, teachers used what Little (2003) termed teacher shorthand to describe problems. Thus, language was highly contextualized, loaded with meanings that only group members could fully apprehend. In addition, hidden group dynamics allowed some problems to be fully explored, as others were pushed aside. This led Little to conclude that "the force of tradition and the lure of innovation seem simultaneously and complexly at play in the teachers' everyday talk" (pp. 939-940).

Background of the Problem

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) mandates that the performance of all students with disabilities be assessed against general education standards and that all Title 1 schools meet AYP for all subgroups of students, including students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2001, 2003). This dissertation study will be conducted at Hopewell Elementary School (a pseudonym), an urban school located in a medium-sized school district in the southeastern United States. Students at the school are largely African American (98%), with most students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Although Hopewell Elementary fared very well the last 2 years in meeting state accountability standards, the school failed to meet national accountability standards of AYP for students with disabilities as defined in NCLB. This failure likely spurred the principal's decision to abandon all self-contained classrooms for students with disabilities in favor of including all students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Thus, professional development around the topic of inclusion became a necessity.

Professional development efforts during the 2004-2005 school year included a year-long, rigorous professional development program tailored to meet the needs of Hopewell Elementary through the collaboration of school faculty and a nearby university. Existing school structures were also changed. For example, faculty meetings were changed to best-practices meetings where teachers presented new ideas to colleagues regarding what was working in their classrooms. In addition, the school began holding grade-level inclusion meetings to discuss problems with individual students. A study at the end of the school year regarding teacher perceptions of school efforts aimed at including students with disabilities in general education classrooms revealed that teachers

wanted more opportunities to discuss problems of practice they were experiencing related to inclusion. Thus, during the 2005-2006 school year, the year of this study, the school continued team inclusion meetings to provide an opportunity for teachers to discuss problems of practice with colleagues, members of the school's leadership team, and other professional educators.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand what kinds of problems of practice are presented at grade-level inclusion meetings, and how interactions during these meetings influence teachers' problem and response constructions. This study answers Little's (2003) call to extend her work with high school teams to other teaching contexts (i.e., an urban, inclusive elementary school). Specifically, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What kinds of problems are described at inclusion meetings?
- What kinds of responses are developed by the group in response to problems presented?
- What value do these meetings have for teachers?
- How does dialogue constructed during inclusion meetings shape problem construction and group responses?

Significance of the Study

There is a great need for professional development that enables teachers to learn how to effectively work with students who struggle in classrooms. Many schools, especially those serving the urban poor, are under increasing pressures to ensure students with disabilities make AYP. Thus, research that illuminates how this is best achieved is needed. Many scholars have suggested that professional development that is embedded in the daily routines of teachers holds the most promise (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999;

McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Although the literature suggests that teams may be well equipped for this kind of professional development, little is known about how the dialogue of these meetings achieves these ends (Little, 2003).

Specifically, we know that when teams focus on student learning, student achievement improves. However, less is know about how dialogue during meetings enables clear descriptions of problems of practice so that teams can generate meaningful interventions for teachers and students. Thus, research that illuminates strategies to improve the productive nature of dialogue during team meetings is needed.

In the chapters that follow, I describe the available literature on teams and communities of practice that are relevant to this study, describe the methods used to study inclusion team meeting dialogue, discuss the kinds of problems of practice and responses these meeting create, discuss the ways in which dialogue shapes both these constructions of problems and responses, and discuss the implications of this research for the professional development of teachers.

Definitions of Key Terms

Inclusion Team Meetings

Inclusion team meetings are conceptualized as problem-solving meetings in which grade-level teachers, along with special education teachers, leadership team members, and other professional educators collaborate to recommend next steps for teachers to try with students who are experiencing problems in classrooms.

Leadership Team Members

Leadership team members include the principal, behavior resource teacher, curriculum resource teacher, the fine arts facilitator, the guidance counselor, and the reading coach.

Other Professional Educators

Other professional educators include the school psychologist, the professor in residence from a local university, and occasional staff members from the school district.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Historically, school-based teams have been used as an alternative to traditional professional development (Chalfant et al., 1979; Sindelar et al., 1992). Specifically, the purpose of teams was to discuss students whom teachers found difficult to teach and provide assistance to teachers. The special education literature suggests that teams evolved according to two very different philosophies (Sindelar et al.). One kind of team was modeled after the mental health conception of consultation (Sindelar et al.). This approach was based on a conception of teacher learning as knowledge-for-practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990; McLeskey & Waldron, 2004), where teachers were taught to use expert-developed interventions for students they were having difficulty teaching. The other branch of teams developed as a knowledge-in practice conception (Chalfant et al., 1979; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; McLeskey & Waldron, 2004). Teams of teachers were deemed qualified to solve the majority of their pressing concerns through collaboration with their peers. When needed, teams would solicit help from experts.

Some scholars have continued to argue that professional development for teachers must be situated in practice (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Fullan (2001) suggested that teachers must be prepared "on the job for context-based solutions, which by definition require local problem solving" (p. 269). Further, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) argued that "professional development today also means providing

occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners" (p. 597). This view suggests that professional development for teachers should reflect a knowledge-in-practice orientation of teacher learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; McLeskey & Waldron, 2004).

The knowledge-in-practice view of teacher learning values the practical knowledge of teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). It suggests that "teachers learn and become better teachers through experience, reflection on their practice, participation in collaborative teacher groups, inquiry into their experiences in the classroom, the study and discussion of cases, and the like" (McLeskey & Waldron, 2004, p.8). Other professional educators are viewed as colleagues who work with teachers to improve practice and ultimately student learning. Scholars have suggested that communities of practice provide the context for such teacher learning (Buysse et al., 2003; DuFour, 2004; Englert & Rozendal, 2004; Franey, 2002; Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins, & Towner, 2004; Hunt, 2000; Louis & Marks, 1998; Morris, Chrispeels, & Burke, 2003; Snow-Gerono, 2005; Strahan, Carlone, Horn, Dallas, & Ware, 2003; Supovitz, 2002; Vescio et al., 2006)

Many facets of teams have been well researched in the literature including team effectiveness (Fleming & Monda-Amaya, 2001), the efficacy of prereferral intervention teams (Safran & Safran, 1996; Sindelar et al., 1992; Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999), the efficacy of consultation teams (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Gilman, 1990), team membership (Burns, 1999; Giangreco, Edelman, & Nelson, 1999), and fidelity of team implementation (Kovaleski, Gickling, & Morrow, 1999). However, only two studies (Knotek, 2003; Little, 2003) investigated the influence of collaborative dialogue during problem-solving meetings.

Little's study looked at the efforts of high school teachers who worked together to discuss pedagogical problems within their classrooms, such as how to improve feedback given to high school English students. Knotek (2003) studied the dialogue of two problem-solving teams located in southern, rural schools to look for bias inherent in the talk of teachers. Thus, no studies have looked at how dialogue during problem-solving meetings shapes possible learning opportunities of teachers.

The purpose of this study is to better understand what kinds of problems of practice are presented at grade-level inclusion meetings, and how interactions during these meetings influence teachers' problem and response constructions. Teacher learning through teams is bounded in at least three ways. First, the kinds of problems presented at team meetings influence what is discussed. If particular problems are never discussed during team meetings, then teachers will not be able to learn about those things. In addition, the kinds of responses to problems generated by the team members will be limited by what team members know and share. Finally, the dialogue of the meetings themselves influences how learning is shaped for participants. Certain ideas may be met with resistance while others are not.

With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to review relevant literature on teacher learning in school-based teams. In the first section, literature on teams will be reviewed. This includes team development and types of teams. Next, empirical studies on teams will be reviewed to address the following questions:

- What kinds of problems of practice did teachers address during team meetings?
- What kinds of responses did teams generate to help teachers with these problems?
- What value did meetings have for teachers?
- What do studies on teams reveal about the nature of dialogue within teams?

In the second section of this chapter, I will discuss literature related to communities of practice. After describing the characteristics of communities of practice, I will describe the empirical studies related to the nature of dialogue in communities of practice. Specifically, I will address the influence of dialogue in communities of practice. I conclude this chapter by situating my study in the context of the reviewed literature.

Educational Teams

The concept of "team" has been described in numerous ways throughout the literature. Abelson and Woodman (1983) suggested that a team was "two or more individuals who work and communicate in a coordinated manner in order to reach an agreed upon goal(s)" (p. 126). Friend and Cook (2003) offered a definition of an educational team as "a set of interdependent individuals with unique skills and perspectives who interact directly to achieve their mutual goal of providing students with effective educational programs and services" (p. 124). Thus, common attributes of these two definitions include the presence of two or more people who, through communication with one another, work toward achieving a particular goal.

Team Development

Teams progress through developmental stages as they work together on problems of practice (Friend & Cook, 1997, 2003). Scholars have suggested different variations on how teams progress developmentally. Friend and Cook (1997, 2003) suggested that teams progress through five developmental stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. This suggests that the work of teams eventually ends (i.e., adjourning). McFadzean (2002) developed a model that better represents the ongoing nature of teams.

McFadzean's (2002) model suggested a five-level hierarchy, which included descriptions of changes in team attention to the task, meeting process, team structure, team dynamics, and team trust as teams progressed through the hierarchy. Level 1 teams are "concerned with getting the job done" (p. 464). These teams lack congruence of goals, which can result in teams being pulled in different directions based upon the goals of individual team members. Level 2 teams were concerned with the tasks and meeting processes. They utilize efficient process tools such as agendas or timelines; however, McFadzean (2002) averred that strict adherence to task and process goals may create a "trade off between time and depth of analysis/discussion" (p. 465). Thus, level 2 teams may reach superficial conclusions or decisions.

Level 3 teams attend to task, process, and group characteristics. Specifically, they understand the need to have individuals present to provide appropriate skills, knowledge, expertise, and experience to accomplish requisite tasks. Level 4 teams attend to these and also group dynamics. Some evidence suggests that "group members tend to be more satisfied with their output if there is equality in participation . . . if every member of the team is allowed to participate in the process" (McFadzean, 2002, p. 465). Thus, level 4 teams tend to ensure that all members participate, even if this results in conflict. McFadzean notes that conflict can be productive, if "it is undertaken in a positive and constructive manner" (p. 465). Level 4 teams tend to generate continuous improvements in terms of process. As problems arise, solutions are negotiated.

The difference between level 4 teams and level 5 teams is trust. Trust enables team members to express their ideas or opinions without fear of ridicule (McFadzean, 2002). Trust may enhance the possibility that novel approaches might be embraced and tried. Further, McFadzean envisioned level 5 teams as committed to their own

professional growth and that of their colleagues, an idea suggested by many scholars (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Pugach & Johnson, 1995). Thus, level 5 teams may be more adept at generating new strategies and solving complex problems (McFadzean, 2002).

McFadzean's (2002) model of problem solving teams suggests creativity can "be expressed as a continuum" (p. 471), ranging from ideas that preserve existing paradigms, stretch existing paradigms, or break paradigms. When paradigms are preserved, the boundaries of the problem do not change. Thus, problems may be examined in deeper ways but not different ways. When paradigms are stretched, the boundaries of the problem-solving space are widened thus creating opportunities for more varied problem solving strategies. Finally, when paradigms are broken, there are no boundaries for solving the problem.

Types of Teams

Friend and Cook (2003) described three types of teams found in schools related to student performance, including (a) special education teams, (b) service delivery teams, and (c) problem-solving teams. The use of special education teams is mandated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Friend & Cook, 2003). Student study teams exist for the purposes of determining whether special education placement is warranted for referred students and managing that placement if it is. These teams typically include the input of parents and students. Thus, literature related to these kinds of teams will be excluded from this review.

Service delivery teams "exist to plan and deliver education and related services to students" (Friend & Cook, 2003, p. 136). Examples of service delivery teams include coteaching teams, content teaching teams, and grade-level teams. Grade-level teams, as

Friend and Cook (2003) noted, have "not received wide attention in the professional literature" (p. 136), even though these groups focus on many important aspects of teaching such as planning curriculum, budgets, and scheduling. In practice, these meetings often serve as a conduit for disseminating information, which may account for the paucity of literature related to the study of grade-level teams. Scholars have suggested that grade-level teams may have the capacity to study problems of practice, particularly when multiple team members share the same students (Friend & Cook, 2003; Morris et al., 2003). Unlike grade-level teams, problem-solving teams are widely cited in the professional literature.

Problem solving teams. Sindelar and his colleagues (1992) noted that two different team problem-solving models emerged for "difficult-to-teach students in regular classrooms" (p. 246): consultation models that routinely include specialists (e.g., school psychologists, special education teachers, speech-language pathologists) as part of the team, and teacher assistance models that emphasize teachers' ownership of problems inviting specialists to join general education teachers only as needed (Chalfant et al., 1979; Safran & Safran, 1996; Sindelar et al., 1992). In addition to differences in team membership, these two types of problem-solving teams differ greatly in underlying assumptions.

Consultation models are referred to in the literature by many names including prereferral teams, intervention assistance teams, functional behavior assessment teams, and mainstream assistance teams. Initially, the primary purpose behind these teams was to reduce the numbers of inappropriate referrals for special education services (Friend & Cook, 2003; Safran & Safran, 1996); however, the role of these teams was later expanded to include educational service delivery (Friend & Cook, 2003). Most consultation models

were created with the assumption that all resources available to schools should be brought to bear on solving student problems in classrooms (Friend & Cook, 2003). Perhaps most importantly, an underlying assumption of these models is that factors within students cause problems in general education classrooms, and that teachers need the assistance of experts to show them how to mediate those problems. Thus, problem-solving efforts may be aimed at fixing the child more than fixing the environment for the child.

Teacher assistance team models. Teacher assistance teams were conceived of as an alternative to traditional professional development (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Chalfant et al., 1979; Sindelar et al., 1992). The goal of teacher assistance teams was to provide classroom teachers with help solving problems of practice to better meet the needs of students who were struggling. Teams were designed to be a forum "where classroom teachers can meet and engage in a positive, productive, collaborative problem-solving process to help students" by helping their teachers (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989, p. 50). Teams emphasized teacher initiative, accountability, communication, and effective decision making through collaborative group problem solving (Sindelar et al., 1992).

Although both of these models differ significantly in their approaches to solving problems of practice, their general aims were the same. That is, teachers brought forward their most pressing problems with particular students, and teams made recommendations to mediate those problems. What follows is a review of the empirical evidence from both kinds of teams regarding the kinds of problems teachers brought to team meetings and the kinds of responses and interventions that resulted. In addition, available evidence of the value of these meetings for teachers is reviewed. Finally, empirical evidence related to dialogue in team meetings is explored.

What Empirical Studies Tell Us about Teams

Using multiple databases (i.e., Academic Search Premier, PsycInfo, First Search, WilsonWeb) and search terms (i.e., teacher assistance teams, prereferral assistance teams, mainstream assistance teams, intervention assistance teams, problem solving teams) 87 articles, books, and dissertations were located. Model descriptions, thought pieces, and other work deemed not to be empirical were excluded, as were articles published earlier than 1985. Further, studies were included in this review only if they reported information about the kinds of problems teachers presented, the kinds of responses or interventions recommended by teams, or if they reported on the value of team meetings to teachers. In addition, articles were included if they described the influence of dialogue during team meetings.

The exception to this was a compilation of program effectiveness information on teacher assistance teams. Although data included in this study were not collected as part of a controlled research design study (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989), Sindelar and his colleagues (1992) determined that the scope of this work was sufficient to warrant inclusion in their literature review. Further, this paper reported details related to the focus of this literature review. Thus, this study is included in this review.

Summaries of the remaining 13 studies are presented in Table 2-1. Six of the 13 studies are based upon surveys or questionnaires, 4 are mixed methods studies, and 3 use qualitative methodologies. In addition, all studies but one (i.e., Chalfant & Psych, 1989) were investigations of the consultative problem-solving team model. What follows are descriptions of relevant studies. This section concludes with a summary of what these studies suggest about the use of teams for solving problems in schools.

Table 2-1. Summary of team literature

Author(s)	Purpose	Method	Participants	Results related to literature review questions
Bahr et al. (1999)	Examine the impact of varying state mandates.	Survey	680 professionals from 121 intervention teams	Respondents strongly endorsed teams as an effective service delivery model. Team follow-up was considered adequate.
Chalfant & Pysh (1989)	To compile evidence on the implementation of teacher assistance teams.	Survey	96 first year teacher assistance teams in five states	Number of goals per student ranged from 2 to 4.9. 57% of the goals (n = 720) were related to non-academic problems including work habits, classroom behaviors, interpersonal behavior and attention. 22% of the goals (n = 275) were related to academics including interventions written for reading, printing and writing, arithmetic, and spelling. 88% of teachers' comments were positive (n = 351) including comments that useful strategies were recommended, moral support of colleagues, student behaviors improved as a result of interventions, facilitation of faculty communication, improvement of skill in understanding classroom problems, expedition of special education placement. 12% of teachers' comments were negative and included problems with time, failure to generate useful strategies, interference with special education referral process, lack of faculty readiness to initiate a team, little or no impact on student performance/behavior, too much paperwork, and role confusion.

Table 2-1. Continued.

Author(s)	Purpose	Method	Participants	Results related to literature review questions
Eidle (1998)	Determine emphasis of the use of prereferral intervention at the secondary level.	Mixed methods	2 secondary level child study teams	Team goals were unclear. Teams displayed limited use of problem-solving. High frequency of external interventions recommended by teams. Limited preventive functioning.
Eidle, Truscott, & Meyers (1998)	Examined the extent to which child study teams addressed behavioral/social-emotional referral issues	Qualitative	4 prereferral intervention teams 14 team members 15 nonteam member teachers	Students were referred for academic difficulties, social-emotional behaviors, poor peer relations, attendance/truancy, family issues, attending/focusing, suspected special education needs, physical concerns, community issues, drug use. Interventions recommended included parent contact, meet with student, collect more information, classroom/behavior modifications, in-school social programs, meet with teacher, provide a case manager, tutoring/remedial assistance, psychoeducational testing, retention, in-school counseling, refer to special education, refer to court system, refer to physician.

Table 2-1. Continued.

Author(s)	Purpose	Method	Participants	Results related to literature review questions
Harrington & Gibson (1986)	Examined teacher perceptions of preassessment teams	Survey	41 teachers who referred students with learning disabilities	Teachers did not think recommendations were successful in addressing the problem referred. Teachers had mixed reactions as to whether teams provided new intervention ideas or whether teams explored a sufficient variety of intervention options. Teachers tried most of modifications recommended by teams prior to making team referrals (i.e., the 5 most frequently reported modifications by teachers before meetings included adapting materials, alternative teaching approaches, behavior management, alternate instructional materials used, and seating changes. Team recommended modifications included adapting materials, alternate instructional materials, behavior management techniques, remedial reading, and alternative teaching approaches). Teachers wanted help developing modifications they already selected.

Table 2-1. Continued.

Author(s)	Purpose	Method	Participants	Results related to literature review questions
Knotek (2003)	Investigated how social processes in the context of multidisciplinary teams inhibited teams' thorough and unbiased discussion of African American students' psychoeducational functioning	Micro-ethnography	2 rural schools with 4 to 8 professionals (African American and White) including teachers, administrators, counselors, and psychologists.	The locus of described problems was within children. High-status members (i.e., principal and those with specialized degrees) swayed discussion at the problem conception level. If the student presented with behavior problems, interventions were designed to document rather than correct behaviors. Further, academics were never considered to be the antecedent of behaviors. If students were from poor families, students tended to be referred for after-school tutoring and special education services.
Kruger (1997)	Investigated the relationship between social support and self-efficacy in problems solving	Survey	27 teacher assistance teams in elementary schools including 125 team members and 129 teachers who made referrals	Team members' perceptions that their skills and abilities were appreciated by co-workers were more important than the perception they could depend on co-workers for help. Strong link between reassurance of worth and efficacy in planning and evaluating interventions for students with behavior problems.

Table 2-1. Continued.

Author(s)	Purpose	Method	Participants	Results related to literature review questions
Kruger & Struzziero (1995)	Investigated the relationship between organizational support and satisfaction with collaborative problem-solving teams	Survey	27 teacher assistance teams in elementary schools including 161 team members and 127 teachers who made referrals	Team satisfaction was related to positive feedback from teachers that recommendations were helping and administrative support for release time to work with teams.
Meyers et al. (1996)	Described typical procedures and collaborative problem-solving processes used by prereferral intervention teams	Mixed methods	134 survey respondents including 62 team members and 72 referring teachers 91 interviews including 57 team members and 34 referring teachers	Students were referred to teams for academic problems (primarily reading difficulties), learning problems (organizational skills, language skills), behavioral problems (acting out, negative attitude, self-destructive behaviors), family problems (lack of support, poor attendance, chaotic home life) Recommendations made by teams were focused on out-of-classroom issues, including special education placement, resource room placement, counseling, speech and language intervention, family intervention.

Table 2-1. Continued.

Author(s)	Purpose	Method	Participants	Results related to literature review questions
				Team process problems included insufficient development of the problem, lack of data to make decisions, no clear action plan for each case Teachers felt they were not adequately involved, were not respected, interventions were difficult to implement.
Pobst (2001)	Explored how teachers perceived the prereferral intervention process	Mixed methods	Survey of 154 teachers 30 teachers interviewed	Teachers were involved in presenting their case. Interventions developed by teams were poor and inadequate in mitigating problems. Teachers were not taught prerequisite knowledge to implement recommendations properly. Teams were perceived as gatekeepers, not sources of professional development for teachers.
Rankin & Aksamit (1994)	Investigated perceptions of student assistance teams by school personnel	Mixed methods	563 educators including 46 building coordinators, 219 team members, 298 general educators	Teachers at the secondary levels were less satisfied with teacher assistance teams than were elementary teachers. Teachers were satisfied based upon their comfort referring students, support they felt, and the degree to which they implemented team suggestions.

Table 2-1. Continued.

Author(s)	Purpose	Method	Participants	Results related to literature review questions
Rubinson (2002)	Investigated implementation of interdisciplinary planning teams in urban high schools designed to support students at risk for failure	Qualitative	12 high school teams Teams fluctuated over time from 62 in year 1 to 117 by year 3. Teams were composed of counselors, administrators, school psychologists, social workers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals.	Teams that evolved into direct intervention groups suggested solutions such as counseling, remedial programs, parent and student conferencing, and placements in alternative schools. Some team members became mentors for troubled students. Another team provided in-class counseling sessions in a classroom where experienced teachers were having difficulty with discipline. Direct intervention teams attributed problems to within-child etiology.
Truscott et al. (2005)	Described state departments of educations' position on prereferral intervention teams and determined the prevalence and workings of existing teams in elementary schools	Surveys	State educational department officials (n = 51) 4 randomly selected elementary school educators per state	Teacher goals included helping classroom teachers, matching student skill level with instructional strategies, preventing problems in future students, and improving instruction. Common interventions recommended by teams included academic interventions (decrease amount of work, one-on-one instruction, change curriculum), changes in classroom structure (seat changes), and interdisciplinary support (counseling, remedial programs).

Kinds of problems reported to teams. Three studies revealed information about the kinds of problems teachers wanted assistance with in their classrooms (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Eidle, Truscott, & Meyers, 1998; Meyers, Valentino, Meyers, Boretti, & Brent, 1996). Using descriptive information gathered as part of the monitoring process for teacher assistance teams, Chalfant and Pysh (1989) compiled data from 96 first-year teacher assistance teams located throughout the United States. Although kinds of problems brought to meetings by teachers were not specifically reported, the authors noted that the kinds of student problems teams were designed to address included

> learning and behavior difficulties, including students who might be described as having poor work habits; social, conduct, and behavior problems; low self-esteem; slow learning rates; poor motivation; language problems; inefficient learning styles; experiential deprivation; or a mismatch between the curriculum and the individual's style. (p. 49)

Two investigations collected evidence on the kinds of problems teachers cited in referrals to problem-solving teams (Eidle et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 1996). Eidle and her colleagues (1998) investigated elementary and secondary child study teams in a small urban district with predominately white, middle class students. They identified two primary reasons teachers made referrals to teams including socio-emotional problems, which contributed approximately 40% of the referrals, and academic problems, which contributed another 50% of all referrals. Remaining referrals were related to nondescript family issues.

Although the majority of referrals were for academic concerns, Eidle and her colleagues (1998) were interested in socio-emotional concerns, and thus reported only details about the nature of those referrals. Referrals for elementary students included concerns about peer relations and attending/focusing whereas concerns for secondary students included drug use/abuse and community delinquency issues.

Meyers and her colleagues (1996) investigated the implementation of prereferral teams in a large, urban school district, which served a multiethnic population of students including large proportions of students from Hispanic, African American, white, Caribbean, eastern European, and Asian cultures. The socioeconomic status (SES) of students ranged from low SES to middle class. Teachers made referrals to teams for concerns, such as difficulties with academics (especially reading), learning (organizational skills, language skills), behavioral issues (acting out, negative attitude, self-destructive behaviors), and family issues (lack of support, poor attendance, chaotic home situation).

Of these studies, only Meyers and her colleagues (1996) reported about how students were described during team meetings. Descriptions of students included prior school records, grades and scores on academic assessments, and interventions that were attempted by teachers prior to referrals. According to researchers, problem descriptions based upon these data were often lacking. Specifically, problem descriptions rarely included classroom data; absent were teacher descriptions and perceptions of student problems. Researchers suggested that "this inhibited the problem-definition stage of the collaboration process" (Meyers et al., 1996, p. 140).

Kinds of interventions suggested by teams. The majority of studies that reported kinds of interventions recommended by teams were investigations of prereferral teams. The purpose of prereferral teams was to provide assistance to teachers so that students were better served and inappropriate referrals to special education were reduced (Truscott, Cohen, Sams, Sanborn, & Frank, 2005). Many investigators reported that the majority of recommendations made by teams were external to classrooms (Eidle, 1998; Meyers et al., 1996; Truscott et al., 2005) and focused on problems conceived of as being

within the student, rather than a mismatch of instruction to student needs (Knotek, 2003; Rubinson, 2002; Truscott et al., 2005). Eight studies reported external classroom interventions, including recommendations for additional special education services (Eidle et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Truscott et al., 2005), socio-emotional services such as counseling and mentoring (Meyers et al., 1996; Rubinson, 2002), family interventions (Meyers et al., 1996; Rubinson, 2002), and remedial programs (Rubinson, 2002).

Eidle (1998) used mixed methods to develop what she termed a thorough needs assessment of two secondary prereferral teams. She examined school records of referred students, interviewed team and nonteam members, observed team meetings, and surveyed the entire faculty of both schools. Findings from this study suggested that teams were recommending many more external interventions than in-classroom interventions.

In another study, Eidle and her colleagues (1998) examined the possibility for teams to be used to prevent student problems. They collected data from surveys and observations of team meetings and classified recommended interventions into two groups: interventions that were focused on "treating" (p. 210) specific disorders and early interventions aimed at ensuring problems did not become worse. Treating interventions were primarily external to classrooms (i.e., referral for special education, counseling, and court involvement), whereas early interventions included classroom behavior modifications and meeting with teachers, but also a high number of external strategies such as using in-school social programs, tutoring or remedial services, and other in-house psychoeducational testing. Both treatment interventions and early interventions were predominately external to classrooms, and thus unlikely to provide assistance to teachers with day-to-day problems.

Rubinson (2002) studied the implementation of problem-solving teams in urban high schools. Direct intervention teams, the most prevalent type of team that emerged, "provided a venue for discussion of problem students that resulted in solutions such as counseling, remedial programs, parent and student conferencing, and alternative placements in other schools" (Rubinson, p. 198). In addition, she reported recommendations for "novel" (p. 198) interventions including mentoring students deemed at-risk and push-in counseling sessions in a classroom with a lot of challenging behaviors.

Using surveys and interviews, Meyers and her colleagues (1996) wanted to provide descriptions of typical procedures and collaborative problem-solving processes used by prereferral intervention teams in urban schools. Recommendations included special education placement changes, counseling, speech and language interventions, and family interventions. In addition, teams recommended students spend time in resource rooms without placement changes. Researchers concluded that "despite the stated goal that these teams could help prevent problems associated with special education, most of the observed recommendations were not designed to improve classroom instruction for the child" (p. 140). Pobst (2001) reached similar conclusions in her study of urban educators.

In addition to Eidle et al. (1998) reporting that teams recommended the use of classroom behavior modification, two studies reported in-classroom interventions including the use of academic accommodations (Truscott et al., 2005), and the use of goals related to encouraging productive classroom behaviors (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989). Truscott and his colleagues (2005) surveyed 200 educational professionals in elementary schools (i.e., 4 elementary school educational professionals per state) to determine the

kinds of recommendations made to teachers by prereferral intervention teams to assist students with difficulties in classrooms. The most frequent kinds of interventions reported were out-of-classroom interventions including requests for additional special education services and special education testing. Although suggested less frequently, in-classroom interventions included decreasing the amount of work expected, one-on-one instruction, and changes to curriculum. In addition, teams reported suggesting teachers change seating arrangements in classrooms. Thus, these researchers concluded that recommendations seldom requested substantive instructional modifications from teachers.

Chalfant and Pysh (1989) reported on their work with 96 first-year teacher assistance teams. These teacher-led teams wrote goals to match problems presented by teachers. The number of goals per student ranged from 2 to 4.9, with more than half of all goals being written to address nonacademic behaviors, such as work habits (i.e., completing assignments on time, working independently, making an effort to do the work, following directions, organizing work, increasing the rate of work). Around a fourth of the goals were written for classroom behaviors, with smaller numbers of goals written for interpersonal behaviors, and attention problems. Interventions were designed to primarily take place in classrooms.

Teacher perceptions of the value of teams. Empirical evidence from research done on teams suggests there are benefits and problems associated with the work of teams. Some studies revealed that teachers endorsed the use of teams for addressing problems of practice (Bahr et al., 1999; Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Kruger, 1997; Kruger et al., 1995; Rankin & Aksamit, 1994). Factors positively associated with the endorsement of teams for problem solving included support for teachers and intervention

effectiveness. Additional evidence suggested that problems associated with team-based approaches included concerns related to time and lack of input from referring teachers (Eidle, 1998; Harrington & Gibson, 1986; Knotek, 2003; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Rubinson, 2002). In addition, teachers cited problems with the utility of recommendations for intervention (Harrington & Gibson, 1986; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Rubinson, 2002; Truscott et al., 2005).

Support and intervention effectiveness were cited as reasons teachers endorsed the use of teams. Studies suggested that support included many things, such as collegial support, organizational support, administrative support, and support for learning. For example, researchers reported that teacher participants in 96 first-year teacher assistance teams valued the moral support of colleagues, and suggested that feelings of support were linked to improved faculty communication, as well as professional development of skills for problem solving (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989). Rankin and Aksamit (1994) found that teachers were comfortable referring students to problem-solving teams and felt supported in their work with students by team colleagues.

Kruger and his colleagues (1995) investigated the role of organizational support in relationship to teacher assistance team satisfaction. Organizational support is the extent to which organizations are supportive and ready for innovations. In this study, organizational support included administrative support, social support, support for perceived purposes, and training (i.e., for work on teacher assistance teams). They surveyed 125 members of teacher assistance teams along with 129 general education teachers who made referrals to teams. Findings suggested that organizational support, particularly from administrators, was related to overall team satisfaction. Specifically, positive feedback from administrators, as well as receiving release time for meetings, was deemed important.

In a follow up study, Kruger (1997) investigated the relationship between organizational support and satisfaction with collaborative problem solving teams. In this study, he found that team members wanted to be perceived as being helpful, which he interpreted as affirming self-worth. He found that reassurance of worth was related to teams' efficacy in planning and evaluating interventions for students with behavior problems. Thus, when teams were supported by administration and thought of as being helpful to colleagues, teams were more efficacious and able to provide helpful interventions for students and teachers.

Some investigations revealed that team suggestions for interventions to address problems were helpful. Bahr and his colleagues (1999) investigated the practices of school-based intervention teams in the midwest and found that teachers were satisfied with interventions developed by teams. Chalfant and Pysh (1989) reported a similar finding. In addition, evidence from their study suggested that interventions led to improvements in student performance with the majority of interventions being deemed "successful" (p. 52) by teachers (i.e., 133 of 200 students helped within the building).

Problems with team problem-solving approaches were also reported. Specifically, team members reported concerns related to time and lack of input from referring teachers, whereas referring teachers cited problems with the utility of recommendations for intervention. Some participants in first-year problem solving teams reported that there was insufficient time for team meetings and interaction (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989). Meyers and her colleagues (1996) had similar findings. They suggested that this resulted in too many cases being presented at meetings and led them to conclude that "most teams spent too little time on the problem-definition stage, and, instead, chose to rush into recommendations prematurely" (Meyers et al., p. 137).

Another related concern was that interventions developed by teams were not useful to teachers. Some problem-solving teams generated interventions that had little or no impact on student performance (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Harrington & Gibson, 1986). Harrington and Gibson (1986) reported that the kinds of interventions suggested by teams were very similar to what teachers had tried before coming to teams for assistance. For example, the most frequent modifications recommended for use with struggling students by both teachers and teams included adapting materials, using alternate instructional materials, and using behavioral management techniques.

Other teachers suggested that prereferral teams were better gatekeepers than resources for professional development (Pobst, 2001). Teachers reported they were not provided with the necessary prerequisite skills to properly implement strategies suggested by teams. Thus, teachers felt that recommended interventions were inadequate and poorly developed.

Researchers reported that many interventions recommended by teams focused on addressing problems perceived of as within the child (i.e., referrals to special education, counseling) (Eidle, 1998; Eidle, Truscott, & Meyers, 1998; Knotek, 2003; Rubinson, 2002; Truscott et al., 2005). Researchers posited that interventions focused on within-child differences left teachers wondering what to do in their classrooms (Meyers et al., 1996; Rubinson, 2002; Truscott et al., 2005). Many researchers attributed this concern to the fact that investigated teams lacked meaningful input from classroom teachers (Harrington & Gibson, 1986; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Rubinson, 2002; Truscott et al., 2005). Specifically, team meetings were often held at times when referring teachers could not attend (Meyers et al., 1996; Rubinson, 2002), or included teachers minimally. For example, one study reported that teachers' participation in team discussions was

limited to describing the student being referred (Pobst, 2001). Thus, many researchers suggested that if teachers were more involved in the process, emphasis might shift from external interventions to more classroom-centered interventions (Eidle, Boyd et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 1996; Rubinson, 2002).

Influence of dialogue in problem-solving teams. Only one study looked at the influence of dialogue in problem-solving team discussions. Specifically, Knotek (2003) was interested in looking for ethnic bias in problem-solving team discussions. Although he concluded that there was no ethnic bias, evidence suggested the "social context of the team produced bias in the problem solving process" (p. 2). Specifically, the "social milieu" (p. 2) of the study team shaped the entire process from description of students through conceptualizations of problems.

Knotek (2003) asserted that before meetings even began, teachers were positioned to ascribe problem status to either themselves or their students. Knotek characterized this as "an inherent bind" (p. 7), because teachers' performances were naturally evaluated during multidisciplinary team meetings. Thus, Knotek suggested that it was not surprising that students become the locus of the problem instead of teachers and their practice.

Knotek (2003) noted that high-status members (i.e., persons of authority and persons with advanced degrees conferring special status) differentially influenced meeting dialogue. He suggested that these members used everyday terms to convey specialized meanings to team members. For example, when the principal at a meeting suggested that the student came from a *backwards family,* the team understood this to carry a negative connotation that suggested the family was part of the problem. Further, Knotek suggested that when a high-status member introduced a problem in a particular

way, the team continued to elaborate in kind. As an example, he cited a sample of dialogue during which the principal used a light bulb analogy to describe a student. Members of the team picked up on this language cue and continued to variously describe the student as having "off and on" days, or days when the "bulb flickers" (Knotek, p. 9).

Knotek (2003) found that when students were characterized by teachers as having behavior problems, "academic concerns were rarely conceived of as an antecedent to the behaviors" (p. 10), and that "interventions [developed] were more concentrated on affirming the initial diagnosis" (p. 10). He also suggested that when students came from low SES backgrounds, there were two interventions "of choice" (Knotek, p. 10), including giving the student a buddy and sending the student to after-school tutoring. Thus, Knotek found that "when these factors [behavior problems and low SES] were present, singly or together, the SST's [student study team] problem-solving process was less reflective and more reflexive than it was for students who were referred primarily for academic problems or who were from higher SES backgrounds" (p. 10).

Summary of the Research on Teams

The kinds of problems teachers addressed through problem-solving teams across all studies were remarkably consistent. Teachers reported needing assistance with students who had a wide range of issues, including problems related to academics, socio-emotional factors, and family concerns. When comparisons were made, there were greater numbers of academic problems reported than problems with behavior (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Eidle, Boyd et al., 1998).

Responses to teachers' concerns were also consistent across studies, with many studies suggesting that external interventions were differentially suggested over classroom interventions. Although some of this would be expected as one function of

prereferral teams, the most prevalent type of team described in articles reviewed, was to refer students for special education testing, when necessary. However, many researchers suggested that this was cause for concern (Eidle, Truscott, & Meyers, 1998; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Truscott et al., 2005). For example, Meyers and her colleagues noted that "despite the stated goal that these teams could help prevent problems associated with special education, most of the observed recommendations were not designed to improve classroom instruction for the child" (p. 140). Thus, providing teachers with suggestions for classrooms was deemed important.

Many researchers recommended that teachers be more involved in problem-solving discussions (Eidle, 1998; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Rubinson, 2002; Truscott et al., 2005). Many speculated that teacher involvement in problem-solving meetings would mitigate the trend of generating predominantly external interventions based upon within-child problem descriptions (Eidle, Truscott, & Meyers, 1998; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Rubinson, 2002; Truscott et al., 2005). Knotek's (2003) study offers a provocative response to this call. His findings suggested that teachers were inherently put in the position of having their performances evaluated, along with the student's, during problem-solving meetings. Thus, his study suggested that teacher involvement alone may exacerbate this concern rather than mitigate it. This suggests problem-solving meetings should include teachers and be safe places where problems can be discussed without fear of evaluation (Meyers et al., 1996).

Empirical evidence from research done on teams suggests there are benefits and problems associated with the work of teams. Some studies revealed that teachers endorsed the use of teams for addressing problems of practice (Bahr et al., 1999; Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Kruger, 1997; Kruger et al., 1995; Rankin & Aksamit, 1994).

Factors positively associated with the endorsement of teams for problem solving included support for teachers and intervention effectiveness. Additional evidence suggested that problems associated with team-based approaches included concerns related to time and lack of input from referring teachers (Eidle, 1998; Harrington & Gibson, 1986; Knotek, 2003; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Rubinson, 2002). In addition, teachers cited problems with the utility of recommendations for intervention (Harrington & Gibson, 1986; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Rubinson, 2002; Truscott et al., 2005).

Only one study of problem-solving teams looked at the role of dialogue. Specifically, the dialogue of problem-solving meetings was examined to determine whether conversations were racially biased (Knotek, 2003). Although no racial bias was found, evidence suggested that discussions were influenced by high-status members. Specifically, everyday terms uttered by high-status members acquired specialized meanings within the group. In addition, evidence suggested bias in the kinds of interventions recommended by the team for two groups of students: students with behavior problems and students from low SES households. Interventions for students with behavior problems were aimed at documenting rather than mitigating problems, whereas students from low SES households were reflexively given the same interventions each time (i.e., a buddy and afterschool programming).

Some evidence was found to suggest that teams necessarily provide opportunities for teacher learning (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989). Additional evidence suggested that due to structural elements in which teams were operating (i.e., meeting during teacher class times, consultation models), teacher learning opportunities were diminished.

The literature on teams also suggests that teachers need a safe place where they can discuss pressing problems of practice. Many scholars have suggested that

communities of practice provide safe, situated learning opportunities for teachers. Thus, I turn to the literature on communities of practice.

Communities of Practice

Buysse and her colleagues (2003) define communities of practice as "a group of professionals and other stakeholders in pursuit of a shared learning enterprise, commonly focused on a particular topic" (p. 266). Communities of practice are also referred to as professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004), critical friends groups (Bambino, 2002; Costa & Kallick, 1993; Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000), teacher communities (Little, 2003), and teaching teams (DuFour, 2004). Buysse and her colleagues (2003) suggest that there are two theoretical constructs underlying communities of practice. The first underlying construct is the notion of situated learning. Situated learning suggests that learning is local, grounded in the everyday lived experiences of people. This means that learning occurs not in isolation, but through "social processes that require negotiation and problem-solving with others" (Buysse et al., 2003, p. 267). Ideally, teachers and researchers collaborate with one another in pursuit of shared goals. The other important construct is reflection, which includes the "dialogic exploration of alternative ways to solve problems in a professional situation" (Buysse et al., p. 268). Thus, talking about problems of practice with colleagues is an important feature of communities of practice.

Some scholars have suggested that communities of practice are a powerful way to mediate the problem of the research to practice gap (Buysse et al., 2003; Englert & Rozendal, 2004; McLeskey & Waldron, 2004) by affording essential collaborations between teachers and researchers to occur because, as Englert and Rozendal assert, "Both teachers and researchers understand that research done in controlled contexts that limit the variation found in regular classroom contexts has inherent limitations when results

are applied to classrooms" (p. 24). Other scholars highlight communities of practice as a reform effort generated in response to the standards movement and efforts to professionalize teaching (Wilson & Berne, 1999) and more recently high-stakes accountability pressures (Vescio et al., 2006).

Regardless of the rationale, communities of practice afford opportunities for educators and researchers to work together to coconstruct knowledge that continuously improves teachers' practice and enhances student learning. In a review of the literature, Vescio and her colleagues (2006) concluded that although there are few published studies connecting communities of practice with student achievement, results from those studies suggest that student achievement improves over time. Further, they conclude that teaching practice is influenced in positive ways as school cultures change to become more student centered and focused on continuous learning for teachers and students. Creating cultures of collaboration that focus on student learning is important to these successes.

DuFour (2004) notes that one of the "big ideas" of communities of practice is the creation of "structures that promote a collaborative culture" (p. 9). He goes on to suggest that "powerful collaboration" includes a systematic approach of teachers working together "to analyze and improve their classroom practice" by working in "teams, engaging in an on-going cycle of questions that promote deep team learning" (p. 9). Implicit is the notion that this learning is achieved through dialogue. However, little is known about the specific dialogic interactions that influence learning (Little, 2003). As Snow-Gerono (2005) states, "The process of dialogue is an important aspect of collaboration that is not represented simply by the notion of people or an expanded

community" (p. 251). In this next section, I will explore what the empirical literature on learning communities reveals about dialogue.

Dialogue

Using multiple databases (i.e., Academic Search Premier, PsycInfo, First Search, WilsonWeb) and multiple combinations of various search terms (i.e., communities of practice, teach community, professional learning communities, critical friends groups) with the qualifier of *dialogue,* five empirical studies were located that specifically addressed the nature of dialogue as part of the studies' findings. Papers were excluded if they disclosed nothing about the context or quality of dialogue (i.e., quantitative studies using questionnaires). Of the five papers located, only 1 paper focused exclusively on dialogue (Little, 2003). The use of dialogue has been studied by scholars using different methods including (a) interview studies, (b) case studies, and (c) discourse analysis. Studies are reviewed highlighting what each reveals about the nature of discourse in learning communities.

Teacher perceptions of the value of dialogue. Strahan (2003) investigated the dynamics important to learning communities at three low-income high-minority population elementary schools where, over a 3-year period, student achievement improved significantly. He wanted to better understand the contribution school culture made to the schools' successes. His analysis of 79 teacher interviews suggested that data directed dialogue and "purposeful conversations" (p. 127) were instrumental to the schools' success. Strahan (2003) wrote that "participants stressed the importance of the time they spent conversing in grade-level meetings, site-based staff development sessions, mentoring discussions, and informal get-togethers" (p. 143). In particular, during weekly grade-level meetings, teachers developed strategies to promote student

engagement in balanced literacy activities and discussed the progress of students using various forms of assessment data. Teachers revealed that for them, this kind of dialogue was valuable.

Snow-Gerono (2005) explored teachers' perceptions of the benefits of professional learning communities at one professional development school. Opportunities for collaborative dialogue at the school included team meetings, study group meetings, teaching partners, as well as working with other education professionals across school sites. Teachers reported they had "an appreciation for dialogue" (Snow-Gerono, p. 251), suggesting they learned better through talking about practice.

In addition, teachers noted that dialogue created opportunities for teachers to discuss "tensions inherent in education and ideological frameworks and embrace problem-posing as a means for professional development" (Snow-Gerono, 2005, p. 251). Teachers expressed a need for safety to enable open dialogue. Teachers noted that even dialogue that was formed as dissent from others in the group was deemed valuable to the learning experiences of these teachers. They explained that it was sometimes dissonant voices that caused others in the group to stretch and grow as teachers.

Dialogue during inquiry. Hollins and her colleagues (2004) investigated the use of a five-step structured study group approach aimed at "developing habits of mind" (p. 247) necessary for improving the literacy acquisition of students attending a high-poverty, low-performing elementary school. Researchers envisioned that "teachers would rely on collaboration and within-group directed inquiry, for consistently improving literacy acquisition" (Hollins et al., p. 255). Specifically, their model of a structured dialogue approach included steps to (a) define challenges, (b) identify approaches to meet the challenges, (c) select and implement an approach, (d) evaluate implementation, and

(e) formulate a theory to guide practice going forward. Qualitative data collected included teacher interviews, meeting transcriptions from the study groups, recorded field notes, and "informal conversations" (Hollins et al., p. 254).

In addition to teachers, the principal attended study groups. Although not the original facilitator, the principal functioned to "refocus the teachers when they began to digress from the purpose of the sessions, improving African American students' literacy" (Hollins et al., 2004, p. 256). Ultimately, the principal stepped into the facilitator role, something the researchers deemed "promising" (Hollins et al., p. 259) in terms of the potential to sustain study groups as a permanent practice at the school. Researchers reported that teachers'

> dialogue during study-group meetings progressed from a focus on daily challenges and defending their own practices to seeking insights from the literature, sharing suggestions for instructional strategies, collaborating to develop new approaches and expressing appreciation for time to dialogue and plan together. (p. 260)

Thus, study groups offered an important opportunity for teachers and the principal to approach learning differently by collaborating with one another.

Englert and Rozendal (2004) discussed the characteristics of a community of practice where they were collaborators with elementary school teachers. The goal was to accelerate progress of students deemed nonreaders and writers. They noted that several "participatory mechanisms" (p. 31) for dialogue were created, including teacher/researcher meetings and discussions about videotapes made of teacher participants in their classrooms teaching.

Researchers noted that analysis of the transcripts from teacher/researcher meetings

> showed a flow of relevant conversation that featured the following key aspects: focus provided by the senior research who functioned as the group leader, clarification through questioning and teacher reflection, agreement and discussion among teachers (with group problem solving and sharing central). (p. 32)

They noted that the group leader was responsible for maintaining group focus and timing. Important dialogic features of videotape discussions included opportunities for reflection on practice and brainstorming. In addition, researchers suggested that questions were used to make clear teacher decisions and procedures represented in video tapes.

Problem-solving dialogue. Little's (2003) investigation was the only study located that examined the ways dialogue found within communities of practice shaped learning for teachers. Specifically, Little sought to study "what teacher learning opportunities and dynamics of professional practice are evident in teacher-led groups that consider themselves collaborative and innovative" (Little, p. 915). Primary data for this study were audio- and videotaped recordings of teacher meetings among English teachers and math teachers at two public high schools.

Using discourse analysis, Little (2003) found that teacher meetings posed unique challenges for teacher learning opportunities. Challenges included concerns about time, problem description, and group interaction patterns. Meetings in this study were described as "both fleeting and incomplete" (p. 925). For example, only 30 minutes of a 90-minute meeting was dedicated to discussing problems. In another example, the meeting check-in procedure took nearly half of the time allotted for the meeting; thus, it was impossible for teachers to thoroughly discuss problems.

In addition, teachers used what Little (2003) described as teacher shorthand when describing problems in classrooms. That is, meanings were situated and localized, rendering it somewhat difficult to "unpack" (p. 936) all that was discussed. Although

learning opportunities might be embedded in this kind of talk, Little was concerned that tension created between what she described as "getting things done" and "figuring things out" (p. 931) impeded teacher learning. Further, Little suggested that when this shorthand was used to "recontextualize" classroom dilemmas, many salient details were lost. Little concluded that "teachers employ[ed] talk about classrooms to justify themselves and their choices to one another" (p. 937), which severely undermines possibilities for teachers to learn.

Interaction problems noted by Little (2003) included movement of meeting topics from one concern to another. She cited an example where the concerns of an intern took up the group's time. She explained that, "moments for extended consideration of practice are coconstructed in ways whose meaning and significance are not immediately apparent" (p. 929). She also explained that for interactions to be truly meaningful, teachers had to open themselves to being vulnerable by asking colleagues to critique practice. Thus, both the teacher and interactions among team members either invited this kind of introspection or not.

Summary of the Research on Dialogue in Communities of Practice

Both Strahan (2003) and Snow-Gerono (2005) stressed the value of dialogue to their study participants. For example, Strahan (2003) concluded that the conversations were "purposeful" for the faculties of these schools and that "this continuous dialogue helped to cultivate collective efficacy at each school and provided a renewable source of energy for participants" (p. 143). Similarly, Snow-Gerono (2005) concluded that people and dialogue were important to the professional development of her participants. Teachers needed to feel safe to open themselves to different possibilities. However, these

descriptions did not provide details on how this kind of dialogue was generated in communities of practice, only that it was important to teachers.

Evidence from implementation studies (Englert & Rozendal, 2004; Hollins et al., 2004) suggested that dialogue is most productive when it is focused by facilitators, such as principals or researchers. The Hollins study suggests that using dialogic structures, such as problem-solving steps, might be especially useful for new teams as they begin collaborating. Thus, these studies provide insights into factors that facilitate productive dialogue (i.e., strong facilitators, guiding dialogic structure), and the kinds of learning that can occur in communities of practice (i.e., instructional strategies). They also suggest a means to promote teacher reflection (i.e., review videotape recordings of teaching episodes).

Little's (2003) study of the dialogue of teacher meetings aimed at improving practice revealed three challenges: time, problem descriptions, and group interaction patterns. There was too little time during meetings for problems to be well defined. Another challenge with problem descriptions was that they contained what Little termed teacher shorthand. That is, words took on contextualized meanings known to the group. Little suggested that this raised concerns about teachers' problem descriptions that in repackaging talk so densely, fine-grained details apparent during the live interaction were lost. Thus, perhaps unwittingly, teachers presented themselves in as favorable light thereby limiting possibilities to truly improve practice. Finally, Little concluded that while meetings may provide opportunities for learning, they can as easily make opportunities dissipate with one conversational turn.

Importance of the Study

Evidence from this literature review suggests that the kinds of student problems teachers ask teams for assistance with include academic concerns, socio-emotional concerns, and family concerns. A consistent theme throughout the literature was that problems within team contexts were often poorly defined. Notably absent were problem descriptions related to problems with teaching. Several factors influenced problem descriptions including lack of teacher input due to the structures of some problem-solving teams and lack of adequate time to thoroughly explore problems. Moreover, when teachers were included as members of problem-solving teams, studies suggested that teachers were motivated to present themselves in the best possible light. This led scholars to question whether or not team meetings can truly provide opportunities for meaningful changes in practice.

Still, teacher reports suggest their strong endorsement of the use of teams for both learning about practice through dialogue and addressing pressing problems of practice. Thus, it is important to look for ways to improve the quality of problem descriptions so that learning opportunities are enhanced for teachers, which ultimately will enhance student learning. In addition, research that describes ways to bring focus to problem discussions could potentially mitigate time constraints.

Evidence from the literature on responses to teacher concerns suggested a differential reliance on interventions that were outside of classrooms. While some evidence suggested that teachers were able to successfully use team-recommended interventions, other evidence suggested that recommendations did little to mitigate problems of practice. This may have been due, in part, to the notion that many

interventions suggested by teams for use in classrooms were things teachers had tried before referring the student to teams for assistance.

As with problem descriptions, responses to problems described in the literature were influenced by structural factors of teams studied, such as the absence of meaningful participation of referring teachers. In addition, the function of teams investigated necessarily skewed interventions toward out-of-classroom suggestions (i.e., prereferral teams function, in part, to refer students for special education testing). Thus, better understandings of contextualized responses to problems where teachers are active participants in generating responses instead of passive recipients of interventions would illuminate the possibilities teams have for suggesting meaningful interventions for pressing problems of practice.

Literature that examined dialogue within the context of teacher problem-solving meetings suggested many concerns related to the possibility that teachers might learn to improve practice through meetings. Researchers suggested that teacher problem descriptions inherently presented teachers in favorable ways. Further, language used to describe problems was often localized and embedded in the social contexts of meetings. Thus, these studies lacked suggestions on how dialogue used during meetings could improve the quality of learning opportunities for teachers, and indirectly, the students they teach.

This current study is important for three reasons. First, this study seeks to elaborate on the influence of teachers' participation in problem-solving discussions. In particular, this study will examine whether or not problem descriptions are sufficiently articulated to allow opportunities for teachers to learn new things about practice. Second, this study seeks to contribute to the literature the kinds of responses generated to

problems of practice when grade-level teachers, special education teachers, leadership team members, and other professional educators work together collaboratively as part of grade-level inclusion teams.

Perhaps most importantly, this study seeks to better understand how dialogue influences both problem and solution constructions. In particular, using discourse analysis at the clause level of speech will produce insights into how statements and questions shape learning opportunities. Through this fine-grained analysis, strategies to improve the quality and power of team meetings for teacher learning will be revealed.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND METHODOLOGY

Scholars have suggested that teacher development opportunities exist within the ordinary work of teachers (Little, 2003). The purpose of this study is to better understand what kinds of problems of practice are presented at grade-level inclusion meetings, and how interactions during these meetings influence teacher problem and response constructions. There are three influences on what might be available for teachers to learn during inclusion meetings.

First, possible learning opportunities are bounded by the kinds of problems discussed during meetings. Thus, in order to understand what kinds of learning opportunities exist at meetings, it is important to better understand the kinds of problems teachers are discussing at inclusion meetings. Second, learning opportunities are bounded by the kinds of knowledge and experiences meeting participants hold. If meeting participants are unaware of particularly helpful strategies, they cannot suggest them. Thus, it is important to understand what kinds of suggestions are made at these meetings. Finally, the actual dialogue among participants may shape the ways problems and suggested solutions to those problems are constructed. Thus, in order to understand how dialogue shapes problem and response constructions during inclusion meetings, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What kinds of problems are described at inclusion meetings?
- What kinds of responses are developed by the group in response to problems presented?

- What value do these meetings have for teachers?
- How does dialogue constructed during inclusion meetings shape problem construction and group responses?

Theoretical Orientation

Since meetings are inherently socially constructed dialogue, this study was conducted primarily through a social constructionist lens. Social constructionist epistemologies typically draw upon the work of constructivists, believing that objects do not possess meaning until human consciousness interacts with them (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000). Thus, instead of discovering new knowledge, knowledge is constructed within situated realities as we interact with objects. Furthermore, social constructionists, in particular, posit that these constructed realities occur "against the backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth" (Schwandt, p. 197).

Social constructionists believe that humans are born into particular cultures through which we are gradually socialized (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Crotty, 1998). We depend upon culture to guide and direct our behavior; it enables us to see particular things while ignoring others (Crotty). Culture includes socially constructed institutions such as governments and schools. Culture and institutions are created and recreated through language, habits of action, and legitimation.

As a system of signs, language is the means by which everyday life is shared with others (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Berger and Luckman consider face-to-face interactions to be prototypical for all language. Through interactions, multiple realties are constructed by individuals. However, "there is an ongoing correspondence between my meanings and [others'] meanings in the world" (Berger & Luckman, p. 23). As individuals interact, individual subjectivities are made available through both verbal and nonverbal exchanges. What we know about others in face-to-face interactions is

prereflective and continuous as we experience the interaction. Thus, it is possible for us to interpret events differently when we reflect upon them than we did during actual lived experiences.

Language is coercive and inherently constrains possible interactions (Berger & Luckman, 1966). For example, both grammar and pragmatics influence speech production. Further, our historical use of language shapes our future use of language. For example, all interactions are influenced by typificatory or classification schemes that have been constructed over time. Others with whom we interact are apprehended as the players of particular societal roles, which thereby affects our dialogic interactions with them (Berger & Luckman). A principal may be apprehended by her faculty as "a school leader," "an African American," and "a woman," simultaneously. Her faculty will interact with her based upon their own typficatory schemes related to these roles. Typificatory schemes are reciprocal. In other words, the school leader holds typificatory schemes about her faculty as well.

Importantly, face-to-face interactions are fluid and "whatever patterns are introduced will be continuously modified through the exceedingly variegated and subtle interchange of subjective meanings" (Berger & Luckman, 1966). These schemes will continue, unless actions occur to change them and "will determine [our] actions in the situation" (Berger & Luckman, p. 31). In addition to typificatory schemes, habitulization is important to the creation and recreation of culture.

Actions repeated often enough become habitualized and "habitualization carries with it the important psychological gain that choices are narrowed" (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 53). Although this can lead to "deliberation and innovation," it can also lead to reification (Berger & Luckman, p. 53). Thus, while there may be multiple ways to solve

problems of practice, the habit of solving problems in particular ways can result in the limitation of possibilities.

According to social constructionists, knowledge is socially distributed (Berger & Luckman, 1966). This "social stock of knowledge" is differentiated based upon "degrees of familiarity" (Berger & Luckman, p. 43). It is from this stock of knowledge that typification schemes are drawn, as well as "recipes" for solving problems are available and taken for granted "until a problem arises that cannot be solved in terms of [the recipe]" (Berger & Luckman, p. 44). As novel problems are resolved, new meanings are legitimated.

Influence of the Theoretical Perspective on the Study

The epistemological stance, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods "inform one another," thereby limiting choices that can be made during the research process (Crotty, 1996, p. 4). Since the theoretical stance for this work is social constructionist based upon constructivism, it follows that data collected must be socially constructed. Thus, primary data were collected during inclusion team meetings as participants socially constructed their realities with problems of practice. Berger and Luckman (1966) explained that through reflection, we have "better knowledge" (p. 29) of ourselves. Thus, secondary data were collected in the form of follow-up teacher interviews to better understand how participants constructed their experiences of these meetings.

Methodology

Two analysis methods were used for this study—inductive analysis and discourse analysis. I selected Hatch's (2002) method for three reasons. First, although Hatch's iteration of inductive analysis draws heavily on the methods of others (Spradley, 1979;

Strauss & Corbin, 1998), his version is adaptable to paradigms outside of postpostivist assumptions, such as constructivism and social constructionism. Second, I was trying to better understand knowledge embedded in the context of inclusion meetings. Specifically, I wanted to better understand the kinds of problems of practice and the kinds of responses to those problems that were socially constructed by inclusion team members at an urban elementary school, and how those problems and responses were legitimized. Inductive analysis allowed the possibility for the story to emerge from the data. Third, I needed a method suitable for a large qualitative data set as I ended up with over 400 pages of single-spaced transcripts. Thus, Hatch's method of inductive analysis was a natural fit, as he suggested that it was "well suited for studies that emphasize the discovery of cultural meaning from large data sets" (p. 179).

In addition to addressing the content of problems and responses to those problems constructed by inclusion teams, I was also interested in understanding ways the dialogue of inclusion meetings shaped the construction of problems and responses to those problems. Specifically, I was interested in better understanding how questions and statements influenced both the construction of the problems by teachers, and the concomitant suggestions for action, thereby influencing possible learning opportunities for teachers. In addition, I wanted to find a discourse analysis method that was compatible for use with other methods.

Importantly, Fairclough (2003) asserted that the language of texts, including spoken words, have causal effects that "can bring about changes in our knowledge (we can learn things from them), our beliefs, our attitudes, values and so forth," which are "mediated by meaning-making" (p. 8). In addition, he noted that "it often makes sense to use discourse analysis in conjunction with other forms of analysis" (Fairclough, p. 2), as

it is best "applied to samples of research material rather than large bodies of text" (Fairclough, p. 6). Finally, Fairclough suggested that inductive analysis is a method compatible with his form of discourse analysis. Thus, Fairclough's method of discourse analysis was selected.

Key Concepts Related to Inductive Analysis

In this section, I will discuss and define key concepts associated with Hatch's (2002) inductive analysis method. Terms and concepts will be defined and described. In addition, the purpose behind each concept will be explored.

Inductive analysis. Inductive analysis leads from the particular to the general (Hatch, 2002; Spradley, 1979). It pulls particular pieces of evidence together to construct a meaningful whole. The purpose of inductive analysis is to enable the analysis to emerge from the data rather than imposing a classification scheme upon the data. Data are examined for patterns of meaning which are then used to construct general explanatory statements regarding what was happening in the data. This allows for multiple, contextualized possibilities to emerge from the data.

Frames of analysis. Frames of analysis are selected by the research after a close reading of the data, as they must be established "with a solid sense of what is included in the data set" (Hatch, 2002, p.162). Frames of analysis can be thought of as conceptual categories and can range from framing analysis around particular words to "blocking off complete interchanges between interactants" (Hatch, p. 163). They can also be related to "comments on specific topics" (Hatch, p. 163). Importantly, framing decisions must encompass all of the dimensions to be explored. Frames may shift throughout the process of analysis.

Frames of analysis serve three important purposes. First, they reduce the quantity of data by limiting intense analysis to data which are relevant to answering posed research questions; otherwise, as Hatch (2002) concludes, “there will be no way to begin to search for meaning in a mass of data” (p. 164). Second, frames of analysis provide the researcher with a way to begin looking closely at the data. Finally, they enable researchers to “move to the next step of creating domains” (Hatch, p. 164).

Domains. Domains are large units of cultural knowledge (Spradley, 1979). The purpose of domain analysis is to “develop a set of categories of meaning . . . that reflects relationships represented in the data” (Hatch, 2002, p. 104). Domains provide insights into typifications held by participants. Domains are organized around semantic relationships. Spradley identified nine domains useful to researchers including inclusion (X is a kind of Y), spatial (X is a place in Y), cause-effect (X is a result of Y), rationale (X is a reason for doing Y), location action (X is a place for doing Y), function (X is used for Y), means-end (X is a way to do Y), and attribution (X is a kind of Y).

Subdomains. Subdomains, or cover terms (Spradley, 1979), are simply the names of particular categories. Their purpose is to provide an overview of what is included in the category.

Included terms. Included terms are codes that are subsumed within each subdomain. They represent smaller chunks of meaningful data. Included terms must be semantically related to other included terms within a particular domain. They serve the purpose of fragmenting data for analysis.

Negative examples. Negative examples are those bits of data that serve as disconfirming evidence. Researchers must deductively search for them throughout the

analytical process. They serve the purpose of ensuring the researcher is alert to any necessary shifts in analysis away from interpretations that are not supported by the data.

Key Terms of Discourse Analysis

Next, key terms of Fairclough's (2003) method of discourse will be defined. All definitions are attributed to him.

Clause. Clauses are simple sentences and are made of three parts: (a) processes, usually verbs, (b) participants, or objects, and (c) circumstances, commonly adverbs.

Dialogue. Dialogues are a particular genre of text, and meetings are a subset of that genre (Fairclough, 2003). During a dialogue, speakers are expected to take turns and use those turns in various ways to ask questions, make requests, complain, etc. They are also expected to speak without interruption, select and change topics, and offer interpretations or summaries of what has been said during dialogue.

Evaluation. Evaluations are portions of text that have to do with values, including explicit statements (e.g., the student is struggling) and value assumptions, which are generally implicit. For example, there are many value assumptions that might accompany "the student is struggling."

Exchange types. An exchange in discourse terms is a "sequence of two or more conversation 'turns' or 'moves' with alternating speakers where the occurrence of move 1 leads to the expectation of move 2, and so forth—with the proviso that what is 'expected' does not always occur" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 106). Two primary kinds of exchanges in dialogue include knowledge exchanges and activity exchanges. Knowledge exchanges focus upon the exchange of information, such as asking for and giving information, making claims, stating facts, and so forth. Knowledge exchanges can be initiated by both the knower and the person who wants to know. The focus of activity

exchanges is on people doing things or getting others to do things. Activity exchanges typically do not involve just talk; they are action based.

Grammatical mood. Grammatical mood is the difference between declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences.

Modality. "The modality of a clause or sentence is the relationship it sets up between the author and representations" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 219). Specifically, for activity exchanges, modality characterizes how committed the speaker is the obligation or necessity of the action. For knowledge exchanges, it characterizes how committed the speaker is to truth. In both cases, modalized speech hedges the speaker's motives. For example, if I say, "He may have learning disabilities," I am holding out the notion that he may have learning disabilities or he may not.

Speech functions. There are four primary speech functions including (a) demands, (b) offers, (c) questions, and (d) statements. All terms except *questions* will defined briefly, as *questions* are self evident. Speech demands include polite demands such as requests. In addition, demands include such things as order, requesting, etc. Offers include such things as promising, threatening, apologizing, thanking, etc. There are three primary kinds of statements including (a) statements of fact (e.g., what is, was, has been the case), (b), irrealis statements (i.e., predictions and hypothetical statements), and (c) evaluations (e.g., should and other judgmental forms).

Study Design

This next section will explain how this study was designed. Specifically, I will describe the context of the study, including the selection of study participants. Importantly, since I have been involved with the school where this study was conducted for 3 years, my personal subjectivity statement includes details of this involvement. I will

also describe data collection and analysis procedures, in addition to methods used to ensure the trustworthiness of the representations contained in this report. Finally, I will describe the methodological weaknesses of this dissertation study.

Personal Subjectivity

Although I will dutifully exercise all manner of techniques to ensure the credibility of my data representations, I do so knowing fully that it is impossible to divorce one's self from the research process. Thus, it is important to recognize how participants' realities differ from my own. By examining my own subjective realities around the topic of problem solving and related teaching practices, both my readers and I will be more equipped to understand what may influence my interpretations of data.

Having worked in the field of human resources for nearly 13 years, I came to the realization that I wanted to become a teacher while volunteering in my oldest daughter's kindergarten classroom. I was amazed by what I saw—children who could not hold a pencil next to my daughter who entered kindergarten reading—the contrast was startling. Soon thereafter, my family and I started a journey that began with me reentering the University of Florida to first finish my bachelor's degree and then my master's degree. Being a parent made me take my education very seriously. After all, I wanted the best teachers for my own children, and I reasoned that other families would expect the same for their children.

One semester before finishing my master's degree, I accepted a position as a first-grade general education teacher in a cotaught, inclusive classroom. In this classroom, students with varying labels including mental retardation and autism were educated alongside typically developing peers for half of the school day. Having done my internship at that school with that class's buddy readers, I had a little experience with the

children I would soon be teaching. This experience left me with the impression that students with disabilities were like many other children I knew. They had distinct personalities and families who loved them.

My coteacher was a veteran special education teacher. She noticed such a difference in what her students could do from spending only a short amount of time with typically developing first graders during a weekly, classroom scouting experience that she, along with the teacher I replaced, went to the principal to create an inclusive program the following year. They successfully completed one year as coteachers when the first grade teacher moved, and I was hired to fill her very big shoes. We were well supported, having two full-time paraprofessionals to help.

We had a wonderful year together as we worked through one practical dilemma after another. We had to develop a classroom community where everyone was respected. For the typically developing children, this meant fostering understandings of when to help and when to simply encourage. We had to develop optimal learning environments for all of our children. As it turned out, I had several "typical" students who benefited from the special education teacher's instruction, while a student with mental retardation joined one of my reading groups. We had to generate buy-in from parents who questioned whether our program would meet the needs of their children. The parent of one child identified for the gifted program was especially concerned. After one observation in our classroom, she went on to become our room parent and one of our biggest allies. Unfortunately, I, like my predecessor, ended up moving at the end of the school year.

My second teaching position was in a private school in California. I was attracted to the school as it espoused a philosophy of educating the whole child. Unlike most

private schools in that area, children were not admitted to the school on the basis of high test scores. Rather, families were interviewed and children were admitted to the school if their families were committed to the values of the school (i.e., educating the whole child, deemphasis on labeling and passing standardized tests). Families who could not afford the tuition were offered generous scholarships. Thus, the school was quite diverse, and although there were no labels allowed at school, I taught children whom I am sure would have been labeled with a disability in another setting. In addition to teaching language arts and world cultures to sixth graders, I functioned as the elementary reading resource teacher. I pushed in to many classrooms to assist during reading instruction. After one year in California, we ended up moving home to Florida.

Fortunately for me, the first school I worked at had an opening for a coteacher in fifth grade. Since our school was departmentalized for fourth and fifth grades, I was hired to teach language arts to two groups of students and to teach social studies to my homeroom students. Students with specific learning disabilities were included in the general education classroom. My coteacher, a long-term veteran of the school system, had been coteaching this class for a few years. His assignment changed that year to include coteaching a fourth-grade class in addition to the fifth-grade class. While I had the students for the entire period, my coteacher and his paraprofessional joined us for only half of the scheduled periods for language arts. This year was full of very different dilemmas and solutions than those I had experienced in first grade. Building community was more challenging because students changed classes. Further, by virtue of the age of the students, there was a greater emphasis on content instruction. Through educated trial and error, it ended up being a very productive year for us all.

My teaching experiences greatly influenced my attitudes toward inclusion. It was clear to me that the needs of *all* students could be met, with hard work and problem solving skills. The emphasis my coteachers and I placed on problem-solving skills was especially important. We were never content to let a less than optimal system go unchanged. We searched out and found the resources we needed, including changing desks for large tables and securing multiple copies of high-interest, low vocabulary books on topics of study. We varied our instructional methods and used a mixture of instructional groupings including whole-group and small-group instruction. We infused technology and research skills into units of study, thereby exposing students with disabilities to valuable skills they would need in middle school. In short, we were inventive and flexible, and our students were successful. It was very hard work.

As I entered my Ph.D. program, I did so thinking I could share some of the lessons I learned through experience, thus helping others miss some of the bumps in the road I encountered. As my program progressed, however, it became clear to me that instead of developing prescribed programs for teachers, I was more comfortable with examining structures to facilitate teacher learning. I believe that in most cases, teachers may be in the best position to work through their own dilemmas, much as I had during my teaching experiences. Thus, I am a proponent of developing professional teachers instead of developing programs that can be implemented with fidelity. After all, it is teachers who teach children, not programs.

Importantly, I have worked on two studies conducted at the school where I did my dissertation study. Although this study was not a direct extension of these previous studies, my participation on those projects inspired the conception of this project. During the first study, I was brought in to help analyze qualitative data collected by others on the

practices of two exemplary teachers (Williamson, Bondy, Langley, & Mayne, 2005). Thus, I had few direct interactions with the school's faculty and staff during this study.

During the second project, I had far more contact with faculty and staff. The principal, under pressure for not meeting adequate yearly progress for students with disabilities, decided to abandon the pull-out classrooms historically used at the school in favor of including students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Much of my role was behind the scenes, working directly with the professor-in-residence from a local university who had worked at the school for 6 years. I played a minor role assisting in the facilitation of monthly professional development workshops where topics of study centered on inclusion.

In addition, as part of this project I participated in one full round of team inclusion meetings. Inclusion meetings were new to the school that year and were designed to address the academic or social needs of particular students. During those meetings, I occasionally asked questions or offered suggestions to teachers. As a follow-up to this professional development work, the professor in residence and I conducted a study designed to explore the perceptions of this group of educators as they developed an inclusive program using focus groups and one-on-one interviews as data collection methods. Focus groups were facilitated by the teachers themselves; however, I conducted seven interviews with school faculty. Even though I have spent what might be considered an extended period of time working with this school, I would still characterize my presence there as somewhat of an outsider.

As a professional development school long affiliated with the University, educators at the school would claim they have been fortunate to have a professor in residence at the school for many years. As such, the professor in residence has forged

meaningful, long-lasting relationships with faculty and staff. Although she presented me as a person with some experience doing inclusion at another school in the community, and as a co-researcher on our most recent project, I believe these educators saw me more as a helper to the professor in residence than as an expert who might be able to help them with the problems they were experiencing with inclusion. My interactions were professional and cordial with faculty, and even friendly at times. However, I was not afforded insider status at this school; I was afforded privileged outsider status. As a privileged outsider, faculty perceived me as a trustworthy person with whom they could share their stories. This afforded me the unique position of researcher-learner (Glesne, 1999), a position somewhere between objective observer and subjective coparticipant. Importantly, although I spoke briefly at two of the meetings, my dialogue from those two meetings was not included as data for study purposes.

Study Context

The study was conducted at Hopewell Elementary School (a pseudonym), a school whose faculty is composed of 23 general education classroom teachers, three Success for All (Klingner, Cramer, & Harry, 2006) reading tutors, seven resource teachers (i.e., physical education, media, art, music, and dance), three special education teachers, and an administrative team comprised of the principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, fine arts facilitator, reading coach, and curriculum resource teacher. As shown in Table 3-1, teachers ranged in years of experience from 1 year to more than 30. All teachers were "highly qualified," as defined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) and thus were certified in the areas in which they taught. Of the 42 educators at the school 23 were white, 17 had African origins (i.e., African American and islanders), 1 was Hispanic, and 1 was a Pacific Islander.

Table 3-1. Faculty's years of experience

	Years of Service			
Area of responsibility	0 – 3	3 – 10	More than 10	Total
Classroom teachers	11	6	6	23
Reading tutors	2	0	1	3
Resource teachers	1	3	3	7
Special education teachers	2	0	1	3
Leadership team	0	0	6	6
Total	16	9	17	42

Student enrollment was more than 400, with African American students being the predominant ethnic group represented at the school. The vast majority of students were eligible for free or fee reduced lunch (90.9%). Many new students became members of the Hopewell school community the previous year. In addition to gaining new students through the district's recent school rezoning, the school board named Hopewell a magnet program for the arts for the first time last year. Table 3-2 presents a summary of student disability classifications by grade level, including the numbers of gifted students. Thus, new students, along with the new school policy to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms, combined to create a challenging work environment for teachers.

Table 3-2. Summary of students' disability classification by grade level

	Grade levels						
Disability	K	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Speech impaired	2	4	2	1	1	1	11
Language impaired	6	6	2	4	6	4	28
Specific learning disability	1	1	1	14	11	9	37
Emh	1	1	0	1	1	0	4
Emotionally handicapped	1	0	1	1	2	1	6
Deaf or hard of hearing	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Orthopedically impaired	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Occupational therapy	2	2	0	1	5	1	11
Autistic	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Gifted	0	0	1	3	1	2	7
Other health impaired	1	0	1	0	2	0	4
Total	14	15	9	25	31	18	112

University collaboration. To help educators with all of these changes, the school enjoyed continued participation in a professional development program for a second year developed through the local university. Topics of study during the 2004-2005 school year included selected articles on inclusion, functional behavior assessments, accommodations, behavior management, and other useful information for educators experiencing the inclusion of students with disabilities for the first time.

Inclusion team meetings. Importantly, grade-level inclusion meetings were created to address the academic and social needs of particular students. Evidence suggested that teachers found these meetings to be invaluable, with teachers consistently agreeing that more of these meetings were needed (Bondy & Williamson, 2006). These meetings continued for a second year, the year in which data were collected for this study.

Inclusion team meetings were held within grade-level or department-level teams (i.e., resources, Success for All) with one team meeting per week. Thus, meetings with each of the eight teams were held approximately every other month. Meetings were scheduled after school and were supposed to last for one hour. In addition to the grade-level or department-level team members, inclusion meeting participants included varying members of the school's administrative team (e.g., principal, behavior resource teacher, curriculum resource teacher, school guidance counselor, reading coach), the special education teacher responsible for that grade level, the district's school psychologist, and the professor in residence from the local university. Importantly, not all of the administrative team was present during each meeting. This study is situated within the context of these meetings.

Data Collection

The general aims of data collection for an inductive study are to achieve maximum variation. This need for variation influences both participant selection and data sources.

Study participants. All faculty, administrative staff, the district's school psychologist, and the professor in residence were invited to participate in this study. Informed consent of participants, as required by the University of Florida's Institution Review Board (IRB) and the school district, were obtained from all participants. Specifically, 27 general education teachers, 3 special education teachers, all 5 members of the administration team, the district's school psychologist, and the professor in residence participated in the study. This represents almost all faculty members from the school. The only faculty who did not participate were those who were absent from their teams' inclusion meeting on the day data were collected. Five participants were men. To protect their identity, all participants were given female pseudonyms.

Data sources. A total of eight inclusion meetings occurring from November 2005 through February 2006, one for all six grade levels as well as the extra departments, were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim by me. Half of the meetings lasted about 60 minutes, with the other half lasting about 90 minutes The numbers of participants at each meeting ranged from 5 to 12 (i.e., kindergarten = 10, first = 5, second = 9, third = 12, fourth = 5, fifth = 11, success for all = 5, resources = 10). This resulted in 287 pages of data.

In addition, 21 follow up interviews were conducted with faculty, with at least two or three teachers from each inclusion team represented. In addition to being varied by grade and subject taught, teachers who were interviewed represented the full range of

teaching experience from early career teachers to veteran teachers. When possible, I interviewed a veteran teacher and an early career teacher from each team. This was not possible for all teams in that some teams were composed entirely of veteran teachers. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by a paid transcriptionist and were checked for validity by a retired community college faculty member and personal friend of mine. Interviews were semi-structured (Kvale, 1996) and lasted from 15 to 30 minutes, with the vast majority lasting closer to 30 minutes. Interviews resulted in 152 pages of data.

Data analysis. As noted earlier, two analysis methods were used including inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) and discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003). I will describe the inductive analysis methods used and then the discourse analysis methods used.

To begin the analysis process, all transcripts were read in their entirety as "all inductive analysis must begin with a solid sense of what is included in the data set" (Hatch, 2002, p. 162). Next, I included an additional step of open coding all transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I added this step to make doubly sure that I was clear on exactly what was included in my data set. Frames of analysis were identified for each of my research questions. Frames for question one included all talk related to problem descriptions including student attributes, what had already been tried to resolve the problem, and problem interpretations. Frames for question two included all talk aimed at offering solutions and responses that were not necessarily solutions to problems that were raised. Frames of analysis for the third question included all talk related to the value of meetings for teachers. Finally, frames for the fourth question included sections of transcripts where teachers and other meeting participants co-constructed the problem and response to the problems.

Next, domains were created using the data marked off as frames of analysis; semantic relationships were identified. Salient domains germane to answering research questions were identified and other domains were set aside. I then reread all data inductively, looking for negative cases that would dispute my constructed domains. As a result of this process, I moved from one subdomain to a different domain. In addition, two subdomains were subsumed within another subdomain. Next, a master outline for each subdomain was created. Data excerpts for each subdomain were identified.

To begin my discourse analysis, I needed some way to select relevant samples of data for my detailed analysis (Fairclough, 2003). Inductive analyses suggested that the value teachers derived from inclusion meetings varied. Criteria were established for selecting positive and negative samples of discourse using findings from inductive analyses of teacher interviews. Specifically, positive samples were selected if they provided evidence of (a) social support, (b) learning opportunities, or (c) practical support. In addition, positive samples were selected if the moved teachers toward classroom-level solutions. Inductive analyses of teacher interviews suggested that meetings were unproductive if they failed to generate solutions. Thus, samples of dialogue were selected if they failed to generate classroom-level solutions that were acceptable to the teacher. Thus, four positive examples and four negative examples were selected, with one sample from each of the eight meetings.

Excerpts were broken into clauses for further analysis with one clause displayed per line in a table. Next, excerpts were read in their entirety and salient text was marked and preserved. Extraneous dialogue deemed minimally related or unrelated to problem and response constructions were replaced with content summaries denoted by brackets within the excerpt.

Next, speech functions and modalities were identified throughout each excerpt. As noted in the definitions section of this chapter, two main speech functions were identified: activity exchange and knowledge exchange. Activity exchanges are composed of two parts: the demand and the offer (Fairclough, 2003). Importantly, the term *demand,* as a linguistical term, is any number of verbs from *request* to *open.* For example, "I *requested* that the parent conduct a classroom observation" is a demand.

The other part of an activity exchange is offer. This might be thought of as the response to a request. Importantly, both demands and offers can be modulated. The degree of modulation suggests the degree to which the actors are committed to the obligation or necessity of the demand or offer. Specifically, a demand can be modulated in three ways. It can be (a) prescriptive (e.g., sit down), (b) modulated (e.g., you could sit down), or (c) proscriptive (e.g., don't sit down). As noted earlier, the modality chosen by actors portends their level of commitment to their demand. Similarly, the offer or response can be modulated. The offer can be (a) undertaken (e.g., I'll open the window), (b) modulated (e.g., I may open the window), or (c) refused (I won't open the window) (Fairclough, 2003). Offers and demands were identified and labeled.

The other kind of speech function is a knowledge exchange or exchange of information. Knowledge exchanges are made up of two parts: statements and questions. Statements can be (a) statements of fact about what is, was, or has been regarding the case (e.g., he has problems reading), (b) predictions of what might happen in the future including hypotheticals (e.g., he will make a one on the standardized test), and (c) evaluations (e.g., he is trying hard). In addition, statements are modulated, thus providing insights into the actor's commitment to the truth he or she is espousing. Statements can be (a) asserted as true (e.g., he is failing in math), (b) modulated (e.g., he may be failing

in math), and (c) denials (e.g., he is not failing math) (Fairclough, 2003). Statement types and modalities were identified.

The other part of knowledge exchanges is questions. Questions "elicit other's commitment to truth" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 167). As with statements, questions can be (a) nonmodalized positive (e.g., is the student passing), (b) modalized (e.g., could the student be passing), or (c) nonmodalized negative (isn't the student passing) (Fairclough). After speech functions and modalities were identified, statement (i.e., fact, irrealis, evaluation) and question types (i.e., yes/no interrogative and 'wh' interrogative) were labeled. Once these analyses were completed, interpretations were written.

Trustworthiness. Although the trustworthiness of a study is ultimately judged from the eyes of the reader, I used multiple tools to enhance the possibility that my readers will judge it so. The techniques I used to improve this possibility included (a) prolonged engagement, (b) peer debriefing, (c) multiple data source triangulation, and (d) member checking. In addition, study reports should represent the entire data set as much as possible (Hatch, 2003). To enable readers to interpret how well this was accomplished, data labels were constructed as follows. First, as noted earlier, all participants were given female pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of male participants, which were consistently applied throughout this report. Since participant roles are an important facet of this report, teacher data tags were coded with a T, leadership team member tags were coded with an L, and other professional educators were coded with OPE. Data quotes included in Chapter 4 come exclusively from inclusion meetings. Data quotes regarding the value teachers found in inclusion meetings come exclusively from teacher interviews. Thus, there is no special notation to attribute data to interviews or meetings. Finally, the date applicable data were collected is noted.

For example, the label Linda (L) 12.05.05 would mean that the quote is attributed to a leadership team member with the pseudonym of Linda and was uttered on December 5, 2005.

Work is considered more trustworthy if there is evidence of prolonged engagement (Hatch, 2003). I have been involved with this school for 3 years. Thus, my presence at the school had likely become less intrusive. Although there is evidence in meeting transcripts that participants were aware of and in some cases spoke to the tape recorder, my earlier participation in these meetings before the onset of my study assures me that the meetings I observed and recorded were typical. In addition to prolonged engagement, peer debriefing was an import tool for ensuring the trustworthiness of this study.

As noted earlier, the professor in residence and I have collaborated on multiple research projects at this school. Thus, it was only natural for me to discuss my work on this project with her. Specifically, by phone and in person, we have discussed this project from data collection through data analysis. Her contribution has been invaluable. In addition to peer debriefing, as will be seen in the analysis chapters, I took care to triangulate as many findings as was possible between the inclusion meeting transcripts and teacher interviews. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I did member checking with my participants.

Member checking was done in two ways. First, preliminary findings were presented at a faculty meeting where most of my participants gave me feedback. In addition, at that meeting I asked for volunteers who would be willing to continue to check my findings with me by email. Four volunteers signed up to do this. Thus, whenever I wanted to check something out, I did so by emailing one or more of these volunteers.

Limitations. As with any study, this study had multiple limitations. First, this study was conducted at one urban elementary school in the southeastern United States. Thus, readers will ultimately decide whether or not findings here are generalizable to other settings (Glesne, 1999). Second, much of this work is interpretive; thus, others looking at the same transcripts might construct different and equally valid interpretations.

Finally, since data were collected during naturally occurring meetings, I did not feel comfortable directing participants to behave differently than they normally would. Thus, unlike focus groups where ground rules can suggest what might help preserve every word of data (e.g., no overlapping talk, no sidebars, limited numbers of participants), teachers behaved normally during meetings. Consequently, there were multiple sidebars occurring simultaneously and lots and lots of overlapping talk. In the case of one meeting, talk was obliterated by the cutting out of dinosaurs from paper for an impending play. Thus, even though I transcribed the tapes myself and worked very hard to get every word verbatim, there were sections of meeting tapes that were not discernable. This was far less of a problem with the interview tapes, for obvious reasons.

Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapter 4, findings from inductive analyses of grade-level inclusion meetings are presented. Specifically, the kinds of problems and responses to those problems are described. To begin Chapter 5, results from teacher interviews are presented to address how these meetings were valued by teachers. Once this foundation is established, results from discourse analyses are presented. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes with an overview of the findings of this study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 4
PROBLEM AND RESPONSE CONSTRUCTIONS GENERATED IN GRADE-LEVEL INCLUSION MEETINGS

Introduction

Since scholars have suggested, based upon teacher reports, that problem-solving meetings are helpful for teachers to learn new ways of working (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003; Chalfant & Pysh, 1989), it is important to examine the possible learning opportunities teachers have during meetings. Teacher learning during inclusion meetings is influenced by three factors. First, possible learning opportunities are bounded by the kinds of problems discussed during meetings. Specifically, if particular problems are not discussed at meetings, opportunities to learn new things related to those problems would not exist. Thus, in order to understand what kinds of learning opportunities exist at meetings, it is important to better understand the kinds of problems teachers are discussing at inclusion meetings.

Second, learning opportunities are bounded by the kinds of knowledge and experiences meeting participants hold. Thus, understanding the kinds of responses inclusion team members offer in response to problems provides insight into members' knowledge and experiences. Finally, learning opportunities can be influenced by how discussions unfold. For example, if discussions remain focused on problems within the student, problems within the classroom might not be discussed. The purpose of this study was to better understand the "black box" (Little, 2003, p. 915) of inclusion meetings as a means for the professional development of teachers at an urban elementary school by

understanding the kinds of learning opportunities these meetings afford. Three research questions guided this study:

- What kinds of problems are described at inclusion meetings?
- What kinds of responses are developed by the group in response to problems presented?
- What value do these meetings have for teachers?
- How does dialogue constructed during inclusion meetings shape problem construction and group responses?

What follows in Chapter 4 is a background description of inclusion meetings including the purpose behind the meetings as well as the procedures used to facilitate meetings. Next, in response to my first two research questions, is a typology of the kinds of problems and responses to those problems discussed at eight inclusion meetings held at Hopewell Elementary School during the 2005-2006 school year. These findings helped establish a foundation for Chapter 5, which addresses my third question.

Specifically, Chapter 5 addresses how the dialogue of these meetings shaped both the construction of problems and the responses to those problems using discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003). Using results from inductive analyses (Hatch, 2002), as well as teacher reports about the value of inclusion meetings discussed during teacher interviews, samples of discourse were selected to illustrate the influence of dialogue in constructing problems and responses to those problems during inclusion meetings.

General Description of Inclusion Meetings

Inclusion meetings were held at Hopewell Elementary to assist teachers as they included students with disabilities in regular education classrooms in response to the school's failure to meet adequate yearly progress for this segment of the school's population. Talk about high-stakes testing permeated almost every conversation, as exemplified in this quote from a member of the leadership team: "All children will be

encouraged to do their utmost on the exam . . . it's a high stakes test—do I need to say more?" (Andra [L] 11.29.05). Thus, meetings were focused on helping students pass standardized exams, so they could progress to the next grade level. Exemplary student performance on exams would, in turn, help the school shed its label as a *school in need of improvement* under No Child Left Behind requirements.

Participants typically included grade-level teaching faculty, members from the leadership team, special education faculty, and other professional educators (OPE), the professor in residence, and the school psychologist. Meetings were held after student dismissal and lasted from an hour to an hour and a half. Notably, half of the meetings were longer than an hour and exceeded the normal teacher workday.

Purpose of Meetings

Out of eight meeting transcripts, there were five references to the purpose of these meetings. Meeting purposes were variously described by Andra, a leadership team member and meeting facilitator, as meeting to "talk about students who need extra support," students "who have flared up," and to "address teacher concerns." The most explicit purpose statement found was uttered by Meg, an OPE, during one meeting: "the whole purpose is to get everybody's wisdom all in one place at one time to help figure out what's up with a kid and what to do." The "what to do" was constructed as next steps for students being discussed. Importantly, it was not strictly defined as solving the problem.

Meeting Procedures

Most inclusion meetings followed a similar procedure. Generally, meetings began with the naming of students who were discussed at previous meetings by the facilitator (i.e., principal or the assistant principal). Next, updates on students were provided by

homeroom teachers, or in the case of the two teams that were grouped by department, by the teacher with the concern. Updates generally included information on academic progress including reading levels and performance on recent formal and informal assessments, as well as personal histories of students including disability status, retention status, family considerations, and health status. As updates were provided, teachers described the kinds of problems of practice they were experiencing with students.

Typically, these descriptions were socially constructed with input from all members of the team with whom the student had contact. This coconstruction of problems was made possible due to structural factors at the school, which facilitated student contact with multiple faculty members. Structural factors included the Success for All School (Klingner et al., 2006) reading model, the fine arts school model providing two resource periods daily to all students, and the departmentalization of classes by subject at the intermediate-grade levels. Further, various responsibilities of leadership team members brought them into regular contact with many of the students discussed during meetings (e.g., lunch duty, disciplinary processes, special education referrals).

During inclusion meetings, team members variously posed questions and offered suggestions to presenting teachers. These exchanges sometimes took on characteristics of a brainstorming session. Overlapping talk was common. In most cases but certainly not in all as noted above, problem descriptions were met with “short-term actions” (Meg [OPE] 1.24.06) that would be taken to mediate the problem. Occasionally, logistical concerns such as getting students to tutoring on time or facilitating an aide’s schedule ruptured predominantly student-centered talk. Finally, time permitting, new challenges faced by teachers were discussed.

Student Problems Discussed/Addressed

During inclusion meetings, teachers discussed two kinds of students about whom they were concerned—students who were failing to progress academically and students with challenging behaviors. Since a few students were discussed at more than one meeting, problems were used as the unit of analysis. A little more than half of the problems discussed were related to academics, with slightly less than half being related to behaviors. These were highly personalized accounts. Often, multiple inclusion team members knew much about the students they were discussing. Importantly, there was some overlap between the problems of these students, which will be described in more detail below; however, based upon teacher problem descriptions, behavior issues, when present, were usually viewed as the primary issue to be resolved. Thus for analytical purposes, students described as having both academic problems and behavior problems were described under behavior problems.

In addition, during the initial analysis, two additional categories emerged that are not presented here. Because those categories contained so few problems (i.e., one student problem each), I went back to the original data to determine whether or not they were substantively different from the other categories; in both cases, categories were subsumed into other categories. Thus, the descriptions presented here represent only those problems wherein a substantive number of students with those problems (i.e., more than five) were discussed.

Many studies have suggested that teachers seek assistance with academic problems experienced by their students (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Eidle et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 1996). However, findings from this study provide more contextualized accounts of these problems. Descriptions of two kinds of students characterized as failing

to progress academically emerged during inclusion meeting discussions including students who exhibited high effort coupled with low performance and students who exhibited inconsistent performance. What follows is a description of how meeting participants described these particular students and their problems, including evidence teachers cited to justify their concerns.

High Effort Coupled with Low Performance

One group of students about whom teachers were concerned was described as trying hard academically without success. Generally, students within this category either qualified for special education services under high-incidence categories such as specific learning disabilities, mild mental retardation, or speech and language impairments, or were students whom teachers believed needed special education testing and services. Most of these problems were brought up by third-grade teachers, the year students faced mandatory retention policies. For example, Jenni described her student noting, “I know she’s going to be tested into the ESE program, and she’s probably going to go right in” (11.20.05). Teachers (i.e., Carrie, Carmen, Jordis) and Corey, an OPE, occasionally discussed children they described as “borderline.” These were students who were tested and did not qualify for special educational services. In addition to describing student’s disability status, teachers typically reported on the student’s history of retention or the possibility of being retained in the future. A history of retention added to the sense of urgency to help students, as noted by Jordis: “Adam has been retained in first grade, and I think his foresight [assessment] was unscorable. It’s so bad” (11.30.05).

Students showing little or no progress were often described during inclusion team meetings in terms of particular academic tasks that were challenging for them. For example, Jenni described two students whose reading “comprehension is very low right

now and their fluency . . . math is low too" (11.30.05). Similarly, Aisha described a student with reading comprehension problems noting, "I'll ask her a question" about her reading, and her response will "be related to the topic, but unrelated to the reading" (11.30.05). In addition, teachers described memory and generalizing difficulties experienced by these students. For example, Cori described her student's problem remembering words when she read

> Even from one sentence to the next, she would be reading along, and she would . . . go through the [decoding] process, and the word would come up again in the next sentence, and she would have to go through the entire [decoding] process; it was like she had never seen the word before. (2.7.06)

Discussions about students always included statements about student effort. Carrie explained her student's effort this way: **"**She tries, it's not like she's not trying. She's trying but the progress just isn't coming, the growth just isn't coming" (11.30.05). Of another student, Jordis averred, "Bless her heart, she tries" (11.30.05). In addition to describing these students as hard working, they were often described as being very likeable by teachers. "He has the cutest personality, cutest. I mean it's just adorable" (Jeni [T] 11.30.05). Thus, these were likeable students who were described in terms of skill deficits alongside effort.

Teachers justified their lack-of-progress claims by discussing how students failed to respond to supports and interventions provided. Typical supports and interventions described by teachers included moving students to lower reading groups, intensive academic instruction, and curricular modifications. For example, Jenni noted that students she considered to be struggling academically "are now in tutoring, and we're not seeing much progress with them" (11.30.05). In addition to discussing how students failed to respond to supports and interventions, teachers also shared evidence of academic classroom struggles.

Teachers presented evidence from assessments and class work that suggested students were struggling. For example, students at Hopewell were required to participate in simulations of impending state assessments. Results from simulations were frequently mentioned as teams discussed student progress. In particular, teachers discussed differences in the raw scores from one testing point to the next (e.g., "she scored a 34, which is low, but I mean she's definitely making progress, cause that's not an easy test, and to make a 55 [during the second simulation], that's 21 points" [Olga [L] 11.29.05]). In addition to these more formal kinds of assessments, it was not uncommon for seasoned teachers to use their own judgments as evidence of concern. This is typified by a statement made by Jenni, a third-grade teacher. "She's a very hard worker, but I foresee her making ones [the lowest score on the state's exam] on both the reading and the math again" (11.30.05).

Inconsistent Academic Performance

Students described as having inconsistent academic performance were characterized by their ability to do very well at times and very poorly at other times. Unlike students described as working hard but not making progress, these students were perceived as being capable but lacking effort. Teachers described students as "lazy" (Paula [T] 11.29.05), "off-task" (Jordis [T] 11.30.05), and "spacey" (Jasmine [T] 11.29.05). Medication also came up as a topic of discussion regarding these students. Candace described her student as follows:

> I really do believe he is very capable, 'cause I've sat down with him one-on-one, listened to him read, had him go back into the article to pick the right answers, and he did it; but then he'll sit there and be lazy when you don't push him. (11.30.05)

Inconsistent performance also was noted among subjects. For example, Bonnie described one of her students this way:

> He comes to reading, he's prepared, he's ready to go, every once in awhile he'll daydream and I have to snap my fingers to get him back, but he does the work, he does the Pause Strategy [a reading comprehension strategy], he Proves everything [a reading comprehension strategy], he does what he's supposed to. Then he goes math . . . then he comes to science, I don't know what his problem is in science, it's the weirdest thing. (11.29.05)

Students also were described as "tired all the time" (Olga [L] 11.29.05) or dragging; however, even this behavior was inconsistent: "He's not tired when he wants to clown with his friends" (Jasmine [T] 11.29.05). Thus, students were characterized as capable, but often off-task and inconsistent performers.

Since there were fewer data points (i.e., failing test scores) to substantiate problem claims for students described as having inconsistent performance, teachers relied more on professional judgment across multiple teachers to justify the existence of problems. For example, a fifth-grade student had three teachers making the same kinds of comments about him, while a third-grade student had two teachers expressing concern. In addition, the only objective data point described by teachers was frequency of absences. Finally, the disability status of one of the students was noted by teachers: "He's staffed for only social/emotional" (Candace [T] 11.30.05).

Challenging Behaviors

Findings from this study were consistent with existing studies suggesting that teachers reported needing assistance with students with a wide range of behavior concerns, or what some studies termed socio-emotional concerns (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Eidle et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 1996). Unlike previous studies, findings described here provide salient details about characteristics of reported problems, as classification

schemes often lose meaning (Berger & Luckman, 1966). In addition, findings shared here illuminate how teachers justified the concerns they brought forward at meetings. Teachers described four kinds of challenging student behaviors including (a) attendance problems, (b) behavior problems and low academic performance, (c) persistent annoying small behaviors, and (d) aggressive behaviors.

Absences. Attendance was especially concerning for teachers because of the high-stakes testing environment, as is suggested by the comments of Jenni:

> She's been out three days this week and . . . I don't want anybody saying to me at the end of the year that I didn't—you know what I mean [did not do everything possible]. Like she's absent so much, there's no way she'd pass the [state's high-stakes exam]. (11.30.05)

Problems were described and justified in terms of the numbers of absences and interventions already tried. For example, while discussing the problem of a fifth-grade student who often came to school but left early after slipping to the clinic to call his mom, a member of the leadership team met with the mom to ask for her help. She reported that the mother said, "I don't want the children to be out. They complain a lot, and I'm going to stop coming at the drop of a hat . . . but apparently, she's still continuing to do that" (Andra [L] 11.30.05). Teachers reported sending the truancy officer to check on another student with high rates of absenteeism. Bonnie reported using praise to reinforce her student's attendance. "I actually paid him a compliment. Oh, Jon, it's nice to see you again. This is getting better, I like this. See, it's nice when you're here, I really appreciate it" (11.29.05). Finally, teachers noted that these students had missed so much school that they were failing many of their subjects.

Behavior problems and low academics. Salient characteristics of these students included the presence of serious problems coupled with behavior and academic problems.

Teachers suggested that behaviors influenced poor academics and vice versa. Behaviors were often interpreted by teachers as ways for students to escape academic instruction. For example, while the team was discussing how one student threw a chair during class, Mildred noted "that's his way of escaping" work ([T] 12.13.05).

Students were described as "lacking self-control" (Lexa [T] 1.31.06), with some teachers reporting that these students often displayed aggressive behaviors. Teachers noted that many problems occurred during transitions and large-group teacher presentations. Aggressive behaviors in younger students included "biting" (Nicole [T] 1.24.06) and "kicking" (Cait [L] 1.24.06) and for older students included "throwing things" (Lexa [T] 1.31.06) and being generally disruptive. Thus, students had frequent encounters with the front office for behavior referrals, and in some cases, suspensions.

Teachers also mentioned problems with peer relations. For example, a primary teacher said of one of her students, "I've been asked to keep [this student away] from several of my other students by parents of my other students [in] my centers" (Mandy [T] 1.10.06). Finally, teachers also mentioned that often these students had low verbal abilities, with one student being described as "nonverbal with adults" (Meg [OPE] 1.31.06).

Academically, students were described as reluctant to engage in tasks. For example, Lexa reported, "I'm having the most challenge being successful with Carl. It is just . . . he avoids and avoids and avoids" (1.31.06). Another teacher observed that a student wanted to go to the bathroom when work was too challenging. In addition, teachers noticed very little academic progress. For example, Mandy explained, "I just tested him again today um and there's not a lot of progress in reading—he's pretty much plateaued" (1.10.06).

Multiple kinds of support were given to these students including peer support, tutoring, and academic modifications, such as breaking academic tasks into smaller pieces. However, teachers characterized academic supports as ineffective in helping students, as noted by a fourth-grade teacher:

> This child is absolutely not functioning in the classroom. There is nothing he can do on his own, and even with him sitting one-to-one with [the special education teacher], he barely, and I'm not exaggerating, can write his name; he's a fourth grade student who's supposed to be in fifth grade, and I just really like our inclusion model, but we are not meeting his needs; we are not even coming close to meeting this child's needs. (Debra [T] 12.13.05)

Notably, the only intervention for behavior described by teachers other than referrals, suspensions, and timeouts was seeing the guidance counselor on a limited basis.

Annoying and persistent small behaviors. Students with annoying and persistent behaviors were described by teachers as "easily distracted" (Bonnie [T] 11.29.05; Jane [T] 12.13.05) and "disruptive" (Mandy [T] 1.10.06). Academically, students were described as working at grade level or above. Common teacher complaints included calling out and talking out of turn. Teachers noted younger students had difficulties keeping their hands to themselves and running in the classroom, whereas older students were described as avoiding responsibility for their own behaviors. Lexa described a recent incident with one of her students this way:

> He'll hop up and run go get scissors 'cause he'll want to cut his painting up or something you know he just . . . it's not too hard to keep on top of that . . . I don't usually get him in trouble I say, "Oh, no no no, that's not for this project. Remember, for this project we're just using these materials." (1.31.06)

They were also typified based on things they did not do—they were not aggressive students, although they often had difficulties with peers. One teacher described her student as follows, "The reason you don't see discipline referrals is that it's not like necessarily disrespectful all the time or aggressive, nasty behavior, it's just

constant" (Debra 12.13.05). Jane put it this way, "It's not like he's hurting somebody or doing anything terrible, but it's the accumulation of it all" (12.13.05). Thus, these students were considered a problem on the basis of the accumulation of small but annoying behaviors.

As with other kinds of student problems, the fact that the student was experiencing difficulties in multiple settings was of concern for teachers. For example, during the fourth grade meeting, both classroom teachers present made similar comments about one student. In addition, teachers noted that some of these students had been formally diagnosed with ADHD.

Since the school had far fewer accommodations and supports for students experiencing behavior problems than for academic problems, families were perceived as the best source of help for teachers with these kinds of problem behaviors. Teachers, however, reported being frustrated with family interactions. For example, one parent was described as blaming the school for problems, suggesting that her son was acting out because he was not being challenged. Most parents did acknowledge the problems of their children. Notably, that did not improve the quality of teacher/parent interactions. For example, a kindergarten teacher expressed frustration that her student's mother missed four scheduled meetings. Debra, a fourth-grade teacher cited her encounter with the parent of one of these children thusly:

> Not too long ago, I had an hour conference on a Friday with his mother, we've made repeated phone calls, there's no reading homework coming in, I mean they seem like conscientious parents, they give you the right words, but there's no follow through. (12.13.05)

Finally, at the mid-point of the school year, teachers reported that a parent said she continued to have difficulty finding a doctor to seek treatment for her son's ADHD and had therefore not been able to help.

Aggressive behaviors. Teachers described problems with students who displayed significant behavior problems, who were also on grade level academically. Teachers also noticed that once these students were actively engaged in work, there were fewer behavior problems.

It was the severe behaviors, however, that teacher found most troubling. For example, one teacher described a student as "making unsafe trouble" (Jane [T] 12.13.05). Unsafe trouble included such things as "hurting people" (Debra [T] 12.13.05) and "throwing things" (Mildred [T] 12.13.05). Teachers felt they had to keep a watchful eye on these students at all times. Behaviors were often categorized as being "aggressive" (Debra [T] 12.13.05) or "defiant" (Linda [L] 1.31.06). Frequency of disciplinary problems was discussed by teachers with the behaviors of one student deemed severe enough for teachers to recommend that the student be evaluated for special education placement in the district's separate school for students with severe emotional disturbances.

Teachers justified their concerns about these students by describing parental acknowledgment of aggression problems. The fact that one student had been diagnosed with ADHD and was taken off the medication added to the perceived veracity of the claim that there was indeed a problem with this student. Finally, the presence of student difficulties in multiple classrooms was another way teachers justified their concerns.

Responses/Suggestions to Address Problems

Responses or suggestions to problems with students discussed during inclusion meetings included (a) family-level responses, (b) classroom-level responses, (c) school-level responses, and (d) responses that suggested no changes for students. Family-level responses and classroom-level responses were discussed far more frequently than school-

level responses and responses that suggested no changes. What follows is a description of each kind of response. Descriptions include details about the responses, the kinds of problems that were being addressed, and how teams supported or justified their particular responses.

Family-Level Responses

Faculty at the school considered families to be important to the overall success of students. Thus, in response to teacher concerns about students, it was common for inclusion teams to suggest involving families directly in the educational process of their children. Involving families was recommended for all student-problem types. Teams suggested involving families by (a) providing families with additional materials to help their child at home, (b) convening a family solutions team meeting (FSTM), and (c) using the home/school liaison to gain access to families.

One recommendation made by inclusion team members for students who were struggling academically was to send materials for families to use to work with their children at home. Suggested materials included laminated sight word cards, sight word lists, and reading packages. For example, during one meeting, a member of the leadership team suggested sending home sight word lists multiple times: “Take you a ream of paper, and um send it home as a packet for the holidays. Put it on red paper, if you have to or green paper . . . just send it in a different format” (Andra [L] 12.06.05). In addition, there was discussion at two inclusion meetings about creating parent workshops to help parents learn how to better help their children. Teachers’ experiences enlisting parent support inspired these suggestions.

Teachers at Hopewell frequently asked families to assist their children at home with school work with some success. Thus, sending home materials for families to use

with their children was not a novel suggestion to address academic concerns for students. For example, Carrie's report of how she involved a parent exemplifies this:

> I have been working with mom since the first day of school, sending extra materials home, this is what we do in class, teaching, you know, showing mom how we do it in class. Giving her more reading stuff, giving her, you know, the vocabulary list, um. Sending things home that she's done in class for mom to go over with her outside of class um I've sent home extra reading books so that she can be ahead of what Carmen's doing for the reading class and she can go over vocabulary with her mom and reread stories to practice the fluency on the words out loud. (11.30.05)

In addition to securing parental assistance at home, inclusion team members frequently suggested involving families in problem solving meetings referred to as Family Solutions Team Meetings (FSTMs).

Convening FSTMs was the most frequent family-level response. FSTMs were recommended for a variety of student-problem types including (a) students with inconsistent academic performance, (b) absences, and (c) persistent annoying behaviors. Guidelines for FSTMs were generated at the beginning of the school year and were available for teachers in a "packet" and in the "handbook" (Linda [L] 12.06.05). Stated purposes for these meetings included discussion with families about student problems with academics, behavior, and attendance. Meetings were intended to include family members, all teachers who had direct contact with the student, as well as school administrators. FSTMs were designed to be precursors to EPTs, although as noted by Linda, a leadership team member, "not every Family Solutions will result in an EPT referral and then testing" (12.06.05).

Often, teams suggested convening these meetings when problems at school could only be handled from home (e.g., behavior related to medication issues, absences). There were, however, other occasions when FSTMs were recommended for challenging classroom behaviors such as moving around during class and calling out because, as

Linda pointed out, “behavior is one of the things that the family solutions team can take a lead on; and we need to sit with all of the stakeholders and come up with strategies to help this child be successful” (12.13.05). Arguably, the “stakeholders” for help with classroom instruction (i.e., reading teacher, math teacher, school counselor, behavior resource teacher) were already at the table during the inclusion team meeting. Thus, this recommendation may have prolonged the amount of time needed to find ways to best mitigate the problem.

The final suggestion to involve parents was for the home/school liaison to visit the parent on behalf of the school. This recommendation to seek the assistance of the home/school liaison to bring family members to school was made to address a kindergarten teacher’s concern that a parent did not show up for a meeting with teachers on four occasions. In particular, teachers were concerned about the student’s behavior. This problem was complicated by teacher turnover; thus, it was reasoned that this meeting would also give the new teacher an opportunity to speak directly with the parent.

Classroom-Level Responses

Classroom-level responses included suggestions or responses to (a) consider how the student was functioning in the classroom, (b) change teaching methods to better address student needs, and (c) influence student motivation. These suggestions were made for students with all types of problems except absences.

Recommendations to consider how the student was functioning in the classroom emerged in two ways. First, a more formal route to establishing student functioning was discussed for students already labeled with disabilities. For a student with low academics and behavior problems, the team recommended the district’s behavior specialist come into the classroom and observe, thinking that “she might have pointers” (Linda [L]

12.13.05) for ways to improve problems with both behavior and academics in classroom. The team also discussed the possibility of doing an Individual Educational Plan update so that a formal functional behavior assessment (FBA) could be done. By design, FBAs define the conditions under which undesirable behaviors occur, which is the first step toward establishing ways to better help the student behave acceptably in the classroom.

The second way this occurred was through teachers responding to questions about the student's behavior in the classroom posed by various team members. For example, one of the resource teachers made the following observation about a student with persistent annoying behaviors in response to inclusion team members' questions: "I do have movement problems with him um the first 5 or 10 minutes of class time during my direct instruction" (Lexa [T] 1.31.06). She went on to suggest that "maybe it's just the way it's [class] structured or something that he has trouble handling it" (Lexa [T] 1.31.06). A bit later in the discussion, she remembered that students were coming to her after the intensive 90-minute reading block. This led to the team brainstorming ways to allow all students to move (e.g., marching, stretching) before she began giving directions.

In another example, by answering the question "when does your student work best" (Meg [OPE] 1.31.06), one of the resource teachers decided that her student needed simplified tasks and directions given one at a time for the student to be most successful. Another teacher realized that her student performed best when she set the tone for class early by greeting him at the door, as well as when she put extra effort forward in offering him pats on the back and praise. Thus, instead of relying on an outside observer to assist with defining optimal learning environments for students, teachers determined their own answers through discussion and reflection. In addition to matching classroom interactions

to student needs through discussion, inclusion teams made recommendations to use different teaching methods.

During several inclusion meetings, teachers brought forward particular concerns about problems with students' reading comprehension. Thus, a lot of talk was constructed around different ways to improve students' reading comprehension. Sometimes, teachers shared ways of teaching particular things. After hearing the concerns from an early career teacher about a student who was struggling with reading comprehension, a teacher with more experience made the following suggestion:

> I didn't start with the textbook with my kids because to me, a 20-page story is discouraging. I remember I was a struggling reader when I was a kid. It took me 3 hours to read 17 pages in a basal reader. I'll never forget that. So I didn't start that way, and I started with the articles on paper. Keisha and Gary [two students] were saying that once I get down to the bottom of the page, [they] can't remember what the top of the page said. So we stopped, and we covered up the bottom of the page, and we read one paragraph. I have them tell me what that paragraph said, in their own words, or they could write it down in the margins what the paragraph said, and then once they understood that paragraph, then we moved on to the next paragraph. And it wasn't like we were tackling the whole thing at once, we were tackling little bit by little bit. (Carrie [T] 1.30.05)

Another example occurred during a second grade inclusion meeting where it was recommended that teachers use big books and word banks to make words more meaningful for word-calling students. In other meetings, technology was suggested as a potential help for students with reading problems including the use of specialized computer reading programs, as well as older technology such as reading masters, which say the word printed on a specialized card via a magnetic strip. Thus, teachers often shared particular ways of teaching with their colleagues during inclusion meetings.

Other important classroom-level suggestions were related to finding ways to motivate students. For example, Carrie found that reading guides were both useful and motivating for her students:

> They have . . . lines, two white lines on the top and this translucent bright yellow high-lighted strip. To see my kids get so excited, my 10 reading kids, and boy, they were following along and they knew where their partner was, and they were so on-task, just to see this yellow strip over one word, and they could follow along with each other, they knew that their partner was on the right thing, um. To see the enthusiasm with those kids today, with just this new tool, was amazing. (1.30.05).

In another example, when an intermediate teacher noted that one of her students enjoyed "clowning" with his friends instead of working, it was suggested that student might need to work with peers to better maintain his engagement. Finally, another response to teacher concerns was to suggest teachers use reinforcement for academic performance. For example, one of the reading tutors described a student who decided "to read stories creatively."

> He's a child that is capable of reading and I don't know what has transpired because I know that the first semester he was doing really well . . . [He] will sound out a word . . . and he's made the correct sounds . . . [now] he will just stick any word in. The next thing that I know, he's just making up the story. (Rosemary [T] 2.07.06)

The team agreed with the teacher's own suggestion that using extrinsic reinforcement (i.e., M & Ms), in addition to letting this student write creative stories, might help the situation.

Importantly, classroom conditions cannot always be changed, such as the need for teachers to give directions. Thus, the team often made suggestions to help the student make changes in his or her behavior. For example, it was suggested during a meeting that for one student identified as having trouble listening to teacher directions that the teacher bargain with the student. The bargain would clarify for the student what was coming next, and what the student needed to do to participate. Meg, an OPE, suggested model language for the bargain as follows:

> Say we're going to do this [name the task] . . . and I want you to be able to do this with everybody. Are you going to be able to—and you know, name a few specific things you need to have him do. Do you think this is going to work? (1.31.06)

Finally, it was recommended that serious attention be given to establishing relationships with students; especially with students who displayed aggressive behaviors. For example, teachers at the meeting described how problems with aggression in their classrooms diminished once they reached out to the student on a more personal level. Ruth explained how she did it:

> I've been going to see him about twice a week in the mornings. I just sit down and we talk . . . I just check in and ask . . . do you play football, you know, what are you doing, can I sit, can I watch the news with you, that kind of thing. Now he's like when he does come to me it's special, and I made him a leader of a team, and um he's doing great for me. He smiles, and he's happy when I see him.

Thus, the recommendation was to simply get to know the child better and give him or her extra, more positive attention.

School-Level Responses

Occasionally, inclusion team members recommended changes in placements. In particular, placement changes were recommended for students who were struggling academically with and without behavior problems. In addition, inclusion team members suggested changes in placement for students who were deemed overly aggressive.

First, when teachers expressed concerns that students were not progressing academically, inclusion team members suggested that EPT meetings be called to begin the special education referral process. This recommendation was made multiple times during a meeting with second-grade teachers, the year before students were subject to retention for failing to pass the state exam. With the exception of one teacher, second-grade teachers were not in the habit of referring students for special education; thus by third grade, there was a backlog of students needing to be tested. This prompted a leadership team member to cajole teachers to "get the referrals in early, go on—I would want you all to go on and do your referrals, do not have them stacking up so that we have 20 or more sitting right now sitting in the third grade hopper" (Andra [L] 12.06.05).

Other placement changes suggested by inclusion team members were related to students with behaviors that inclusion team members described as "extreme." For these cases of extreme behaviors, inclusion team members suggested placements in alternate schools for students with severe behavior problems be considered. In a related recommendation, inclusion team members also suggested that students with challenging behaviors participate in a district problem called Character Counts, which emphasized behavior modification.

No Recommendations for Change

There were two circumstances when inclusion team members recommended no changes—cases where it was clearly demonstrated that teachers were doing everything possible to help students who were struggling and cases where parents indicated an unwillingness to have their children tested and/or staffed for special education services. Importantly, most of these recommendations were made during the third grade inclusion meeting, the grade at which students could be retained for failure to pass the state's high-stakes assessment. Because of the gravitas of possible retention, many of the school's strongest teachers were placed at that grade level. Confidence in these teachers is evident in comments made at the beginning of this meeting by Andra, one of the leadership team members:

> One thing about this team, Pam, that you may not know is they are hard-working group of young ladies. They take everything they do seriously, so I would almost tell you that as we go around the table, they will have discussed and they almost have a consensus about the children that we will need to talk about this afternoon as far as who will need extra support. (11.30.05)

In addition, because of the high-stakes testing environment, third-grade teachers displayed heightened anxiety over concerns about the lack of progress being made by some of their students. Thus, one response from the team was to suggest that teachers

continue to have high but realistic expectations for students. For example, Jenni described all of the interventions she was doing with a particular student she had concerns about:

> I'm doing a lot of hands on; I pull them into IAI (intensive academic instruction) all the time, Cate's in after-school tutoring. I know she's going to tutoring outside the school on Saturdays. It's kind of one of those things where I don't want to overwhelm her so much. She tries so hard. That kid never gives up. (11.30.05)

Jenni went on to explain to the inclusion team that she wanted to be sure that she was doing everything possible, to which Meg, an OPE, replied, "Maybe the children are making the progress they can make right now" (11.30.05). Thus, teachers were reminded that it might not be reasonable to expect a student with learning disabilities to progress at the same rate as typical students and that progress might better be defined in smaller increments.

Another somewhat related response to teacher concerns about students who were failing to progress was to simply recommend that all interventions and supports in place at the time of the meeting be continued. This recommendation sometimes occurred when the student was already labeled with a learning disability, and the team concluded that everything possible both inside and outside the classroom was being done to help the student, including access to accommodations for the state's high stakes assessment. On other occasions, the recommendation to do nothing more was suggested when parents declined to have students tested for special educational services, as is noted by one of the school's leaders in the following excerpt:

> She's [the mother] not oblivious to the [high-stakes test] or what's coming up, and she knows what a one [the lowest score on the state's standardized assessment] may mean on her child's test, then I'm not overly [concerned] as I am with these [others]. I am concerned, but not overly, because she knows what her child faces. (Andra [L] 11.30.05)

Thus, the inclusion team recommended that the teacher continue with the accommodations and supports already in place for that student.

Summary of Findings about Problems and Responses to Problems

Inclusion team participants offered highly personalized accounts of students they were concerned about in classrooms. Teachers described what they understood about students' academic performance, reporting data from formal and informal assessments. They reported what they knew about students' peer relationships and families. Often, teachers offered interpretations of why particular problems were occurring.

The kinds of problems discussed by teachers during inclusion meetings fell into two broad categories—problems related to academics and problems related to behavior. Specifically, inclusion team members discussed students who were failing to progress, including students who put forth effort and students whom teachers considered to put forth intermittent effort. Concerns about behaviors included concerns for students with low academic success coupled with behavior problems, persistent annoying small behaviors, and aggressive behaviors.

In response to problems, inclusion team members offered a range of possible solutions, which were considered appropriate based upon previous successes with recommendations for other students (e.g., teaching strategies, family strategies) or established guidelines for enacting particular responses (e.g., FSTMs). Responses to problems discussed included recommendations for intervention at the family level, classroom level, and school level.

Teams suggested involving families by (a) providing families with additional materials to help their child at home, (b) convening a family solutions team meeting (FSTM), and (c) using the home/school liaison to gain access to families. Classroom-

level responses included suggestions or responses to (a) consider how the student was functioning in the classroom, (b) change teaching methods to better address student needs, and (c) influence student motivation. School-level responses included recommendations that placement changes be considered for particular students. Finally, there were also responses that called for teachers to simply continue all that they were doing for students. Two circumstances occasioned recommendations for no change—cases where it was clearly demonstrated that teachers were doing everything possible to help students who were struggling and cases where parents indicated an unwillingness to have their children tested and/or staffed for special education services.

CHAPTER 5
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FINDINGS

Since discourse analysis is best used in combination with other methods (Fairclough, 2003), inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) of teacher interviews was conducted to better understand the perceptions teachers held about the value of inclusion meetings. Teacher interviews revealed two important perceptions teachers had of inclusion meetings. First, teachers described benefits, or what one participant referred to as "trickle downs," they derived from their participation in these meetings. In addition, teachers described problems they perceived with meetings. Chapter 5 opens with these descriptions, as these analyses provide a foundation for the rest of the chapter.

Specifically, the purpose of Chapter 5 is to address how dialogue during inclusion meetings shaped both the construction of problems and problem responses using discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003). Following the description of teacher perceptions of the value of inclusion meetings, I briefly describe how selected samples of text were identified and how I employed discourse analysis on these samples (greater detail on both of these can be found in Chapter 3). Next, I use discourse analysis to explain how dialogue shapes both problem constructions and responses to problems within inclusion meetings. Finally, a summary of important dialogic features of productive meeting dialogue is provided.

Teacher Perceptions of the Value of Inclusion Meetings

Participants described the value of meetings in terms of benefits derived from meetings and the problems that decreased the value of certain meetings. The description

of participants' perceptions of the value of various meetings helps to clarify benefits teachers felt they experienced from meetings and problems that made meetings seem unproductive for teachers.

Benefits of Inclusion Meetings

Analysis of teacher interviews suggest that teachers perceive four main benefits from inclusion meetings including (a) feeling social support for their work from colleagues, (b) learning new things about the profession of teaching, (c) gaining practical help with problems, and (d) promoting improved practice through reflection.

Social support. One of the kindergarten teachers pointed out that teachers need "care and support . . . regardless of how long you might be in a profession" (Dana [T] 3.08.06). Every teacher interviewed stated they used colleagues as a source of support for dealing with problems of practice and many teachers felt that inclusion meetings were an important space for that interaction to occur. More specifically teachers were describing what Kruger (1997) termed *social support*. In addition to feeling cared for by colleagues and others, social support includes guidance, and reliable alliance (Kruger). Teachers at Hopewell Elementary guided each other in handling the complexities of working with students. For example, Carrie put it this way:

> I have a child in particular in my class who goes to like three different teachers, so it was nice to hear their input as well . . . the different things that we've been trying to do . . . we see each other here and there in the hallway. We don't always have time to meet, but it makes it very nice to be able to sit down and talk with the other teachers with administration there and with an outside hand to say, yes you're on the right path or no, maybe we should go this way. (12.05.05)

Kruger (1997) suggested that "reliable alliance occurs when people feel they can depend on others for assistance" (p. 168). Jordis explained it this way: "We're all on the same boat. We're trying to figure out ways together to help our kids to be successful" (12.07.05). Jane explained the importance of social support this way: "The way I feel

when I get out of the meeting is like I have support. I have people backing me up, and being a new teacher, I don't always know the right thing to do when a problem comes" (12.15.05).

Learning new things. Teachers reported that inclusion meetings enabled them to learn many things including more about (a) their students, (b) classroom management and teaching strategies, and (c) special education procedures. Several teachers explained that inclusion meetings allowed them to learn more about how students behaved during other parts of the school day. For example, Dana said that she especially liked the meetings because "you get to know each child" (3.08.06). Ruth put it this way:

> What those meetings do is they give you the whole person from different perspectives. The whole child, it's not just Deonte was a little pill in dance, and bounced off the walls. He had a teacher over here saying well, he did this for me, and I was so proud of him . . . you end up with a more full picture . . . it's got to develop empathy and compassion and the desire to look at the whole child. That's what has been driven home to me is I just don't know these children, I just don't know them. And so those meetings are gold. (3.13.06)

Thus, teachers like Dana and Ruth believed these meetings help them connect with students by gaining insights into the lives of children outside the walls of their own classrooms.

Additionally, teachers gained important information about particular students, which influenced the ways teachers were teaching these students. For example, Bonnie shared the following story:

> I just learned [at the meeting] that one of the students that we had talked about . . . was almost completely blind in one eye. And that would explain why she has difficulties finishing stuff . . . now I'm working with her and reading aloud more and like she can hear, so she focuses more on her listening skills. . . . I can partner her off with somebody. (12.07.05)

Early career teachers, in particular, seemed to report learning new teaching strategies. Aisha, a new intermediate teacher, reported using reading guides with her

students, as recommended by one of her more experienced colleagues during an inclusion meeting. Rosemary, a reading tutor, reported learning how to use whiteboards effectively for reading instruction. In another example, Alice described her experiences of the meeting this way:

> There was a general concern and willingness to help me find perhaps alternative teaching methods or other suggestions to help me in the classroom. . . . I felt the atmosphere of the meeting was very helpful, to say the least. And I did get one or two ideas that I can bring back. (1.25.06)

Unlike teaching methods, classroom management methods were learned by teachers at all phases of career. Rosemary, an early career teacher, reported that she learned ways to help a student become better at raising her hand during class, whereas Lexa, an experienced teacher, reported learning a way to help students with ADHD control their motor needs in a more acceptable way. Because much of the dialogue was related to students with disabilities, teachers reported learning about procedures related to the staffing and delivery of special education services.

General education teachers reported learning about (a) special education referral procedures, (b) individual education plans (IEP), (c) testing accommodations, and (d) manifestation hearings. Macy, an early career teacher, reported she better understood her obligations to refer students who were struggling in her second-grade classroom after the inclusion meeting. Alice said this of what she learned about the purpose of IEPs: "It has made me more aware of perhaps looking into, well [interventions] based what their IEP prescribes." Debra, a veteran teacher reported

> I'm still learning from the procedures when it comes to special ed and the inclusion program we have, so just that my questions are answered whenever I have any and I'm learning more what kind of accommodations children are allowed to have for the [state's high-stakes test]. (12.14.05)

And finally, teachers reported learning about manifestation hearings, which are called when students with disabilities have over 10 days of suspension to determine if behaviors

resulting in suspension are related to the disability. Thus, inclusion meetings gave general education teachers opportunities to better understand the policies and practices specifically related to students with disabilities.

Practical help. Many teachers reported satisfaction with inclusion meeting recommendations. For example, Jane put it this way: "I was happy with the solutions of the meeting and the feedback that I got and when we talked about the two students that I brought up" (12.15.05). In addition to feeling satisfied, teacher interviews suggested that teachers gleaned practical help from the meetings. For example, Carmen noted, "I did try to move her in a different group and use some of the suggestions about keeping her focused." In another example, Lexa shared how discussion at the meeting gave her assistance in her classroom:

> We had talked in the meeting about how students are so fidgety because they have been forced to sit and be still and taken through this lock step reading process for an hour and a half, and then I'm getting them immediately after . . . I told them, I said, look if we can get through the explanations of what we're going to do and can follow directions, I will do Karate with you . . . they listened hard and they worked hard. (12.28.06)

In addition, Debra reported that

> in talking about Ronald yesterday [at the inclusion meeting], I made sure again today . . . that I sat with him on a one to one and worked through part of it with him and just, it reinforced what we discussed yesterday . . . it's more successful if it's gentle. (12.14.05)

Thus, teacher interviews suggest that many teachers were given practical help with thorny problems of practice during inclusion meetings.

Prompting improved practice through reflection. Teachers reported that inclusion meetings helped them to improve their practice through immediate and long-term reflection. Teachers suggested that meeting interactions promoted teacher reflection. Specifically, Dana reported the value of questions at the meetings because "it makes you

reflect on it [problems] in a different way" (3.01.05). Further, teachers reported continued reflection about discussions long after meetings were over. Carrie explained it this way:

> We were in there for a fairly long time and you know we all just kind of got to hit the tip of the ice berg, you know not really go in depth but um, just that little tip allows everyone else to process it a little bit more, and even if you know there's not anything to say right then and there, we're still processing it you know that day or even you know a week later. (12.05.05)

Problems with Inclusion Meetings

In addition to reporting benefits, teachers reported problems with meetings. Specifically, teachers focused on two interrelated issues—time limitations and not finding solutions to problems.

Time pressures. The kinds of time pressures that emerged from teacher interviews included (a) meetings beginning and ending late, (b) having too many students to discuss, and (c) not having enough time to discuss all problems fully. Obviously these issues were interrelated. As one of the resource teachers commented, "We seem to have a long list of people each time we've met. We probably need to pare that down so that time isn't wasted and that everybody is heard" (Ruth [T] 3.13.05). Another teacher commented, "We tend to spend a lot of time on two or three students, and then there's six more students we don't get to talk about. And so that's always frustrating" (Lexa [T] 2.28.06).

Some teachers complained that meetings were too long and often ran over the time allotted, while other teachers were concerned that they did not receive assistance from the team on pressing issues because time ran out. For example, one of the intermediate teachers described time pressures as follows: "I didn't want to spend most of the time on my kids, and I think that everybody kind of felt the same way, that there

was so much to say and so much to talk about" (Carrie [T] 12.05.05). Another comment made by Nicole suggests her concern about taking too much time on the discussion of her student. "I was getting the evil eye from the other teachers because we were talking about him [her student] for so long, but there is so much to talk about" (3.01.06). Further, although an underlying goal of these meetings was that the most pressing problems teachers were having would be discussed at these meetings, teacher interviews suggested that this goal was subverted due to the structure of asking about new concerns at the end of the meeting. In addition to problems with time, teachers also cited the failure to generate solutions as a pressing problem.

Failure to generate solutions. Teachers attended these meetings because they wanted "solutions." Carmen explained that "it seems like when we talk about the students . . . we talk more about the problems than solutions" (2.01.06). Further, solutions were bounded by what meeting participants knew. One teacher described inclusion meetings as "just kind of a rehashing of what we already know and what we've already tried" (Lexa [T] 2.28.06). Another teacher explained that for her, discussions never went deep enough stating, "I don't really get things [solutions] that really get at the meat of the problem most of the time" (Dana [T] 3.08.06).

Other teachers reported that sometimes solutions suggested by the team were simply not acceptable to them. For example, a teacher rejected team suggestions that she implement a token economy and/or point sheets for a student with behavior problems, as she felt that these recommendations would not work in her classroom because they would require more time than she felt had. Further, she went on to state that she felt these were special education interventions, and she was teaching a general education class. Finally, teachers explained that sometimes, particular kinds of group interactions made finding solutions quite difficult.

Teachers revealed that problems with group interactions sometimes made finding solutions difficult. Specifically, concerns about interpersonal relationships and blaming were two problems cited by teachers. One teacher explained, "You know, you don't want to offend anybody, because sometimes I think they do take offense, that maybe we feel they're not doing what they need to be doing and that's not it at all" (Rosemary [T] 3.13.06). Teachers explained that even though students were supposed to be the reason for inclusion meetings, sometimes inclusion team meetings became a blaming game of

> he didn't, she didn't when it really should be more directed at the student and not other circumstances as to maybe somebody didn't do this or somebody should have done that. I think we need to stay more focused on what, on what our purpose is—solving a problem. And sometimes I walk out and I really don't feel like I have any answers. (Corey [T] 3.13.06)

Another teacher put it more bluntly:

> Well, there have been some meetings where it's been pretty tense. I feel like there's tension in the air among the teachers and administration. . . . We talk about the students, and it's like we're being grilled about their progress rather than just having a conversation. (Carmen [T] 2.01.06)

Some teachers found inclusion meetings helpful in mitigating their problems of practice, while other teachers found them unhelpful. Notably, sometimes teachers within the same meeting had different opinions. Possible reasons for this include (a) whether the teacher had a problem to present, (b) how helpful teachers perceived suggestions to be, and (c) meeting dynamics. In the next section, I describe how I applied discourse analysis to better understand how this occurred.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis, as described by Fairclough (2003) was applied to samples of dialogue from eight inclusion team meetings (i.e., one from each grade-level inclusion team meeting) at Hopewell Elementary School. What follows is a description of (a) my

sampling technique, (b) the discourse features I highlighted in my analysis, and (c) the actual analysis of selected samples.

Sampling Technique

An important issue for discourse analysis is specifying how samples of discourse were selected for detailed analysis (Fairclough, 2003). Criteria were established for selecting positive and negative samples of discourse using findings from inductive analyses of teacher interviews. Specifically, positive samples were selected if they provided evidence of (a) social support, (b) learning opportunities, or (c) practical support. In addition, positive samples were selected if the moved teachers toward classroom-level solutions. Inductive analyses of teacher interviews suggested that meetings were unproductive if they failed to generate solutions. Thus, samples of dialogue were selected if they failed to generate classroom-level solutions that were acceptable to the teacher.

Excerpts were broken into clauses for further analysis with one clause displayed per line in a table. Next, excerpts were read in their entirety and salient text was marked and preserved. Extraneous dialogue deemed minimally related or unrelated to problem and response constructions were replaced with content summaries denoted by brackets within the excerpt.

Discourse Features

Discourse features reveal different aspects of meaning behind spoken language. For the purpose of this study, I selected five features of discourse including identification of (a) speech function, (b) statement and question types, (c) modality, (d) semantic relations between sentences and clauses, and (e) social actors. Next, each feature will be described. In addition, the purpose behind choosing each discourse feature to focus on

will be illuminated. Finally, the ways these features were marked in the analysis tables will be noted.

Speech functions. Speech functions reveal the purpose behind the dialogue. For example, during a knowledge exchange, actors take turns asking questions and making statements. The purpose is to "know" something. By contrast, during an activity exchange, one actor asks the other to do something. Importantly, both kinds of exchanges can be initiated by either the actor or the other with whom the actor is interacting. Thus, by identifying the speech function of an interaction, interpretations can be made about the implicit and explicit purposes of the exchange.

The two main speech functions (i.e., knowledge exchange and activity exchange) were identified and noted under "discourse features" in italics in all tables displaying excerpts of dialogue. Knowledge exchanges are comprised of questions (i.e., yes/no interrogatives or "wh" interrogatives) and statements (i.e., declarative sentences), whereas activity exchanges are comprised of demands (i.e., imperatives) and offers (i.e., statements related to commitment to act). Activity exchanges often imply more than just an exchange of words. There is an expectation that someone will do something. Knowledge exchanges, on the other hand, are generally an exchange of words. Importantly, both halves of these exchanges are not always found, as dialogue is unique in that expectations for exchange are not always met (Fairclough, 2003). Thus, I marked the initiation of particular speech functions in addition to changes in speech function.

Statement and question types. Next, I identified the kinds of statements (i.e., statements of fact, irrealis statements, evaluations) and questions (i.e., "wh" or yes/no interrogatives) represented in the dialogue. Irrealis statements include statements that are future oriented (e.g., She will come to the meeting) and hypothetical statements

(e.g., I might need to ask for help with this student, if nothing I do helps). The purpose behind identifying statement and question types is to aid with identification of patterns within the discourse. These labels are identified in the "discourse features" column of all excerpts of dialogue.

Modality. "Modality is a very complex aspect of meaning" making (Fairclough, 2003, p. 168). Although there are explicit markers of modality such as modal verbs (e.g., can, will, may, must, would, should), modality is best understood as making speech more tentative. Importantly, all speech can be modalized. In the case of activity exchanges, modality suggests the degree to which the actors are committed to the obligation or necessity of the demand or offer. Specifically, a demand can be verbalized in three ways. It can be (a) prescriptive (e.g., sit down), (b) modalized (e.g., you could sit down), or (c) proscriptive (e.g., don't sit down). (Note: modalizing an imperative switches the command to an opinion). Similarly, the offer or response can be verbalized in three ways. The offer can be (a) undertaken (e.g., I'll open the window), (b) modalized (e.g., I may open the window), or (c) refused (I won't open the window) (Fairclough).

Statements and questions can be modalized. Statements of fact are generally asserted (e.g., She has a learning disability), whereas irrealis statements tend to be modalized (e.g., She may have a learning disability). Statements can also be denied (e.g., The student is not qualified). Questions can be (a) nonmodalized positive (e.g., Is he your student?), (b) modalized (e.g., Could it be that he's overwhelmed?), or (c) nonmodalized negative (e.g., Isn't he one of your success stories?). The actor's choice of modalization is noted in parenthesis in all tables with excerpted dialogues adjacent to sentence and question types. In Table 5-1, I present a summary speech functions and concomitant modalities used in my analysis.

Table 5-1. Exchange types, speech functions, and types of modality

Knowledge exchange	
Statements: The actor's commitment to truth	
Assert	The student has a disability.
Modalize	The student may have a disability
Deny	The student does not have a disability
Questions: The actor elicits the other's commitment to truth	
Nonmodalized positive	Is your classroom too stimulating for the student?
Modalized	Might your classroom be too stimulating for the student?
Nonmodalized negative	Isn't your classroom too stimulating for the student?
Activity Exchange	
Demand: The actor's commitment to the obligation/necessity	
Prescribe	Call the parents.
Modalize	You could call the parents.
Proscribe	Don't call the parents.
Offer: The actor's commitment to act	
Undertaking	I will call the parents
Modalized	I may call the parents
Refusal	I will not call the parents.

Note. This table was adapted from Fairclough (2003).

Semantic relations between sentences and clauses. At the clause level, semantic relations were identified. The identification of semantic relations between sentences and clauses enables analysts to better understand the meaning behind the speech. For example, identifying semantic relations can suggest whether the actor was giving his or her opinion about something or presenting evidence as fact. Table 5-2 presents an overview of the kinds of relationships between sentences and clauses that can be identified in dialogue. Importantly, the examples presented in this table reflect complete sentences whereas since dialogue is rarely uttered in complete sentences, semantic relationships in my analysis are noted between clauses.

Table 5-2. Semantic relations between sentences and clauses

Relationship	Examples *(Markers are italicized)*
Causal	
Reason	He is not as much of a concern *because* he's on grade-level.
Consequence	The mother is concerned, *so* we're going to assess her.
Purpose	*In order to* get through all of the students, we need to start.
Conditional	*If* he does this again, we will have to suspend him.
Temporal	We were concerned *when* her mother called.
Additive	He's lazy, *and* a lot of trouble.
Elaboration (including exemplification and rewording)	Our meeting started late – it started at 2:15 and it should have started at 2:00.
Contrastive/concessive	He is challenging *but* smart.

Note. This table is a modification of one found in Fairclough (2003).

Social actors. Speakers make choices about how social actors are represented in dialogue (Fairclough, 2003). Actors in dialogue are represented by either nouns or pronouns. In addition, through dialogue social actors are either activated (i.e, "the one who does things and makes things happen") (Fairclough, p. 145), or passivated (i.e., "the one affected by processes") (Fairclough, p. 145). On the importance of actors being active or passive, Fairclough explains:

> The significance of 'activation' and 'passivation' is rather transparent: where social actors are mainly activated, their capacity for agentive action, for making things happen, for controlling others and so forth is accentuated, where they are mainly passivated, what is accentuated is their subjection to processes, them being affected by the actions of others (p. 150).

Importantly, in order to maintain the readability of the analysis tables, pronouns related to the student being discussed were generally not noted. Thus, salient pronouns related to the interaction were identified, along with their state (i.e., activated or passive), as a way to interpret who was responsible for action. Finally, tables were constructed with a space between different actors in the dialogue.

Discourse Around Problem Constructions

Analysis revealed two kinds of problem construction: parallel problem construction and coconstructed problems. Both problem types will be described in terms of relevant discourse features. In addition, interpretations are provided.

Parallel problem construction. The interaction in Table 5-3 occurred during a second grade inclusion meeting. The exchange was between one of the school's leadership team members and one of the classroom teachers. Following a procedure typical for these meetings, this student had been discussed at an earlier meeting and the progress of this student was being updated.

In this excerpt, the teacher and the leadership team member each assert an interpretation of the problem, but their interpretations of the problem are parallel rather than coconstructed. This means that while they both agree there is a problem, they do not agree on the substance of the problem. The teacher notes that the student is, for the most part, academically on-grade level (lines 3-4), a point with which the administrator agrees (line 41). The teacher sees the student as a behavioral challenge (inference made based upon lines 5-16 and 31-37); whereas the administrator notes that this student's problems have not resulted in disciplinary action beyond contacting the parent (lines 21-24). Thus, the perspectives on the severity of the problem differ between the teacher and the administrator.

The teacher believes that the way to make the situation better is to have the parent in to witness her son's behavior (lines 31-37). The teacher states that she tried multiple times in multiple ways to get the parent to come to school (i.e., activity exchange lines 7, 9, and 31). Interestingly, the administrator does not respond to this suggestion for solving "the problem."

Table 5-3. Second grade inclusion team meeting

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
		Knowledge exchange
1	**Linda:** next child is Gerald Thomas and	Statement of fact (assert)
2	I think this is Ms. Fordham's	Statement of fact (modalized)
3	**Greta:** Gerald is strong in math, reading, spelling,	Statement of fact (assert)
4	his writing is weak.	Statement of fact (assert)
5	Um I've spoken with the mother	Statement of fact (assert)
6	as recently as last Friday and	Temporal
		Activity exchange
7	I asked her please come in.	I (activated) Demand (prescribed) Her (passive)
8	I've sent several written notes.	I (activated) Statement of fact (assert)
		Activity exchange
9	Please come in for an appointment.	Demand (prescribed)
10	I scheduled an appointment with her	Statement of fact (assert)
11	one morning this last week,	Temporal
12	I think it was Monday	Statement of fact (modalized)
13	or Tuesday of last week,	Elaboration
14	she did not keep the appointment.	She (activated) Statement of fact (refusal)
15	She assured me on Friday	She (activated) Undertaking
16	that she would come in sometime this week.	She (activated) Undertaking
17	**Linda:** okay, this mom works at Longwood	Statement of fact (assert)
18	and um that's where I've had success reaching her	Statement of fact (assert)
19	and she has been responsive um.	Statement of fact (assert)
20	I've called her at work	Statement of fact (assert)
21	because at the point where I'm calling,	Reason
22	it's never at the point	Statement of fact (deny)
23	where it's come	Statement of fact (assert)
24	or there will be an outside detention.	Irrealis statement
25	And I did note that	Statement of fact (assert)
26	you have on here	You activated
27	that he's very active,	Statement of fact (assert)
		Activity Exchange
28	and have you had a conversation with mom,	Yes/no interrogative You (activated)
29	or is that still on the list	Yes/no interrogative

Table 5-3. Continued.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
30	**Greta:** I have mentioned it to her,	Undertaking *Activity Exchange*
31	I've requested	I (activated) Demand (modalized)
32	on several occasions	Elaboration
33	that she come and	She (passive) Demand (prescribe)
34	do an observation of him	Demand (prescribe)
35	through my window	Elaboration
36	with him not being aware of it,	Condition of demand
37	and she has failed to do that.	Statement of fact (refusal) *Activity Exchange*
38	**Linda:** so what are you suggesting	'wh' interrogatory (modalized) You activated
39	where do you see	'wh' interrogatory (modalized) Social actor (you - activated)
40	us moving forward with this student	Elaboration Us passive
41	because he is an on-grade-level student	Reason Statement of fact (assert)

Note: Key marker of discourse feature underlined; major speech function italicized.

Notably, nearly every line of dialogue from the teacher is either a demand statement (i.e., 5 demand statements) or a statement of fact (i.e., 8 statements of fact). Further, very few of these statements and demands were modalized (i.e., 2). This suggests that the teacher is very committed to her position. High numbers of demand statements and statements of fact that are not modalized are typical of speech patterns for authority figures (Fairclough, 2003). This could be interpreted that by her authority as a teacher of many years, she has clearly defined both the problem (i.e., the student has behavior problems) and the solution (i.e., the parent is responsible for correcting her son's behavior) to her own satisfaction and does not need others to help her with this. From her perspective, all she needs help with is making the parent come in to observe her

son. Taken together, this evidence suggests that she is closed to opportunities to view this problem differently (e.g., changes in her practice might influence this child's behavior).

The administrator, for her part, counters the teacher's statements of fact that the parent is not responsive with her own experiences contacting this parent (lines 17-20). Of particular interest is line 26, when the administrator activates the teacher (i.e., social actor "you" as a referent for the teacher) as being responsible for the statement that the "child is very active." This suggests the administrator may not share this concern. For example, she could have simply stated that the "child is active" without attribution to the teacher, which would have suggested that people other than just the teacher think this child is active. This interpretation takes on additional meaning when in lines 38-39 are considered. Using an activity exchange (line 38), the administrator activates the teacher as the social actor, not the inclusion team (line 40), in seeking suggestions for potential solutions to the problem. For example, she could have said, "Where should we go from here?" as was said at other meetings thereby activating the entire team in problem solving. Thus, the administrator seems to allow the teacher to own both the problem and the responsibility for finding a solution to the problem.

In summary, this interaction failed at the problem construction level. While both parties clearly constructed problems, problems were constructed in a parallel fashion thereby reducing any opportunity for problem solving that might have helped the teacher and, more importantly, the student. Neither actor has altered her "fact based" interpretation of the problem. Thus, even though activity exchanges are initiated, the discourse does not lead to a common construction of the problem nor commitment to act.

Coconstructed problem. The interaction displayed in Table 5-4 is an exchange between the one of the other professional educators (OPE) at the meeting and one

Table 5-4. Resource inclusion team meeting

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
		Knowledge exchange
1	**Meg:** I'm wondering how far we can get	Irrealis statement we activated
2	here today on Clovis.	Temporal
3	Seems like there's mixed behavior	Statement of fact (modalized)
4	that we're getting.	we activated Statement of fact (assert)
5	A couple of you are not really having	Statement of fact (deny)
6	a lot of difficulty with him and	Additive
7	a couple of people are having	Statement of fact (assert)
8	a lot of difficulty with him.	Additive
9	I wonder if the space is difficult	Yes/no interrogative (modalized)
10	for some children to manage, Lexa?	Lexa activated
11	I just – it seems to me that space	Statement of fact (modalized)
12	and the tables with the (indistinct)	Additive
13	that that could be	Irrealis statement (modalized)
14	and all the materials	Additive
15	**Lexa:** um hmm	Agreement
16	**Meg:** especially	
17	**Lexa:** (overlapping with Meg)	
18	I think all the materials are exciting to him [Lexa elaborates on the set up]	Statement of fact (modalized)
19	I think that uh um the printing station is where	Statement of fact (modalized)
20	I have to give my focus,	I activated Undertaking (modalized)
21	'cause that's a very difficult technical process	Reason
22	and it takes a lot of me giving the kids a lot of feedback	Additive Irrealis statement (assert)
23	[Lexa elaborates on keeping her attention on the project]	
24	but every time	Temporal
25	I take my eyes off of Clovis,	I activated Irrealis statement (assert)
26	he's out of his seat, [Lexa cites examples of his behavior. She investigates an incident and determines his behavior was accidental, but he was still not where he should have been].	Statement of fact (assert)

Table 5-4. Continued.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
	[Lexa elaborates with multiple additional examples].	
27	if I have to give other students my attention	Conditional Irrealis statement (assert)
28	and take my attention off of	Additive
29	what he is specifically doing	Statement of fact (assert)
30	or his table is specifically doing,	Statement of fact (assert)
31	I lose him.	I activated Statement of fact (assert)
32	**Meg:** maybe that's especially hard for him	Irrealis (modalized)
33	that there are these several different things going on	Condition
34	and you're having to focus	Additive Irrealis statement (assert)
35	**Lexa:** yeah (sounding sympathetic to student's problem)	Agreement
36	**Meg:** which is how	Reason
37	**Lexa:** it's a lot easier doing a lock-step project	Statement of fact (assert)
38	where everybody does one step at a time	Condition
39	and everybody is on the same	Additive Statement of fact (assert)
40	**Meg:** and I think in dance they're kind of moving together,	Statement of fact (modalized)
41	right, or moving everyone together,	Tag question
42	so that's dif- uh- that maybe	Statement of fact (modalized)
43	**Lexa:** maybe it's just the way it's structured	Irrealis statement (modalized)
44	or something that he has trouble handling it	Statement of fact (assert)

Note: Key marker of discourse feature underlined; major speech function italicized.

teacher. Instead of parallel problem construction, this interaction is an example of a coconstructed problem where the OPE facilitates the teacher's thinking about her problems with a particular student.

This interaction begins with a knowledge exchange, where the OPE summarizes that the particular student being discussed is successful in some places and not in others. What is particularly interesting is the use of pronouns. From the beginning, the OPE uses *we* (line 1). This underscores that from the perspective of the OPE, she is an active participant, along with the teacher, working through this problem.

It is also clear that the OPE has some ideas about what could be causing part of the problem (i.e., the setting) (line 9). However, instead of asking a direct question, she asked a modalized question. Modalization of this question enabled the teacher to either agree or disagree with the OPE's assessment more easily than alternate constructions. This was particularly important given the OPE's earlier statements of fact (line 5-8) where she noted that some teachers were not having problems with the student. By modalizing her question, the OPE reduced the likelihood that the teacher might become defensive. In addition to continuing to present her hypothesis using modalized statements, the OPE inserts herself as an activated social actor using an "I statement" (line 11). As with modalizing speech, using "I statements" gives the teacher a safe space in the dialogue to consider what the OPE is suggesting.

Interestingly, the teacher responds with modalized speech of her own (lines 18-19); thus, she tentatively agrees with the OPE that part of this student's problem could be the open space in her classroom. She elaborates on what happens when she takes her attention away from this student (lines 19-30). The way the teacher wraps up this part of her narrative is very powerful—instead of blaming the student, she asserts that she is the person who loses "him." Further, as the OPE suggests that the learning conditions are part of the problem (lines 32-34), the teacher agrees with her. With the teacher leading the way, the conversation takes a productive turn toward discussing the

conditions under which this student works best (line 37). At this point in the dialogue, the OPE is taking a confirmatory position in relation to what the teacher suggests by citing examples from other classes, which support the teacher's hypothesis (line 40-42).

There are two salient features of this interaction. First, there is the high number of modalized irrealis statements compared to the former example of parallel problem construction where there were a high number of asserted statements of fact. Absent is the trading of assertive statements, one after the other. Instead, the talk here is tentative and speculative. This gives the teacher room to think about what the OPE is saying to her and compare it to her experience with this child.

Second, the teacher uses the pronoun *I* thereby taking responsibility for what happens with the student instead of blaming him (e.g., I lose him). She accepts the possibility and acknowledges that there are some things within her power that could be changed to enable the student to be more successful (e.g., maybe it's just the way it's [the lesson] structured).

Responses to Problems

Teacher interviews suggest that many of the problems with inclusion meetings were related to solutions not being generated. In the next section, I present three pairs of dialogue (i.e., one positive and one negative) that illustrate how socially constructed dialogue influences (a) focus, (b) support, and (c) coherence of problems and solutions thereby producing very different responses to problems of practice. Focus represents the extent to which meeting participants remained true to the topic of conversation. The first excerpt represents an unfocused response to a teacher's concern with a particular student in her classroom. The second excerpt represents a more focused discussion related to the teacher's concern.

Chasing rabbits. During teacher interviews, one of the teachers suggested that sometimes inclusion meetings were a bit like "chasing rabbits." This metaphor represents what sometimes happened during inclusion meetings—the focus of the meeting veered off in many directions, much like "chasing rabbits." The following excerpt (Table 5-5) represents one such case.

This interaction begins with a knowledge exchange where Meg, an OPE at the meeting, is asking for the names of students about whom reading tutors are concerned. Before the problem is well articulated, the focus of the discussion moves away from discussing the problems of one student, to discussing the problems of many students (lines 11-12). This theme is repeated later in the discussion as the team discussed creating a workshop for parents whose children have similar problems (lines 32-54).

In addition, numerous turns change the dialogue from one topic to another, and none of the turns move the dialogue back to the teacher's original concern—that the teacher was having difficulties with a little girl who was not progressing in reading like she should. For example, one turn takes the discussion toward the parent's involvement with the student's education (lines 14-26). Subsequent turns take the dialogue to discussions about the logistics of the tutoring schedule, a new reading tutor that has just been hired, to the leadership team member's concern about how far behind a large number of students are in one particular teacher's reading class. Although discussion of these topics may be important, the teacher expressed concern that she left this meeting without any next steps to try with this student. Thus, if teachers go in expecting to get help with pressing problems of practice, "chasing rabbits" may leave teachers feeling as though they do not get much from these meetings. In addition, meetings that lack focus may take longer than more tightly focused meetings resulting in fewer students being

Table 5-5. Success for all inclusion team meeting excerpt

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
		Knowledge exchange
1	**Meg:** Is there a particular child	Yes/no interrogative
2	you should be worried about now	Demand (modalized)
3	**Corey:** Okay, there's Keira,	Statement of fact (assert)
4	um she's not on my tutoring list right now [Talk about who tutors this student]	Statement of fact (deny)
5	**Linda:** she's low academic	Evaluation (assert)
6	**Corey:** Low academic uh	Agreement
7	but I do know that we've been pulling her	Statement of fact (assert)
8	as a back up at this point [**Corey** describes in detail this student's specific reading problem]	Condition
9	**Meg:** and she's a first grader?	Yes/no interrogative (nonmodalized positive)
10	**Corey:** Mm hmm.	Agreement
11	**Meg:** well, this is sounding like a couple of children	Evaluation (assert)
12	who we were talking about earlier [**Meg** elaborates on which children are like the one Corey has brought up and that she wishes the reading coach was at the meeting to talk]	Elaboration Statement of fact (assert)
13	**Corey:** it's like teaching them a foreign language	Evaluation (assert)
14	**Linda:** isn't she one that we have a family support	Yes/no interrogative (nonmodalized negative)
15	**Corey:** yes, we've had a solutions team meeting with the mother	Statement of fact (assert) Elaboration
16	**Linda:** had a solutions team [**Corey** elaborates on details of that meeting]	Statement of fact (assert)
17	**Andra:** who's Keira's teacher	"wh" interrogatory (nonmodalized positive)
18	**Corey:** Mr. Odom	Mr. Odom (passive)

Table 5-5. Continued.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
19	**Andra:** okay um	Understood
20	**Linda:** she picks up	She – activated Statement of fact
21	every afternoon	Temporal
22	**Andra:** oh, good.	Evaluation
23	How do we find her, in front?	"wh" interrogatory (nonmodalized positive) *Activity exchange*
24	**Linda:** mm hmm (laughs). Just go up there	Demand (prescribe)
25	every afternoon	Temporal
26	**Corey:** I was calling her workplace	Offer (undertaking)
	[Talk about this student being on the back-up list instead of the regular list and the extra reading tutor who will start soon]	
	[Talk about where the reading coach is]	
	[Talk about where funds for the new tutor are coming from and the implications of being able to tutor more students]	
	[**Corey** informs the principal about how the tutors use a back-up list of students when their regular student is absent]	
	[**Andra** shares a story of her observing in a classroom where students have not been assessing well. She expresses great concern.]	
27	I don't know if Kayla's in this,	Irrealis statement Conditional
28	but that that's the basic,	Evaluation (assert)
29	just getting your initial sound – consonant sound	Elaboration
30	so, if these babies are not at that point,	Conditional Evaluation (deny)
31	they have to have that kind of um help	Statement of fact (assert)
32	**Linda:** one of the things	Elaboration
33	that we left this meeting at the end	We - activated Elaboration

Table 5-5. Continued.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
34	we talked about possibly having a "make it take it"	We - activated Irrealis statement
35	and inviting	Additive
36	because we did have such a high number of children	Reason We – passive Evaluation
37	who were not getting the phonics	Statement of fact (deny)
38	having a workshop designed just for those parents	Irrealis statement Irrealis statement
39	and it we we	
40	**Corey:** Right	Agreement
41	**Linda:** where we left this	We - activated Statement of fact (assert)
42	the meeting you know was over	Statement of fact (assert) Temporal
43	but whether we would do it during the school day	Condition We - activated Irrealis statement
44	like at ten in the morning or um have an afternoon (overlapping talk, indistinct speaker and words)	Temporal elaboration
45	**Corey:** that'd be a good time to do it	Evaluation
46	**Linda:** yeah, but to make it fun	Irrealis statement
47	and also to have them leave with something	Irrealis statement
48	that they could work on	They – activated Irrealis statement
49	because it is way um off the mark at this point	Reason Evaluation
50	**Corey:** I'm working on some strategies for the parents	I – activated Statement of fact (assert)
51	to take with them	Irrealis statement
52	when we have our meeting solution team meetings	Temporal We – activated Irrealis statement
53	and to come up with a um a specific goal	Irrealis statement
54	for them to work with the child	Irrealis statement

Note: Key marker of discourse feature underlined; major speech function italicized.

discussed. Thus, maintaining meeting focus might mitigate perceptions that meetings last too long and that sometimes too few children are discussed.

Staying focused. As was noted in the preceding example, maintaining the focus of the discussion on the problems of one teacher and one student was sometimes challenging. In the following excerpt (Table 5-6), an OPE ensures that the dialogue comes back to what is important—discussing how best to help a student who struggles with reading comprehension. Although the conversation does change topics a bit, there is far less off-topic dialogue (i.e., not explicitly related to the problem) than in the previous sample.

This exchange takes place during the third grade inclusion team meeting. The dialogue centers on discussing the reading comprehension problems of a student in Aisha's classroom. Aisha is a first year teacher. Dialogue preceding this excerpt included the suggestion of a leadership team member to convene a Family Solutions Team meeting to discuss this child's academic and behavior problems. Three people, the classroom teacher, a special education teacher, and a member of the leadership team, all have direct experience with this student's reading difficulties. Thus, the excerpt opens with a knowledge exchange.

This excerpt opens with the leadership team member describing the memory problems (line 7) of this student. We can infer from lines 3-4 and again through lines 10-11 that this student is sent to the office on a regular basis. Thus, it is likely this student is being sent to the office as a result of her behavior. It is clear from the excerpt that the student goes to the office and does school work there.

Table 5-6. Third grade inclusion team meeting

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
		Knowledge exchange
1	**Linda:** And she does not have any comprehension.	Statement of fact (deny)
2	In my office with her,	Elaboration
3	you're wonderful Mrs. Cooper,	Evaluative
4	about sending work with her,	Elaboration
5	she cannot read,	Statement of fact (deny)
6	and if you read it to her,	Irrealis statement
7	she cannot hold it for (indistinct)	Statement of fact (deny)
8	**Aisha:** you have to sit on top of her	You – activated Irrealis statement
9	**Linda:** She does not know what to do	Statement of fact (deny)
10	and I say this is why	I – activated Evaluation
11	you need to be in the classroom	Demand (proscribe)
12	**Meg:** umm	
13	**Linda:** because she cannot	Reason Statement of fact (deny)
14	you can't explain more than a sentence.	Statement of fact (deny)
15	She does that one	Statement of fact (assert)
16	and then she comes back	Additive Irrealis statement
17	and gets more instruction	Additive Irrealis statement
18	and the she goes back	Additive Irrealis
19	**Aisha:** mm hmm	Agreement
20	**Linda:** I mean she cannot do multiples of the same thing	Statement of fact (assert)
21	**Aisha:** I give her one thing at a time.	I – activated Statement of fact
22	I just write down the steps	I – activated Statement of fact (assert)
23	on how to answer questions	Irrealis statement
24	just like the articles,	Elaboration
25	just like read the questions.	Demand (prescribe)
26	Alright, you're done with that one	Statement of fact (assert)

Table 5-6. Continued.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
27	go to direction number two.	Demand (prescribe)
28	What does direction number two tell you to do	"wh" interrogatory (nonmodalized positive)
29	**Carrie:** um, just with my reading class,	Elaboration
30	this is something I have been doing,	I – activated Statement of fact (assert)
31	it goes back to what Meg about	Irrealis (assert)
32	maybe it's too much,	Evaluation (modalized)
33	if you know, they can't read a word,	Conditional Statement of fact (assert)
34	then this whole passage is obviously too much.	Conditional Evaluation
35	[Carrie explains a reading strategy she uses with her students]	
36	**Linda:** That's where the Prove It strategy comes in,	Statement of fact (assert)
37	finding which question goes with	Irrealis statement
38	and then having to go back in to the paragraph	Additive Irrealis statement
39	find it,	Demand (prescribe)
40	and prove your answer.	Demand (prescribe)
41	Has her parent been at any of the FCAT meetings?	Yes/no interrogative Parent – activated
42	**Aisha:** No.	
43	I actually had a phone conference with her mom	I activated Statement of fact (assert) Her mom (passive)
44	**Linda:** I know you've had several of those	Statement of fact (assert)
45	I mean you know,	Elaboration *Activity exchange*
46	it's time to get her in here	Demand (prescribe)
47	**Meg:** I just want to	I – activated Irrealis statement
48	I just wish	Irrealis statement
49	I think we should consider this sort of process	We – activated Demand (modalized)
50	or something like it,	Elaboration
51	that Carrie is describing for these kids	Statement of fact (assert)

Table 5-6. Continued.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
52	who <u>are struggling</u> so much	Statement of fact (assert)
53	you know <u>to keep hammering</u> away on	Irrealis statement
54	**Linda:** Absolutely, absolutely	Agreement

Note: Key marker of discourse feature underlined; major speech function italicized.

Aisha agrees that there seems to be a memory problem with this student. She goes on to describe how she parses directions for this student. Interestingly, Carrie, a more seasoned colleague of Aisha's, suggests that the problem is more than this student's inability to answer questions (inferred from lines 29-35). She constructs the problem as being related to the assignment (i.e., the passage is too difficult for the student). Carrie goes on to describe specifically how to go about helping students work through longer, more difficult reading passages by chunking the text.

Interestingly, the member of the leadership team who frequently has this student in her office brings the dialogue back to the parent (line 51). Further, she seems to have missed Carrie's premise that the passages are too difficult for the student to read independently, as the reading strategies she suggests work for students who can read (inferred from lines 36-40). Although discussing the parent's role in the student's education is important, in order to maintain the focus on reading instruction, the OPE shifts the dialogue back using "I statements" (i.e., statements that begin with the pronoun "I") and irrealis statements. She softens her demand (i.e., "I think" on line 48) before making assertions that it is important to consider how students with reading comprehension problems are being taught. Thus, she facilitates maintaining the focus on instruction until agreement with how to proceed with instruction is reached. Later, the focus of the dialogue is turned back upon parental involvement.

This excerpt illustrates a way to work through the challenge of ensuring cohesive conversations about the problems of students. Often students, such as the student discussed in the former excerpt, have multiple concerns that need to be addressed (e.g., behavior and low academics). Arguably, more appropriate reading instruction might influence behavior problems the student is experiencing. Thus, by focusing the dialogue to address each concern systematically (i.e., not allowing premature termination of a topical discussion), teachers can leave these meetings with a sense of what to do in their classrooms.

Tense dialogue. Some teachers expressed concerns that inclusion meetings were sometimes "tense." The interaction in Table 5-7 could be characterized as tense. Importantly, this meeting had a difficult start, as it was held after a school holiday. Thus, there was some confusion as to whether or not the meeting would take place. In addition, the meeting started late and several key people were either late to the meeting or did not come at all. The following excerpt is from a discussion about a student that the teacher characterized as "not making progress." The excerpt begins with a knowledge exchange about the kinds of interventions the teacher has tried and evolves into a response to the problems the teacher articulated about the student's behavior.

Meg, one of the OPEs in the group, was asking Mandy whether or not she had tried to use a point sheet with this particular student (lines 1-6). Interestingly, Mandy interrupts Meg two times (lines 3 and 5), as Meg is trying to ask her the question. In her next turn, Mandy shifts the conversation from what she has been doing (i.e., making a point sheet and sending it home) to what the parent did not do (i.e., return the signed point sheet). Mandy makes clear that she expects the parent "to support the process," and when the parent failed to do so, Mandy stopped using the point sheet. Mandy's dialogue

suggests that she feels very strongly that the parent should help establish “accountability” for this student’s behavior.

Meg, for her part, modalized her speech patterns while still suggesting that using a point sheet might be very helpful to this student, even without parental support. She uses “I statements” (lines 19, 23) and empathy (lines 24-27) to minimize the possibility that Mandy will react defensively to her comments. Further, Meg even suggests that Mandy’s expectations would be appropriate for some parents, such as herself (line32-33). Meg goes on to try to activate Mandy, using modalized language (i.e., irrealis statements) (lines 35-45) to consider using point sheets, without parental participation, strictly in the classroom in response to defined appropriate behaviors. This suggestion is immediately met with a “yes, but” (line 46), which can be interpreted as a rejection of this idea. Mandy clarifies her rejection by asserting that she would not be able to teach her class and manage this student’s point sheet (lines 51-53). Mandy goes on to refuse another suggestion from other professional educators in the group to manage both tasks: keeping a point sheet and teaching her class.

Andra, one of the leadership team members present at this meeting, had only been listening through line 53. Perhaps responding to this teacher’s unwillingness to try something new with this student, Andra harkens back to when Mandy had an intern in her classroom. She then asks a very pointed question (i.e., were you not kind of one-on-one with him at that time). Before giving Mandy an opportunity to respond, she goes on to state her opinion (i.e., evaluative statement) that that would have been “a good time to give him more attention” (line 60). Thus, Andra’s evaluative statements (lines 67-70) suggest that she wonders whether or not this teacher did enough to help this student.

Table 5-7. First grade inclusion team meeting

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
		Knowledge exchange
1	**Meg:** is there any uh	Yes/no interrogatory (nonmodalized positive)
2	have you done anything with um some kinds of maybe either a point sheet	Yes/no interrogatory You – activated
3	**Mandy:** (overlapping) yes	Agreement
4	**Meg:** where he earns something	Irrealis statement
5	**Mandy:** (overlapping) yes	Agreement
6	**Meg:** for displaying appropriate behavior	Elaboration
7	**Mandy:** yes.	Agreement
8	The point sheet um did not come back signed,	*Activity exchange* Statement of fact (deny)
9	he took it home	Statement of fact (assert)
10	but it never came back signed,	Offer (refused)
11	rarely even comes back so there um	Elaboration
12	there's no point in continuing that	Evaluation (nonmodalized negative)
13	if there's not going to be –	Condition
14	the point of the point sheet is that the parent helps	Statement of fact (assert) Parent – activated
15	to support the process	Elaboration
16	um and that it's not just a reward at school	Statement of fact (deny)
17	that it's it's an accountability	Statement of fact (assert)
18	and you know that is not happening and so	Statement of fact (deny)
19	**Meg:** I think that it would be ideal	Irrealis statement (modalized)
20	if the parent would work with you on this kind of system,	Condition
21	but if you're not getting anything back	Concessive
22	**Mandy:** no	Agreement *Activity exchange*
23	**Meg:** I would still if you couldn't –	You – activated Condition
24	I'm sure that he's pushed you	Statement of fact (assert)
25	past your frustration point, you know,	Temporal
26	a bunch of times	Elaboration

Table 5-7. Continued.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
27	from what you're describing,	You – activated Statement of fact (assert)
28	but I wonder	Modalized
29	if there's not something that you could set up um	Irrealis statement You – activated
30	that doesn't involve the parent,	Condition
31	it would be ideal to involve the parent,	Irrealis statement
32	if it were me,	Condition
33	I'd be there,	I – activated
34	but I wonder	Elaboration (rewording of lines (28-29)
35	if there's something that you could set up	*Activity exchange* Condition You – activated
36	so that if he displays behavior X,	Condition Irrealis statement
37	which is something that you really want to see	Condition
38	in line or in reading group,	Elaboration
39	or whatever it is,	Elaboration
40	some specific setting during the day,	Elaboration
41	if he displays this,	Condition Irrealis statement
42	and then you've got what "this" is with him,	Additive Irrealis statement
43	then this is what happens, you know,	Condition
44	so there's the point sheet	Consequence Statement of fact (assert)
45	and it gets to something and then	Additive Irrealis statement
46	**Mandy:** yes but the point sheet is divided	Disagreement Statement of fact
47	into 15 minute increments.	Elaboration
48	David would need them	Irrealis statement
49	in about 2 and a half minute increments	elaboration
50	**Meg:** he might	Statement of fact (modalized)
51	**Mandy:** so, I couldn't do that	Offer (refusal)
52	all day long	Temporal
53	and still teach my class	Additive Statement of fact (assert)

Table 5-7. Continued.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
	[Another exchange about a different way to accomplish a point sheet occurs with similar results]	
54	**Andra:** when there was an intern	Temporal Statement of fact (assert)
55	there with you	Condition
56	and she had more of the control	Additive Evaluation
57	with all of the other children,	Elaboration
58	were you not kind of one on one with him	yes/no interrogative (nonmodalized negative)
59	at that time,	Temporal
60	that was a good time to give him more attention	Evaluation
61	during that period of time	Temporal
62	**Mandy:** well yes,	Conditional agreement
63	that yes, but	Disagreement
64	that's not happening now	Statement of fact (deny)
65	**Andra:** I know,	Agreement
66	but I would see –	Conditional
67	it seems like there should have been more progress	Evaluation (modalized)
68	by this point in time	Temporal
69	with two people being there	Condition
70	that you would have given him more real time	Evaluation

Note: Key marker of discourse feature underlined; major speech function italicized.

Two things stand out from this interaction. First, the teacher has limits on what she would consider to be acceptable interventions in her classroom. Thus, even though Meg used many of the same techniques that aided Lexa's thinking in the previous example (i.e., modalized speech, "I statements"), they were not sufficient to overcome this teacher's resistance. This suggests that although dialogue can sometimes shape what happens, deeply held positions may not be moved.

Secondly, the interaction between Andra and Mandy presented some awkward moments for the inclusion team. Statements that negatively evaluate team members do

not produce problem solving dialogue. Rather, they serve only to increase the likelihood that teachers entrenched in their own positions will stay there.

Supportive dialogue. Teachers indicated that one important benefit of inclusion meetings was feeling the support from their colleagues. The exchange in Table 5-8 is from a kindergarten inclusion meeting where support was given to a classroom teacher through solutions-oriented dialogue. The student being discussed had behavior challenges and low academic skills. Although his behavior was managed by his classroom teacher, he was often in trouble in his other classes. Since resources for kindergartners were first thing in the morning, teachers suggested to the child's grandmother that she bring him to school after resource class each day. However, because of her job, she was unable to do this. This was an especially challenging situation that had been discussed on many other occasions. During the inclusion team meeting, a leadership team member who was responsible for deploying reading tutors had an idea. She suggested that she rearrange the schedule of one of her tutors, sending the tutor to the teacher's room to be with this student first thing in the morning. What follows is the negotiation of the student's schedule.

This interaction highlights how material support can come from colleagues in resolving challenging problems of practice. Two things stand out in this interaction. First, since plans are being made, there are a number of irrealis statements (lines 1, 5, 17-18, 23-24). Further, plans are concrete; that is they are stated specifically and reiterated by different members of the inclusion team (e.g., Nicole and Cait's exchange in lines 17-22). Also notable is that the classroom teacher seems to be leading on this interaction. Since she is responsible for ensuring that these plans are enacted, this seems especially important.

Table 5-8. Kindergarten inclusion team meeting

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
		Activity exchange
1	**Meg:** so we'll try this tomorrow	Irrealis statement
2	**Nicole:** well tomorrow he has Wednesdays at 8:30	Statement of fact (assert)
3	he has	Elaboration
4	**Cait:** the counseling	Statement of fact (assert)
5	**Nicole:** the counseling and that takes him from PE	Irrealis statement
6	which is not his best area	Evaluation
	(overlapping talk)	
7	**Nicole:** but you know, Mr. Hogan,	Contrastive
8	I gave him the opportunity to give up Donald	Statement of fact (assert)
9	and he said no,	Statement of fact (assert)
10	that he does really well in his class	Statement of fact (assert)
11	**Unknown speaker:** Donald likes music	Statement of fact (assert)
12	**Nicole:** So maybe	Modal
	(overlapping talk)	
13	like Mr. Hogan,	Comparison
14	he actually said	Statement of fact (assert)
15	he'd hate to lose him	Irrealis statement
16	**Unknown speaker:** He has to go there	Demand (modalized)
17	**Nicole:** so maybe Wednesdays is the day	Irrealis statement
18	that he could stay in resource	Irrealis statement
19	**Cait:** Wednesday music	Elaboration
20	**Nicole:** Wednesday music	Elaboration
21	and then counseling	
22	**Cait:** the counseling	Elaboration
23	so tomorrow's taken care of	Consequence
		Irrealis statement
24	Wednesdays are taken care of	Irrealis statement

Note: Key marker of discourse feature underlined; major speech function italicized.

Solution deferred. Teacher interviews revealed that sometimes teachers feel they spend more time talking about problems than they do talking about solutions. The interaction in Table 5-9 represents one such case. Notice that the teacher provides only a partial description of the problems she is experiencing with one of her students.

This excerpt opens with the teacher, Jane, describing the problems she is having with the student including talking out and failing to sit still. Jane goes on to imitate the dialogue of a typical exchange she has with the student. It is clear from line 17 that the teacher is very frustrated by constant interruptions from this student. Instead of asking probing questions about what the teacher has just described (e.g., when does he do the best job in your room, or what things have you already tried to help this student), a member of the leadership team, Linda, asks a question about the student's special education status (line 24) and another about the kinds of interactions teachers have had with parents. This turning point in the dialogue foregrounds the family and pushes teaching practices to the background of the conversation.

Beginning on line 27, another teacher, Debra, answers the administrator's question about parent contacts she had with the family. She asserts that after multiple interactions with the parents (line 30 and line 32), there is still "no reading homework coming in." Her evaluation is that "they seem like conscientious parents," but they lack "follow through." However, Jane goes on to note that according to this student's sister, Jane's student is being punished at home. Thus, there may be "follow through" at home in the form of punishment, but the student's reading work is still not being returned.

In lines 42 through 56, Linda turns the focus of the dialogue toward referrals. She asserts that since she has not seen this student, the severity of the problem is minimal

Table 5-9. Fourth-grade inclusion meeting

Line	Excerpt	Discourse features
		Knowledge exchange
1	**Jane:** He's very disruptive,	Statement of fact (assert)
2	can't sit still,	Statement of fact (deny)
3	always running everybody,	Elaboration
4	he just talks out,	Statement of fact (assert)
5	hey what are you doing?	Statement of fact (description of what was said)
6	I'll say,	Irrealis statement
7	Andy, be quiet.	Demand (prescribe)
8	Well Bella made me do it,	Statement of fact (assert)
9	and well it's like,	Statement of fact (modalized)
10	I mean, you know,	
11	and it's not just like a couple of times.	Statement of fact (deny)
12	It's like,	Statement of fact (modalized)
13	if I teach a 20 minute lesson,	Irrealis statement
14	he'll stop my lesson five or six times	Irrealis statement
15	because of something,	reason
16	I mean,	Elaboration
17	it's just ridiculous.	Evaluation
18	somebody looked at him	Statement of fact (assert)
19	or somebody smiled at him,	Statement of fact (assert)
20	somebody did something to him last week	Statement of fact (assert)
21	and you know,	Elaboration
22	he's always got an excuse	Statement of fact (assert)
23	and it's	Statement of fact (assert)
24	**Linda:** is he exceptional student education	Yes/no interrogatory
25	**Jane:** no	
26	**Linda:** have you met with the parents	Yes/no interrogatory (nonmodalized)
27	**Debra:** oh I have,	Statement of fact (assert)
28	repeatedly	Elaboration
29	Not too long ago,	Temporal
30	I had an hour conference on a Friday	Statement of fact (assert)
31	with his mother,	Elaboration
32	we've made repeated phone calls,	Statement of fact (assert)

Table 5-9. Continued

Line	Excerpt	Discourse features
33	there's no reading homework	Statement of fact (deny)
34	coming in,	Elaboration
35	I mean they seem like conscientious parents,	Statement of fact (modalized)
36	they give you the right words,	Statement of fact
37	but there's no follow through	Statement of fact (deny)
38	**Jane:** and his sister tells me	Statement of fact (modalized)
39	that he's being punished at home	Statement of fact (assert)
40	**Linda:** is it (indistinct name)	Yes/no interrogative
41	**Debra:** no Shakeria	Disagreement
42	**Linda:** he's obviously not a behavior problem	Evaluative statement
43	'cause I've not seen him	Statement of fact (deny)
44	**Jane:** oh, you've seen him a couple of times	Statement of fact (assert)
45	**Linda:** on referral	Yes/no interrogative
46	**Jane:** uh huh	Agreement
47	**Linda:** I don't remember the name,	Statement of fact (deny)
48	okay	
49	and what type of um ref-	"wh" interrogatory
50	do you know what um	Yes/no interrogatory
51	**Jane:** (interrupts, makes Linda's speech inaudible)	
52	it's usually the same old thing.	Statement of fact (modalized)
53	Um I mean he's not like,	Statement of fact (deny)
54	it's not like he's hurting somebody	Statement of fact (deny)
55	or doing anything terrible,	Elaboration
56	but it's the accumulation of it all	Contrastive Statement of fact (assert) *Activity exchange*
57	**Linda:** I think you should fill out	Demand (modalized)
58	a Family Solutions Team on him	Elaboration
59	**Jane:** okay	Undertaking

Table 5-9. Continued

Line	Excerpt	Discourse features
60	**Linda:** a request for a Family Solutions Team meeting,	Elaboration (restatement)
61	because you've already had	Reason Statement of fact
62	conferences with the parents,	Elaboration
63	now we need to have the other stakeholders there.	Statement of fact (assert)
64	Is he on grade-level in reading and in math?	Yes/no interrogatory
65	**Jane:** yes, yes	Agreement
66	**Linda:** we need to get to -	Statement of fact (assert)
67	**Jane and Debra:** yes, yes	Agreement
68	**Linda:** so, what we're –	Consequence
69	behavior is one of the things	Statement of fact (assert)
70	that the Family Solutions Team can lead on	Irrealis statement
71	and we need to sit	Statement of fact (assert)
72	with all of the stakeholders	Elaboration
73	and come up with strategies	Additive
74	to help this child be successful	Purpose
75	**Jane:** okay	Agreement
76	**Debra:** okay	Agreement

Note: Key marker of discourse feature underlined; major speech function italicized.

(lines 42-43). Jane disputes this (line 44). Through her response, Jane somewhat turns the focus back to her classroom. She notes that the problem with this student's behavior in her classroom is the "accumulation of it all" (line 56). Once again, Jane provides an opportunity to discuss specifically what is happening in her classroom. However, once again, Linda moves the conversation away from the classroom and toward the family (lines 57-58).

This represents a failed response in that there are no "next steps" for this teacher to take with this student. In order for this to have occurred, questions regarding details of

problematic classroom interactions should have been asked. In addition, based upon this classroom teacher's description, health issues (i.e., ADHD) might have been discussed and were not. Finally, it is unclear how bringing the family, absent dialogue about health issues, in for a formal meeting might help this teacher, as this exchange suggests that teachers have already been in close contact with the family. As much contact as there has been, it could have had a deleterious effect on the relationship teachers had with the family. If family's feel they are being "conscientious" and already have consequences in place at home for behavior problems at school (e.g., punishment), then holding another meeting with parents may alienate them.

Solution addressed. Teachers reported that they appreciated when meetings were oriented more on solutions than the problem. The next excerpt (Table 5-10) occurred during the fifth-grade inclusion meeting. In the excerpt, a member of the leadership team, Andra, is facilitating finding solutions for a student who has trouble with academics, but not behavior, about whom teachers are concerned.

In this excerpt, Andra, a member of the leadership team, is asking the inclusion team what more can be done for the student under discussion. Unlike the previous example, Andra asks a great number of questions including interrogatories of both types (i.e., "wh" and yes/no) (lines 2, 4, 36, 37, 41, 45, 50) that are specifically related to the instruction this student is receiving. In addition, she engages the entire inclusion team by asking for recommendations (line 4). Thus, many people talk including two additional members of the leadership team (Anne and Linda), three classroom teachers (Paula, Bonnie, Jean) and one special education teacher (Jasmine).

In lines 23 and 24, Andra summarizes what is being done for this student, acknowledging that typical academic interventions are in place, and pushes for additional

Table 5-10. Fifth-grade inclusion team meeting

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
		Knowledge exchange
1	**Andra:** anything before we close out,	Temporal Irrealis
2	what can be done for Janet though,	"wh" interrogatory (modalized)
3	other than talking back with Marge.	Elaboration Marge (passive)
4	Any recommendations	Yes/no interragotory (nonmodalizaed positive)
5	**Bonnie:** What grade-level is she on	"wh" interrogatory (nonmodalizaed positive)
6	Anne: 4.2.	
7	I wonder if she passed 4.1	Yes/no interrogatory (modalized)
8	There's some glitch –	Statement of fact (assert)
9	I want to say she passed 4.1	Statement of fact (modalized)
10	but then she scored a fifty something	Contrastive Statement of fact
11	on her end of the year test	Elaboration
12	**Paula:** she's low	Evaluation
13	**Anne:** sweet girl,	Evaluation
14	but I work with her	Statement of fact (assert)
15	**Linda:** do you know what major she's in	Yes/no interrogatory
16	**Bonnie:** she's in drama	Statement of fact (assert)
17	**Linda:** she was keyboard	Statement of fact (assert)
18	when she came in last year	Temporal Statement of fact
19	and she had an auditory problem	Additive Statement of fact (assert)
20	**Bonnie:** I eat lunch with her	I (activated) Statement of fact (assert)
21	on a regular basis	Temporaral
	(overlapping talk about lunch and IAI)	

Table 5-10. Continued.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
21	**Jasmine:** I mean it's generally	Statement of fact (modalized)
22	almost one on one with her	Condition
23	**Andra:** that's the extra support	Statement of fact (assert)
24	that we have in place	Statement of fact (assert)
25	um for our upper grade children	Elaboration
26	so you got that in place.	Consequence
27	She's in the lower group	Statement of fact (assert)
28	and so she's going to the computer lab,	Consequence Statement of fact (assert)
29	I don't know what else	Evaluation
30	that we're offering at this point	Irrealis statement
31	any other recommendations	Interrogatory (nonmodalized positive)
32	anything with the Accelerated Reading or	Elaboration
33	**Bonnie:** I encourage it	I (activated) Statement of fact (assert)
34	I mean I do have kids	Statement of fact (assert)
35	that take AR tests	Elaboration
36	**Andra:** who's working with her,	"wh" interrogatory (nonmodalized positive)
37	is she on a consult basis	Yes/no interrogatory (nonmodalized positive)
38	**Jasmine:** support facilitation.	Statement of fact (assert)
39	**Andra:** okay	
40	**Jasmine:** I see them 45 minutes every day	Statement of fact (assert)
41	**Andra:** oh, you do	Yes/no interrogatory (nonmodalized positive)
42	**Jasmine:** mm hmm	
43	**Andra:** okay.	
44	So she's working with Jasmine.	Consequence Statement of fact (assert)
45	Do you have a specific area	Yes/no interrogatory (nonmodalized positive)

Table 5-10. Continued.

Line	Transcript excerpt	Discourse features
46	you're working one on one with her	Elaboration
47	**Jasmine:** no	Deny
48	**Bonnie:** reading	Statement of fact (assert)
49	**Jasmine:** working on class work	Statement of fact (assert)
50	**Andra:** in the reading classroom	Elaboration
51	do work in Mary Ellen's room with her?	Yes/no interrogatory (nonmodalized positive)
52	**Jasmine:** no	deny
53	**Jean:** She teaches reading at that time	Irrealis statement
54	**Andra:** you have your own reading group	Yes/no interrogatory (nonmodalized positive)
55	**Jasmine:** she's not in my reading class	Statement of fact (deny)
56	**Andra:** okay	
57	**Jasmine:** I see her in the classroom (indistinct)	Statement of fact (assert)
	(overlapping talk)	
58	**Anne:** I gotta go back and look	Statement of fact (assert)
59	'cause I think there was something about 4.1,	Statement of fact (modalized)
60	there was a whole issue about that but	Statement of fact Contrastive
61	**Jasmine:** Yeah,	
62	we're about to move up to 4.2 soon	Irrealis statement
63	**Anne:** so I think it might	Irrealis statement
64	**Andra:** that might be a better fit	Irrealis statement
65	considering Jasmine's there.	Reason

recommendations from the team (line 31). When the team does not respond, she begins asking additional questions to stimulate more discussion. When she finds out the special education teacher, Jasmine, is working with the student, she asks if they are working on anything in particular (lines 45-46).

Andra's questions focus in on what is being done for this student in reading (line 50-51), which is the area of struggle for this student. This causes discussion, noted as overlapping talk, about moving this student to the class being taught by the special education teacher. It is on this student's reading level, and the class is a small one where the student will receive more individual instruction. Thus, the team decides to move this student to a different reading group as a way to intensify her reading instruction. Thus, unlike the previous example, the solution (i.e., change reading groups) matches the problem (i.e., the student is struggling in reading). This congruence is achieved through the asking of instructionally relevant questions.

Two things stand out in this interaction. First, this example highlights the importance of asking specific questions related to the problem. In this case, the problem was that the student was not doing well in her reading class. Finally, this excerpt illustrates the power of asking the group to participate. By simply asking others in the room for suggestions, new possibilities opened up.

Summary of Unproductive and Productive Dialogic Strategies

Findings from discourse analyses on samples of dialogue from inclusion team meetings suggest that unproductive problem-solving dialogue contains (a) high numbers of statements which are asserted as facts, (b) pointed statements of evaluation, and (c) premature terminations of problem and solution constructions. High numbers of asserted statements of fact suggest that meeting participants are closed to alternate

possibilities of both problem and solution construction, which is inherently not collaborative.

Evaluative statements, especially those which are not modalized, also run counter to productive discussions. Such statements serve to make discussions tense. They also serve to elicit defensive postures from those at whom statements are directed. This serves to close possibilities within the dialogue down, rather than opening them up for further discussion.

Finally, unproductive dialogue contains premature terminations of problem and solution construction. When problems and solutions are not fully explored, the resulting dialogue may be unfocused, filled with unproductive turns that leave teachers without short-term solutions for pressing problems. In addition, when problems are not fully discussed, proposed solutions may not match actual problems. In either case, teachers leave without new ways to mitigate problems of practice.

Findings from discourse analyses suggest that productive dialogic features for problem-solving meetings include (a) the use of tentative language, (b) asking questions highly related to teacher concerns, (c) the use of summary statements to clarify actions, and (d) requests for entire group participation. The use of tentative language, including modalized questions and statements, gives all meeting participants room to consider what is being suggested. Modalized speech moves away from strong opinion or judgment.

Asking questions which are highly related to teacher concerns helps focus the dialogue of problem-solving meetings. By asking questions aimed at clarifying concerns, teachers can leave meetings with ideas to address problems of practice. In addition, using summaries as next steps are agreed upon reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings. It helps ensure that all meeting participants have similar expectations.

Finally, engaging the entire group in the problem-solving process enhances group productivity. This occurs when facilitators directly ask for team input. Directly asking for all team members to participate generates input that might otherwise be missed. Challenging problems are more readily addressed when everyone is engaged in the problem-solving process.

CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

There is great need for professional development that enables teachers to learn how to effectively work with students who struggle in classrooms (Brownell et al., 2004; Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Vaughn et al., 1996). Scholars have suggested that professional development embedded in everyday practice may provide the kind of experiences teachers need to explore problems of practice in meaningful ways (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Little, 2003; Supovitz, 2002). Some evidence suggests that when teachers work together in small groups, which are focused on student achievement, both teaching practices and student achievement improve over time (Hollins et al., 2004; Supovitz, 2002; Vescio et al., 2006).

Little (2003) investigated how teachers represented problems of practice to colleagues during team problem-solving discussions. Her work suggests that there are occasions during meetings when teachers "disclose a problem of teaching practice and invite commentary from others as part of ongoing, ordinary group work" (p. 930). Thus, on the one hand, this work confirmed "the optimistic premise" (p. 925) that small group meetings served the purpose of collaborative problem solving. On the other hand, Little found that teacher discussions of problems sometimes remained at a superficial level. In particular, teachers presented problems in ways to "justify themselves and their choices to one another" (p. 937), and group members failed to ask questions to help colleagues fully pursue stated problems. This led Little to conclude that "ongoing interactions both

open up and close off opportunities for teacher learning and consideration of practice" (p. 939). Thus, it is important to better understand the nature of how team interactions during problem-solving discussions generate productive and unproductive dialogue. This, in turn, would explain why some meetings are more effective than others.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to better understand what kinds of problems of practice are presented at grade-level inclusion meetings, and how interactions during these meetings influence teachers' problem and response constructions. Inclusion meetings functioned to provide teachers assistance with pressing problems of practice through collaborative problem solving. Teams were comprised of grade- or department-level teachers, special education teachers, leadership team members, and other professional educators. The research questions guiding this study included the following: What kinds of problems are described at inclusion meetings? What kinds of responses are developed by the group in response to problems presented? What value do these meetings have for teachers? How does dialogue constructed during inclusion meetings shape problem construction and group responses?

This study was approached from primarily a social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckman, 1966) in that the primary data source were verbatim transcripts from eight inclusion meetings held at Hopewell Elementary school from the fall of 2005 through the spring of 2006. These data were supplemented with 21 teacher interviews representing a wide spectrum of teachers based upon teaching assignment, years of service, and race to better understand their perspectives of inclusion meetings.

Inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) and discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) were used to address research questions. Using inductive analysis as described by Hatch, I began my analysis by reading all data from beginning to end. Since Hatch stressed the

importance of knowing the data set well before proceeding to the next step, all data were open-coded. Frames for analysis were used to identify data for additional analysis. Frames for Question 1 included all talk related to problem descriptions including student attributes, how problems had been previously addressed, and problem interpretations. Frames for Question 2 included all talk offered in response to problems, including responses that seemed off target. Frames for Question 3 included all talk related to the value of meetings to teachers. Finally, frames for the fourth question included sections of transcripts where teachers and other meeting participants coconstructed problems and responses to problems. Domains and subdomains were identified. The end results were typologies of problems presented at inclusion meetings and responses to those problems.

Inductive analyses were conducted on teacher interview transcripts to better understand how teachers valued inclusion meetings. Using results from inductive analyses, I selected samples of dialogue on which to perform discourse analysis. Criteria were established for selecting positive and negative samples of discourse using findings from inductive analyses of teacher interviews. Specifically, positive samples were selected if they provided evidence of (a) social support, (b) learning opportunities, or (c) practical support. In addition, positive samples were selected if they moved teachers toward classroom-level solutions. Inductive analyses of teacher interviews suggested that meetings were unproductive if they failed to generate solutions. Thus, samples of dialogue were selected if they failed to generate classroom-level solutions that were acceptable to the teacher. Thus, four positive examples and four negative examples were selected, with one sample from each of the eight meetings. Next, I identified speech functions, statement and question types, modality, semantic relations between sentences and clauses, and social actors within each dialogue sample (Fairclough, 2003).

Two main speech functions were identified. Knowledge exchanges occur when the purpose behind the talk is to know something. Knowledge exchanges consist of questions (i.e., yes/no interrogatives) or "wh" interrogatives and statements (i.e., declarative sentences). The purpose behind an activity exchange is to gain commitments for action. Thus, activity exchanges imply more than just an exchange of words. Activity exchanges consist of demands (i.e., imperatives) and offers (i.e., statements related to commitment to act). Importantly, both halves of these exchanges are not always found, as dialogue is unique in that expectations for exchanges are not always met (Fairclough, 2003).

Statement types identified included statements of fact, irrealis statements, and evaluations. Irrealis statements are future oriented (e.g., She will be discussed at the meeting) and hypotheticals (e.g., I may need to refer her for special education services, if this does not help). The purpose behind identifying question and statement types is to aid pattern identification within the text.

The modality of each question and statement was identified. Although there are explicit markers of modality (e.g., can, will, may, must, would, should), modality is best understood as making speech more tentative. Thus, in the case of activity exchanges, modality suggests the degree to which the actors are committed to the obligation or necessity of the demand or offer. Demands can be verbalized three ways. It can be (a) prescriptive (e.g., sit down), (b) modalized (e.g., you could sit down), or (c) proscriptive (e.g., don't sit down). Similarly, the offer or response can be verbalized in three ways. The offer can be (a) undertaken (e.g., I'll open the window), (b) modalized (e.g., I may open the window), or (c) refused (I won't open the window) (Fairclough, 2003).

Statements and questions can be modalized. Statements of fact are generally asserted (e.g., She has a learning disability), whereas irrealis statements tend to be modalized (e.g., She may have a learning disability). Statements can also be denied (e.g., The student is not qualified). Questions can be (a) nonmodalized positive (e.g., Is he your student?), (b) modalized (e.g., Could it be that he's overwhelmed?), or (c) nonmodalized negative (e.g., Isn't he one of your success stories?).

Semantic relations between clauses were identified to better understand the meaning of the utterance. Relationships identified included causal (i.e., reason, consequence, purpose), conditional (i.e., marked by *if*), temporal (i.e., markers implicate time), additive (i.e., marked with *and*), elaboration (i.e., included exemplification and rewording), contrastive/concessive (i.e., marked by *but* to signal a qualifier of the statement).

Representations of social actors in dialogue were identified. Specifically, nouns and pronouns directly related to the interaction were identified. In addition, whether actors were activated (i.e., responsible for action) or passivated (i.e., recipients of action) were noted. This was used to identify who was responsible for action within the discourse sample.

Problems Addressed/Described at Inclusion Meetings

Problems discussed during inclusion meetings were consistent with problems teachers shared during teacher interviews when they were asked to discuss a recent classroom dilemma. In most cases, teachers discussed very similar problems to those raised during inclusion meetings. The notable exception here was that early career teachers frequently raised pedagogical issues, such as how to properly group students or teach particular concepts, whereas experienced teachers uniformly shared concerns about

particular students. This suggests that inclusion meetings, particularly for experienced teachers, may be fruitful places for professional development to occur.

Problems of practice teachers brought before inclusion team meetings fell into two large categories: problems with academics and problems with behaviors. Teachers reported two kinds of students about whom they had academic concerns, including students perceived as putting forth effort but who were failing to progress, and another group of students teachers described as having inconsistent academic performance. Importantly, teacher descriptions were highly personalized coconstructions that conveyed multiple characteristics of students who had academic problems including (a) disability status, (b) retention status, and (c) academic progress. Teachers justified concerns about students in multiple ways including (a) evidence of academic progress from assessments and class work, (b) lack of response to supports and interventions teachers tried before meetings, and (c) evidence that the problem existed in multiple classrooms. Thus, teachers described students as either putting forth effort with little progress, or they described students as doing well on some days, or even in some subjects, but not on others. Teachers noted that students with inconsistent performance had to be "forced" to get work done.

Teachers described four kinds of challenging student behaviors including (a) attendance problems, (b) behavior problems and low academic performance, (c) persistent annoying small behaviors, and (d) aggressive behaviors. Attendance problems were especially concerning for teachers in high-stakes testing grades. Teachers justified concerns about absences by noting the patterns of absences and the ways they tried to address the problem. Teachers reported a wide range of interventions for

absences including sending the truancy officer to homes and praising the student for being at school.

Teachers also discussed students who had behavior problems and academic problems. Teachers suggested that behaviors influenced poor academics and vice versa and often interpreted poor behavior as a means for the child to escape academic situations they found too challenging. Teachers justified their concerns about these students by reporting (a) students' academic progress, (b) failed interventions and support already offered, and (c) students' records of disciplinary actions. In addition, teachers reported on the disability status of these students.

Teachers also described problems with students who had persistent and annoying small behaviors. These students were described as usually being on grade-level or above, who had infrequent disciplinary encounters, as their behaviors were not severe. In addition, they were described as easily distracted and disruptive. Teachers justified concerns about these students by suggesting that disruptive behaviors occurred in multiple settings with multiple teachers. Teachers also noted that many of these students had been diagnosed with ADHD. Teachers suggested that family support was important, as the school had fewer interventions for these kinds of behaviors. However, teachers reported that interactions with families generally did not mitigate student behaviors in classrooms.

Teachers described concerns about students with aggressive behaviors. Academically, these students were described as performing at or near grade level, with teachers noting that behaviors diminished when students were actively engaged in classroom activities. Teachers felt that these students caused "unsafe" trouble, and that they needed to keep a watchful eye on these students at all times. Teachers justified their

concerns about these students by suggesting that parents acknowledged aggression problems in their children. In addition, teachers noted that one student had been taken off medication for ADHD, which teachers felt added to the veracity of the claim that there was something wrong with the student.

Responses to Problems Described/Addressed at Inclusion Meetings

Responses coconstructed by inclusion teams to address problems with students were generated at different levels, depending upon the problem. Responses were constructed at (a) family levels, (b) classroom levels, and (c) school levels. In addition, there were specific occasions when teams suggested that interventions and supports already in place for students be continued without change. Notably, teachers and leaders at Hopewell Elementary had far fewer suggestions to remedy behavior problems than academic problems. This may be explained by the fact that the school had multiple structures in place to assist with academic problems, such as intensive academic instruction, after-school tutoring, coteaching, and tutoring for reading. Thus, getting additional help for academic struggles in classrooms was relatively easy for teachers at Hopewell Elementary.

Although teachers actually brought slightly more academic problems to meetings than behavior problems, behavior problems were discussed for longer periods of time than academic problems. Further, teachers described fewer kinds of problems with academics (i.e., low performing with high effort and inconsistent academic performance) than behavior problems (i.e., attendance, low academics with problem behavior, persistent annoying behaviors, and aggressive behaviors). Taken together, this suggests that dealing with problem behaviors was challenging for teachers.

School-level interventions suggested for problem behaviors were few (i.e., discipline policies and counseling), which may be why involving families for classroom problems was frequently suggested by inclusion teams. Although involving families may help students and teachers in the long run, valuable instructional time is lost when teachers cannot effectively manage students in their classrooms. Thus, if teachers come to an inclusion meeting with concerns about student behavior, they need to leave the meeting with more than the promise of a meeting with parents at some point in the future. This suggests that schools and their partners need to come up with creative ways to help students with problem behaviors beyond those reported by teachers and leaders in this study.

Family-level responses included involving families by (a) providing families with additional materials to help their child at home, (b) convening a family solutions team meeting (FSTM), and (c) using the home/school liaison to gain access to families. Family-level responses were recommended by teams for students of all problem types. Convening FSTMs was the most frequently suggested response. Family solutions team meetings included families and all school stakeholders who had direct contact with the student of concern. Guidelines for these meetings were developed prior to the beginning of the school year and were available to teachers in written form. Often, teams suggested convening these meetings when problems at school could only be handled from home (e.g., behavior related to medication issues, absences). There were, however, other occasions when FSTMs were recommended for challenging classroom behaviors such as moving around and calling out during class.

Classroom-level responses included suggestions or responses to (a) consider how the student was functioning in the classroom, (b) change teaching methods to better

address student needs, and (c) influence student motivation. These suggestions were made for students with all types of problems except absences. Recommendations to consider how the student was functioning in the classroom emerged in two ways. Teams discussed the possibility of doing an Individual Educational Plan update so that a formal functional behavior assessment (FBA) could be done. By design, FBAs define the conditions under which undesirable behaviors occur, which is the first step toward establishing ways to better help the student behave acceptably in the classroom.

The second way this occurred was through teachers responding to questions about the student's behavior in the classroom posed by various team members. As teachers responded to team member questions about how and when students did best in classrooms, plans were developed to adjust classroom environments and instruction to maximize possibilities that students would be successful. For example, through dialogue, one teacher determined that she needed to allow her students to move and stretch before beginning direct instruction. This plan was developed in consideration of the fact that students were coming to her class after a 90-minute, intense reading block.

It was also a team recommendation that teachers change teaching methods. These recommendations were made, in particular, for reading instruction. Experienced teachers shared methods for effectively teaching reading comprehension with their less experienced colleagues. In addition, several kinds of instruction related to technology, such as computer programs and language masters, were suggested in response to teacher concerns about students' reading performance.

Finally, teams made recommendations related to improving student motivation for academic tasks. These recommendations were made, in part, because sometimes classroom conditions could not be changed such as the need for teachers to give

directions. Thus, teams recommended using extrinsic reinforcement, as well as making bargains with students, to mitigate problems related to student engagement and disruption.

School-level responses were suggested for students with onerous academic problems and problems with aggression. For academic problems, teams sometimes recommended students be evaluated for special education placement. This recommendation was frequently made during the second grade inclusion meetings, the year before high-stakes testing could result in student retention. Importantly, special education testing was necessary to gain access to testing accommodations and had little bearing on students' placements as the school was already including students with disabilities in general education classrooms. In addition, when students' problems were related to extreme aggression, teams recommended that students be evaluated for placement in separate schools for behavior.

The final kind of recommendation made by teams was for teachers to continue interventions already in place for students. This occurred most frequently during the third-grade meeting, as this was the high-stakes testing grade. Some teachers worried excessively about the progress of their students, even though leadership team members suggested that teachers were already doing everything possible to help. This recommendation also applied to cases where teachers understood from parents that they would not give permission for students to be tested for special education. Thus, on these relatively rare occasions, teams had no further recommendations for teams except to keep doing what they were already doing.

How Dialogue Shapes Constructed Problems and Responses during Inclusion Meetings

Teacher interviews suggested that some teachers found inclusion meetings to be productive ways for them to address problems of practice whereas other teachers did not find them to be helpful. Notably, these different opinions of meetings were sometimes from teachers present at the same meeting. When teachers and leaders entered meetings with preconceived notions about how to solve problems, meetings produced less dialogue. For their part, teachers perceived meetings as unhelpful when solutions suggested were contrary to their own beliefs about acceptable practice or when they entered meetings with preconceived notions that the locus of the problem was the student and/or his or her family. On the other hand, when teachers entered meetings uncertain about how to manage their concerns, more dialogue was produced—dialogue teacher interviews suggested was helpful.

Leaders, particularly when they were the only leader at the meeting and acting as facilitator, had the capacity to stifle discussion with one decisive comment. On the other hand, when leaders encouraged group participation and offered opinions judiciously, teacher interviews suggested meetings were perceived of as more productive. This suggests that in order for dialogue to be as productive as possible, authority (i.e., evaluative statements and opinions) must be disrupted. This is likely complicated by the fact that being decisive is often perceived of as a valuable leadership trait.

Meeting dynamics also influenced the production of dialogue during inclusion meetings. In many of these meetings, dialogue involved only the presenting teacher and the facilitator. Other meeting participants seemed to take on roles akin to observers

instead of participants. Notably, when teachers chose to observe, they often suggested that meetings were not helpful to them. Perhaps more problematic was that observing instead of participating limited the expertise in the room devoted to problem solving. Interestingly, leadership team members who were not facilitating meetings seemed especially prone to being silent. Thus, it is important to engage all members in active problem solving.

Values of Meetings for Teachers

Analysis of teacher interviews suggested that teachers perceived three main benefits from inclusion meetings including (a) feeling social support for their work from colleagues, (b) learning new things about the profession of teaching, and (c) receiving practical help with challenging problems of practice.

Support. Support teachers described was akin to what Kruger (1997) termed *social support*. Social support includes guidance and reliable alliance with others. Teachers at Hopewell Elementary frequently guided each other and supported each other with decisions about how best to help students.

Learning new things. Teachers reported learning new information at inclusion meetings about (a) students, (b) classroom management and teaching strategies, and (c) special education procedures. Teachers reported that through inclusion meetings, they better understood how students behaved outside of their own classrooms. In addition, teachers reported learning details about students that changed the ways they were teaching. For example, one teacher reported learning that one of her students was legally blind in one eye. This prompted her to provide accommodations that she had not previously used.

Early career teachers, in particular, reported leaning about new teaching strategies during meetings. For example, teachers reported learning ways to use instructional aids, such as whiteboards and reading guides. Teachers at all phases of career reported learning to use new behavior management techniques. For example, an early career teacher reported learning how to help teach a student to raise her hand, whereas an experienced teacher reported learning how to help students with ADHD channel their motor needs in productive ways.

General education teachers reported learning about (a) special education referral procedures, (b) individual education plans (IEP), (c) testing accommodations, and (d) manifestation hearings. Teachers reported understanding the relevance of referring students for special education and reading IEPs to aid instruction. Finally, a couple of teachers reported that, prior to inclusion meetings, they had never heard of manifestation hearings. They reported that after inclusion meetings, they understood that manifestation hearings were held in response to student suspensions in excess of 10 days, to determine if behaviors that cause suspensions resulted from disabilities.

Practical help with problems. Teachers reported that at inclusion meetings, they received practical help with challenging problems of practice. Teachers shared examples of how they applied what they learned in their classrooms, such as allowing students to move before giving directions and moving students to different instructional groups to help students focus. Teachers also reported that inclusion meetings helped them improve practice through short-term and long-term reflection.

Problems with Inclusion Meetings

Teachers reported two kinds of problems with inclusion meetings: time pressures and not finding solutions to problems. Time pressures included logistical things such as

meetings beginning and ending late and having too many students to discuss. They also included procedural things, such as talking too long about a couple of students, which limited the numbers of students that could be discussed.

Failure to generate solutions. Failure to generate solutions was related to multiple issues. Some teachers noted that teams spent too much time discussing problems and not enough time talking about solutions. Other teachers reported that team recommendations were not acceptable for them. For example, one teacher reported that the team wanted her to use a point sheet with her student. She resisted that suggestion because, from her perspective, she did not have enough time to do an adequate job with the point sheet and teach her class. In addition, she opined that point sheets worked best in special education classrooms, not general education classrooms.

Other teachers revealed that some group interactions made meetings feel unproductive. Teachers explained that meetings sometimes became occasions for blaming instead of problem solving. Finally, teachers reported that some inclusion meetings were tense affairs, where teachers were grilled about student progress, rather than simply discussing it.

Findings from Discourse Analysis

All of these results were used to select samples of meeting dialogue, as described earlier, for discourse analysis. Discourse analysis revealed how dialogue shaped the constructions of problems and responses to those problems. Importantly, there were two meetings that could be considered highly productive and two meetings that were mostly unproductive. The other four meetings had moments of both.

Problem constructions. Dialogue shaped problem constructions in productive and unproductive ways. Productive problem constructions resulted in problems that were

coconstructed during inclusion meetings, whereas unproductive problem constructions resulted in the construction of two different problems during inclusion meetings.

Coconstructed problems were characterized by team member language that was tentative and speculative. For example, instead of using statements of fact to make asserted statements about the problem (e.g., Your room is too open for this student), an inclusion team member made a modalized statement (i.e., I wonder if the space is difficult). By phrasing this statement in a tentative way, the presenting teacher was afforded a collaborative posture instead of a defensive posture. Thus, the presenting teacher was able to consider whether or not this concern was consistent with her own experiences without concern of disagreeing with the team member's suggestion.

Coconstructed problems were also characterized by particular activation patterns among meeting participants. At the beginning of the dialogue, all team members were activated (i.e., I'm wondering how far we can get here today on Clovis). Thus, the entire team was viewed as important to the discussion of the problem. In addition, the presenting teacher accepted responsibility for what happened with the student being discussed in the classroom by activating herself in the dialogue (i.e., I lose him). Thus, the dialogue was collaborative and nonthreatening.

Parallel problem constructions were inherently unproductive exchanges whereby inclusion team participants addressed concerns related to the same student but arrived at different problem constructions. These exchanges consisted of back and forth statements, which were asserted as fact. In addition, neither party in the exchange was willing to alter their fact-based opinion about the problem. Thus, the dialogue was closed and noncollaborative.

These unproductive exchanges were common among relatively few teachers and leaders. Teachers who seemed prone to parallel problem constructions had two things in common. First, they had many years of teaching experience. Second, they engaged in this kind of talk primarily when they were discussing their own problems. In other words, these teachers actively engaged in coconstructions of other teachers' dilemmas, just not their own. Importantly, years of experience were not always related to the capacity of teachers to coconstruction their own problems with others. There were far more experienced teachers who brought actual dilemmas, not preconceived problems, to inclusion meetings. This suggests that the entering assumptions of teachers play an important role in how problem descriptions unfold.

One leader frequently engaged in unproductive problem constructions. She seemed highly invested in her own perceptions of problems and was decidedly less open to how others perceived problems. No matter how much or how little direct experience she had with particular student situations, she positioned herself as the expert. Clearly, this had a deleterious effect on the quality of dialogue at meetings—especially meetings where she was facilitating. Importantly, other leaders and professional educators, when present, appeared to mute this propensity to sway dialogue with her asserted opinions. This suggests the hopeful possibility that this kind of behavior can be influenced.

Response constructions. Dialogue shaped the social constructions of responses in productive and unproductive ways. Productive meetings were characterized by dialogue that was focused and supportive. In addition, solutions suggested were highly related to teacher concerns (i.e., provided classroom-level assistance).

Maintaining dialogue related to the problem being discussed was challenging. Inclusion team members were often reminded of unrelated but important ideas they

wanted to discuss. In addition, presenting problems were often complex, requiring multiple responses from teams (e.g., students with academic and behavior concerns). Focus problems were mitigated when inclusion team members systematically addressed each part of the concern before entertaining other parts (e.g., recommendations for academic issues are addressed fully before discussing recommendations for behavior concerns). When dialogue moved away from the central issue being discussed, inclusion team members nudged their colleagues back to the central concern with modalized statements (e.g., I think we should . . .). Unfocused dialogue, on the other hand, was characterized by a series of conversational turns that moved discussions away from helping teachers with classroom-level suggestions.

Productive responses to teacher concerns offered material support to teachers for pressing problems of practice. Material support included coconstructing concrete plans of action. Since plans inherently convey what will happen in the future, these discussions contained high numbers of irrealis statements. In addition, plans were confirmed through reiteration to ensure all members of the team understood what would occur next. Instead of providing material support, some meetings were characterized by tense dialogue that included teacher resistance and negative statements of evaluation. When teachers were highly resistant to suggestions, suggestions were cast aside with statements that began with the words “yes, but.”

Productive responses to teacher concerns involved dialogue that generated interventions that were appropriately targeted to address teacher concerns. There were two discourse features that shaped matched problem/response to problem pairs, including questions that invited group participation (e.g., Any recommendations?) and questions that were tightly focused on teacher concerns. Asking for recommendations resulted in

the participation, including suggestions, of more team members. In addition, questions highly related to teacher concerns produced solutions that matched the problem. On the other hand, questions that moved the conversation away from classroom-level concerns toward family-level concerns resulted in solutions that left teachers with no next steps for their classrooms. Thus, family-level solutions, while important, should be coupled with solutions for assisting teachers to better manage classrooms so that valuable learning opportunities are not lost.

Extending Existing Literature

This study is situated in two areas of the existing literature: literature on teams and literature on communities of practice.

Situating this Study in the Literature on Teams

Kinds of problems reported to teams. Findings from this study were consistent with existing studies suggesting that teachers reported needing assistance with students for a wide range of issues including academic and behavior concerns, or what some studies termed socio-emotional concerns (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Eidle et al.,1998; Meyers et al., 1996). Unlike previous studies, my findings described salient details about characteristics of reported problems, as classification schemes often lose meaning (Berger & Luckman, 1966). For example, students described by teachers did not simply have reading problems, they had reading problems and worked really hard, or they had reading problems and put forth inconsistent effort. Obviously, even though these are both academic problems with reading, addressing them would require substantively different approaches. Thus, details concerning the kinds of problems presented matter.

Findings from this study are consistent with studies that have found that teachers request assistance with attendance problems (Meyers et al., 1996) and socio-emotional

behavior problems (Eidle et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 1996). This study extends the literature by suggesting that classroom teachers also requested assistance with aggressive student behaviors and with student behaviors that caused persistent minor disruptions.

In addition, this study provides more evidence about how these problems are related to other concerns. For example, behavior problems in this study occurred either in isolation or with academic problems. Teachers suggested that when behavior problems existed with academic problems, students used behavior to avoid academic tasks. In addition, teachers in this study reported that peer problems cooccurred with both aggressive behaviors and persistent annoying behaviors. As was suggested above, these more fine-grained problem descriptions enable better understandings of the suitability of the kinds of suggestions teams make in response to problems.

Kinds of responses to problems suggested by teams. The types of teams studied extensively that reported the interventions recommended were primarily prereferral teams (Bahr, 1994; Eidle et al., 1998; Harrington & Gibson, 1986; Knotek, 2003; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Truscott et al., 2005). Researchers reported that these teams focused on recommendations for out-of-classroom interventions, such as referring students for special education services or counseling rather than in-classroom interventions. Both of these kinds of interventions also were recommended by teams included in this study.

Teachers in the current study focused much more extensively on in-classroom interventions. Only two previous studies reported in-classroom interventions including the use of academic accommodations (Truscott et al., 2005), and the use of goals related to encouraging productive classroom behaviors (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989). Although Truscott and his colleagues (2005) reported that external interventions were the most

frequent kinds of interventions recommended by teams, they reported less frequent in-classroom interventions such as decreasing the amount of work expected, one-on-one instruction, and changes to curriculum. These first two recommendations were not suggested as recommendations by teams in this study, whereas the third recommendation (i.e., change to curriculum) was. This is likely due to the fact that decreasing the amount of work expected by students was a common accommodation offered to students with disabilities. Thus, teachers would likely do this independently. One-on-one instruction was also common practice at the school (i.e., intensive academic instruction, coteaching with special educators); thus, there would be no need for teams to make such recommendations.

Importantly, prereferral teams by design are often charged with determining whether students should be referred for special educational services. The fact that researchers report that they do so in large numbers is not surprising. Researchers involved in many of these studies, however, have suggested that the high number of recommended external interventions left teachers wondering how to proceed in classrooms (Eidle, 1998; Eidle et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 1996; Rubinson, 2002; Truscott et al., 2005). Thus, some scholars suggested that teacher involvement might mitigate the trend of recommending so few in-classroom interventions (Meyers et al., 1996; Rubinson, 2002; Truscott et al., 2005). This study adds to what is known about whether or not teacher input generates more in-classroom interventions.

This study suggests that involving teachers in problem-solving discussions produced a larger variety of responses to teacher concerns than what is reported in the literature for teams with limited teacher participation. Specifically, eight studies report external classroom interventions, including recommendations for additional special

education services (Eidle et al., 1998; Meyers et al., 1996; Pobst, 2001; Truscott et al., 2005), socio-emotional services such as counseling and mentoring (Meyers et al., 1996; Rubinson, 2002), family interventions (Meyers et al., 1996; Rubinson, 2002), and remedial programs (Rubinson, 2002), all interventions consistent with findings from this study. Family interventions reported in the literature were mostly related to conferencing with families. Although inclusion teams in this study made similar suggestions (i.e., Family Support Meetings), family-level recommendations also included suggestions to send home academic materials thus engaging families in supporting academics, not just behavior.

Importantly, inclusion teams in this study made recommendations that involved teachers making meaningful changes in instructional practices to accommodate students with problems. In some cases, teams suggested finding out more information about how students were functioning in classrooms. Presumably, this information would be used to improve conditions for particular students. Teams also functioned to assist teachers with thinking more deeply about how what they were doing in the classroom influenced student problem behaviors. Finally, there were recommendations for teachers to use different teaching methods (e.g., teaching methods to assist with reading comprehension) in classrooms.

Thus, evidence from this study suggests that inclusion teams, which had extensive teacher participation, seemed to suggest a wider variety of recommendations than prereferral intervention teams reported in the literature, which had more limited teacher participation (i.e., meetings held when teachers could not attend, teachers cast as problem presenters only). Family interventions went beyond holding conferences and in-classroom interventions went beyond what Truscott and his colleagues (2005) termed

"easy" (p. 130) interventions (i.e., reducing the amount of work required, changing students' seats). In many cases, recommended interventions pushed teachers in new directions. Recommendations in this study suggested teachers consider ways to encourage appropriate classroom behaviors (e.g., extrinsic rewards, bargaining with students). Teachers were given recommendations to try different teaching methods (e.g., methods to aid reading comprehension, use of technology). Teachers were encouraged to change their own procedures to benefit students (e.g., allow some movement before directions are given). Stated differently, teachers were challenged to try new things in their classrooms to mitigate behavior and academic concerns. Notably, although most teachers were open to changing practice, a few teachers were resistant. Their participation in meetings frequently led to tense, unproductive dialogue.

Finally, there were rare occasions when inclusion teams suggested that teachers continue what they were doing to ameliorate student problems without change. This recommendation, more than others, was a direct reflection of the environment created in response to high-stakes testing. Teams made this recommendation when families, in spite of teacher recommendations, chose not to have their children tested for disabilities. It is important to note that teachers pursued special educational testing for the purpose of garnering access for students to use accommodations on the state's high-stakes exam, not for the purpose of removing students from their classrooms. In fact, because of school's inclusion model, students were not moved to other classrooms when they qualified for special education services. Thus teachers made recommendations for testing to mitigate the negative consequences of high-stakes testing for students and the school. It was also made in response to dedicated teachers, who had already exhausted every approach to help their students succeed. Inclusion teams recognized that, when students and teachers

had already tried every accommodation possible, more interventions were unlikely to make a difference.

Situating this Study in the Communities of Practice Literature

Communities of practice, as described in the literature, involve much more than teachers working in teams (Buysse et al., 2003; DuFour, 2004; Vescio et al., 2006). An important component of communities of practice is collaborative work on teams focused around issues of teaching and learning. The current study provides an important analysis of the nature of productive dialogue.

Evidence from empirical studies on communities of practice suggest that teachers appreciate and value dialogue that is "purposeful" (Strahan, 2003) and safe (Snow-Gerono, 2005), findings confirmed by this study. In addition, evidence suggests that specific structures helped teams stay focused on issues of teaching and learning (Hollins et al., 2004). Strong facilitators or structured protocols helped maintain an appropriate focus (Englert & Rozendal, 2004; Hollins et al., 2004). This study extends what is known by suggesting that patterns related to the ways questions are asked and statements are made can open up or close down the problem-solving dialogue.

This study reveals something about the nature of safe dialogue. Specifically, if one or more team members assert fact-based positions replete with evaluations of teacher behaviors as right or wrong, the resulting dialogue is tense and unproductive. Teachers leave meetings without solutions for their problems of practice. Safe dialogue is achieved through asking questions and making statements that are modalized (e.g., Is it possible . . , I think maybe . . .). This kind of tentative language enables teams to generate dialogue that is open instead of closed. It gives teachers space to consider what is being said against the context of their own experiences. It also allows teachers to either agree or

disagree with what is being suggested without fear of being perceived as argumentative. Thus, when one or more members engage in dialogue through asking questions and making modalized statements, dialogue is more likely to remain open. It is important to note, however, that one member who makes multiple evaluative assertions of fact can close down the dialogue, especially if that member holds a position of authority.

This study confirms that strong facilitators help maintain the focus of dialogue (Englert & Rozendal, 2004; Hollins et al., 2004). In particular, this study suggests that asking questions highly-related to problems is helpful. In addition, when facilitators invite all members of inclusion teams to participate, it improves the engagement of team members, which, in turn, allows more ideas and thoughts to bear on pressing problems.

National School Reform Faculty (2006) advocate the use of protocols to guide problem-solving discussions about student work. Protocols provide structures to facilitate effective communication by providing speaking patterns (e.g., presenting teacher speaks first; presenting teacher takes notes while colleagues discuss what was presented) and time limits. In the absence of a strong facilitator, protocols may enable productive dialogue to occur.

In addition to facilitators, teachers' contributions to discussions shaped learning opportunities. Little (2003) found that teacher problem descriptions inherently put teachers in a favorable light, a finding not confirmed in my study. Rather, this study suggests that if teachers expressed a great deal of certainty by making strong fact-based statements grounded in one definition of the problem, then teachers positioned themselves as figures of authority. This undermined the possibility of collaborative dialogue. On the other hand, when teachers were more tentative and open to the idea that what they do in classrooms influences student problems, problem constructions did not

necessarily position teachers in a favorable light. Rather, teachers were positioned to collaborate with inclusion team members productively.

Implications

As with any study, this study had multiple limitations. First, this study was conducted at one urban elementary school in the southeastern United States. This school was in its second year of including students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Nearly all instructional faculty and leadership team members participated in inclusion meetings. Not one person who was invited to participate declined participation. This suggests a high commitment on the part of the school to actively participate in the generation of new knowledge for practice. Second, much of this work is interpretive; thus, others looking at the same transcripts might construct different and equally valid explanations of the data (Glesne, 1999).

Implications for Practice

McFadzean (2002) has suggested that as teams progress developmentally, there are changes in teams' attention to task, meeting process, team structure, team dynamics, and trust. This study suggests a number of practical ways to improve the quality of problem-solving discussions about pressing problems of practice that align with this framework.

Teach Teachers How to Bring Problems of Practice

Evidence from this study suggests that meetings were not helpful when teachers were seeking reinforcement for or help in implementing preconceived solutions to problems, especially when problems were thought to reside within the student or the student's family. On the other hand, meetings were more productive when teachers brought forward problems of practice. This suggests that when teachers problematize

their own practice, meetings are inherently more productive. Two tools that may assist teachers with this different way of viewing problems are the use of inquiry projects and collecting FBA-like data specifically to address behavior concerns. Using one of these two frameworks may enable teachers to learn how to effectively frame problems of practice as dilemmas they are wondering about.

Pursue Classroom-level Interventions

When teachers bring concerns to inclusion meetings, they expect to leave meetings with next steps that at least move problems forward. Although school-level and family-level recommendations are important, when these recommendations are made without concomitant classroom-level recommendations, the risk of continued unproductive classroom interactions is increased. Within the realm of high-stakes accountability, students and teachers cannot afford to waste valuable instructional opportunities. Thus, when teams make recommendations for family- and school-level interventions, teams need to provide additional suggestions for what teachers can do the next day in their classrooms to mitigate onerous problems of practice.

Ask Focused Questions Related to the Problem Under Discussion

This study suggests that to improve meeting processes so that teams move beyond concern with merely "getting the job done" (McFadzean, 2002, p. 464) or as Little (2003) described it, the tension between "figuring things out" and "getting them done" (p. 931), asking questions that are highly related to the problem posed is essential. When team members are focused on getting things done, questions go unasked. For example, there was one meeting where several problems were described and no problem responses followed, in part, because no one in the group asked questions. Thus, focused questions orient the group toward figuring things out.

Express Suggestions, Statements, and Questions Tentatively Rather than Assertively

This study suggests that an important mechanism for improving team dynamics was framing dialogue in more tentative ways. Specifically, this study suggests that when team participants used statements and questions that were modalized with such markers as "I think" or "have you considered" that the ensuing dialogue was inherently more productive. In addition, tentative dialogue enabled team members to be more open and reflective than dialogue that was asserted and evaluative. Dialogue that was filled with facts and evaluations tended to produce tense, unproductive discussions. Thus, problem-solving teams should consider at least becoming familiar with ways to produce more tentative talk (i.e., modalized statements and questions).

Consider Using Problem-solving Protocols

Evidence from this study suggests that grade-level inclusion meetings offer a promising venue for the professional development of teachers as they engage in working collaboratively through problems of practice. However, this promise comes with two caveats. First, in order for meetings to be truly collaborative, naturally authoritative participants must be disrupted from those tendencies lest they commandeer meetings to their own purposes. Second, in order to broker the best possible solutions for teachers and students, all meeting participants need to be actively engaged in the process. Too often, meetings were reduced to a dialogue between the facilitator and the presenting teacher while others at the meeting remained silent. Specially developed problem-solving protocols may offer the possibility to remedy both of these concerns.

National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) recommends that protocols be used to facilitate productive conversations about student work (Smith & Tamez, 2006).

Although not thoroughly described in their article, Hollins and her colleagues (2004) used a problem-solving protocol in their investigation aimed at improving reading instruction for teacher-dependent students. Evidence from this study suggests that absent a strong facilitator, dialogue during inclusion meetings became decidedly less productive. NSRF suggest that protocols offer the advantage of learning by doing. That is, they provide novices with structure that increases the likelihood that productive dialogue will ensue. Thus, a protocol developed explicitly for use during inclusion meetings to discuss problems of practice may make more meetings productive for teachers.

Implications for Research

This study merely scratched the surface in investigating the influence of dialogue on problem-solving team meetings. There are likely other factors than those identified here that might help make meetings open, safe places where teachers can learn new ways to manage their most pressing problems of practice. Using discourse analysis was a productive way to better understand how dialogue simultaneously opens and closes learning possibilities for teachers. Thus, additional studies in other locations would add to what is known about how to make the dialogue of meetings productive for teachers.

In addition, it would be useful to understand the utility of problem-solving protocols used during grade-level inclusion meetings. Evidence from this study suggests that the authoritative positioning can undermine productive dialogue. Thus, investigating the use of protocols to enable parity among participants by promoting the active engagement of all inclusion team meeting participants would be helpful.

This study investigated structures in one particular kind of school meeting – inclusion meetings. Thus, it would be helpful to understand patterns of discourse that influence other kinds of meetings, such as grade-level meetings. It would be helpful to

conduct a study to see whether or not the kinds of practices suggested during inclusion meetings happen in practice. Thus, studies where teachers are observed in classrooms after inclusion meetings would demonstrate a more direct link from inclusion meetings to practice.

Finally, much evidence from this study points to the influence that the entering assumptions of meeting participants have on the dialogue of meetings. This seems an especially important, if messy, problem to address. However, addressing how dialogue and entering assumptions intersect would provide valuable understandings about the inherent limitations of using teams explicitly for the purpose of developing teachers as professionals.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Pamela Williamson was born and raised in Milford, Michigan. Upon graduating from high school, she relocated to Gainesville, Florida. After spending 13 years in human resources management while attending college on a part-time basis, she left her position to finish her bachelor's degree and master's degree in elementary education at the University of Florida. After working as an elementary school teacher for 3 years in two different schools, Pam returned to the University to pursue her doctorate in special education. She selected special education because of her experiences teaching students with disabilities alongside special education teachers, as the general education teacher of record. Pam now works as an Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Cincinnati.