



Teacher agency for inclusive education: an international scoping review

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is contextualised within local systems and represents a continuous struggle to ensure access to meaningful and equitable education. The purpose of this scoping review was to examine international empirical studies published in peer-reviewed journals from 1999 to 2019 focused on teacher agency for inclusive education for students with disabilities in grades K-12. The conceptual framework used for this research identified teacher agency for inclusive schooling as requiring a disruption of traditional special educator identities, particularly pertaining to segregated schooling practices and deficit notions of disability. Eleven articles met the inclusion criteria. The results revealed varied conceptualizations of how teacher agency promotes inclusive education. We identified the following themes related to teachers' agentic actions towards inclusive education: (a) instructional strategies, (b) collaboration, (c) family-school-community connections, and (d) other agentic moves. Implications for future research are discussed.

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Global conceptions of inclusive education vary in terms of socio-historical context, disability labels, and school organisation. Inclusive education is contextualised within local systems and represents a continuous struggle to ensure access to meaningful and equitable education (Slee and Allan 2001; Waitoller and Kozleski 2013). In the U.S., three decades of research supports inclusive education as a system of ongoing supports and services to educate all students in general education contexts to achieve access to the general curriculum with same age peers (Ryndak et al. 2014). Despite research showing the positive impact of inclusive education in academic learning (Heinrich et al. 2016), academic engagement (Rangvid 2018), and post-school outcomes (Test et al. 2009), many students with disabilities continue to be educated in separate, special education settings (Morningstar and Kurth 2017; Harry and Klingner 2014). Internationally, inclusive education has gained momentum as a key factor in improving education systems (Tiwari, Das, and Sharma 2015). Yet, many students with disabilities continue to be placed in segregated settings or excluded from school

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altogether (Nyeris and Koross 2015; United Nation Girls' Education Initiative 2017). To establish and maintain inclusive education, teachers must negotiate a range of contextual factors while occupying various roles that often go against dominant frames of teacher practice (Naraian 2010; Slee 2013) through the use of agentic action.

Teacher knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and efficacy

A myriad of research focuses on teacher knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and efficacy for inclusive education. Teacher attitudes and beliefs about inclusive education have been studied as key factors in determining success or failure of placement in inclusive settings (Oluremi 2015). Teacher beliefs about inclusive education are impacted by both pedagogical and context-specific working knowledge (Leko et al. 2015) as well as by the systems and cultural practices in which they are a part. Because beliefs are intertwined with knowledge, teachers with positive attitudes and beliefs toward inclusive education are more likely to promote effective inclusive teaching strategies than teachers with less positive beliefs about inclusive education (Kuyini and Desai 2007).

Another factor influencing teacher actions toward change is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy develops through positive experiences across similar tasks and can be modified by different forms of information (Bandura 1997). For example, teacher self-efficacy for inclusive education is influenced by contextual variables (e.g. team planning time, student/teacher schedules) as well as teachers' perceived skills to meet the needs of all students (Kuyini, Desai, and Sharma 2018). Previous research explored how self-efficacy can develop through coaching and collaboration as teachers co-teach in general education classrooms or meet to collaborate on school activities (Cantrell and Hughes 2008; Flessner et al. 2012).

Research on teaching and inclusive education has shown that teachers can have vastly different interpretations of inclusive education for students with disabilities and often work under varying constraints, even within the same school district (Allaf 2006). Because teacher identities are typically socialised from a traditional dichotomy of either general or special educator (Skrtic 1995), the role of the inclusive educator becomes an additional identity to navigate (Naraian 2010). Separate general and special education teacher preparation programmes further contribute to limited pedagogy for inclusive education (Ruppar, Allcock, and Gonsier-Gerdin 2017). Yet, while teachers' knowledge about inclusive education and influence over school-based decisions may be limited, what happens within specific contexts is largely determined by individual teacher actions (Gourd 2015). As a result, teacher agency goes beyond teacher efficacy to incorporate intentional and contextual strategic actions (Naraian 2014). Teacher agency has been defined as the capacity to impact systems (i.e. schools, classrooms) within schooling contexts (Gourd 2015). In addition, enacting agency requires pushing back against such challenges through pragmatics of articulating and enacting inclusive ideals in schools. Therefore, teacher agency for inclusive education is exerted both within and despite school contexts. Teacher agency is generally considered to be situated within the individual; however, a view of agency as collective offers expanded possibilities for cultivating introspection, while also broadening collaborative skills in working with others (Evans 2012).

Naraian (2010, 2014) has led the field in examining teacher agency in the context of inclusive education. Therefore, we draw from Naraian (2010, 2014) and Gourd (2015)

to expand the aforementioned definition of teacher agency to include the specific actions teachers engage in for inclusive education for students with disabilities. By doing so, we examine the limited prior research that has revealed agency as a lever for implementing inclusive education.

Conceptual framing

At the core of our conceptual framework is the idea that teachers are socialised into multiple identities through their participation in figured worlds (Holland et al. 1998). Within schooling contexts, educators' figure, or construct, their identities as they make sense of who they are (Thorius 2016). In addition, they perform activities based on their conceptualizations of self and responsibility (Holland et al. 1998). For example, a teacher's identity and responsibilities as an inclusion facilitator are influenced within and across special and general education boundaries (Jorgensen, Schuh, and Nisbet 2005; Naraian 2017). These roles are distinct from the traditional dichotomy of general education versus special education (Slee 2013; Tiwari, Das, and Sharma 2015).

The confluence of someone's personal and professional lived histories (Adams and Markus 2004), combined within their multiple figured worlds is expected to impact their agentic actions. For example, a teacher may be more inclined to incorporate equity-driven teaching practices across the school day (Cochran-Smith et al. 2009) based upon their own experiences with educational inequities. Thus, an educator's experiences in a teacher preparation programme that exposes them to anti-oppressive discourses and innovative teaching strategies (Hancock and Miller 2017) may also impact their agentic actions in schools. For example, a teacher who has access to inclusive pedagogy during their pre-service clinical fieldwork may be more prone to advocate for similar approaches that disrupt segregated teaching practices once teaching professionally (Zagona, Kurth, and MacFarland 2017; Tugaraza 2014). In sum, by grounding in this conceptual framing, we held that moving from inequitable to inclusive education requires teachers disrupt traditional educator identities and segregated schooling practices. This allowed us to develop a greater understanding of how teacher agency and action for inclusive education are currently represented in the literature.

As teacher educators, we are interested in understanding how teachers cultivate inclusive education within contextually situated educational systems. From this perspective, teacher actions designed to build teaching and institutional capacities that support inclusive education for students with disabilities are crucial. We hypothesise that formal and informal incremental changes at individual and school levels develop over time. We view these incremental changes as essential systems of support and want to understand how teacher agentic actions facilitate individual and systems change. Therefore, the purpose of this scoping review is to examine the past two decades of literature focused on teacher agency for inclusive education for students with disabilities in K-12th grades. The research team sought to answer two empirical questions:

- (1) How is inclusive education conceptualised in the extant literature as it relates to teacher agency and students with disabilities in K-12th grades?

- (2) What are the teachers' agentic actions towards inclusive education for students with disabilities in K-12th grades?

Method

A multi-step process was used to conduct this scoping review. This form of review was selected because of the range of conceptual frameworks relevant to the investigation of agency. Scoping reviews systematically search for existing literature on key concepts and the variations of evidence found (Colquhoun et al. 2014). Therefore, scoping reviews seek to synthesise the breadth of research evidence on a particular topic (Prihodova, Guerin, and Kernohan 2015). This method was appropriate to the investigation of our study as it sought to interpret and synthesise international research with varied perspectives of teacher agency (Davis, Drey, and Gould 2009). We followed procedural stages recommended for conducting a scoping review study (Arksey and O'Malley 2005; Daudt, van Mossel, and Scott 2013), described in the following sections.

Identifying relevant studies

The research team collectively established search procedures. Relevant articles were located through ERIC and PsychINFO, leading databases in education and social science, using a combination of key terms. These terms included either 'teacher' or 'educator,' 'inclus*,' 'special ed*,' or 'disa*,' and 'agency,' 'belief*,' 'efficacy,' 'motivation,' or 'advoca*'. For example, one search consisted of 'teacher, inclus*, and agency.' In all, nine combinations of search terms were entered in each database. This resulted in 1,271 total articles, including duplicates. Abstracts of all resulting articles were then screened for the established inclusion criteria, that is, empirical studies published in a peer-reviewed journal in English between 1999-2019. In addition, a study must have involved pre-service or in-service teachers as participants. Due to the breadth of inclusion criteria, further criteria were set to locate articles relevant to the primary objective of this scoping review, which was to understand teacher agentic action for inclusive education. Studies were excluded if they were not related to inclusive education. Also, we removed studies that did not include students with disabilities.

Study selection

Interrater agreement was conducted at this screening phase of the study by having a research team member who was not yet involved in the search procedures review abstracts of 30% of the articles with duplicates removed. This resulted in 90% agreement rate. Articles in question were then discussed and consensus was reached by the research team (i.e. first three authors and one additional doctoral student), resulting in a total of 93 remaining articles. Full manuscripts were reviewed and among the 93 total reviewed, 82 were removed because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The primary reason for removal was the articles did not focus on teacher agency for inclusive education. For example, many articles described teacher beliefs and attitudes about inclusive education but did not report on teacher actions that facilitated inclusion in their schools. Additionally, articles were removed if the agentic actions described were not directly aimed at advancing inclusive education. An ancestral search was conducted on the

remaining 11 articles, which resulted in no additional articles meeting the inclusion criteria.

Charting the data

Charting was utilised to reach consensus on what information to extract from the included articles (Daudt, van Mossel, and Scott 2013). Codes were developed collaboratively based on the conceptual framework and research questions. The 11 articles were coded for key information. This involved coding for demographic information within articles and utilising qualitative methods for analysing article narratives on agency and inclusive education. Qualitative methods were used to identify themes around the following areas: a) purpose of the study, b) conceptualizations of inclusion, c) conceptualizations of agency, d) results, and e) implications. A naturalistic paradigm was employed to allow themes within the included studies to emerge from the data and to establish credibility of findings through peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Frequent meetings were held to ensure communication about the consistency of the coding process (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). Intercoder agreement was established by having each researcher code a portion of the 11 articles, discuss findings, and then ask additional questions at regularly scheduled research team meetings. The first three authors met to make meaning out of the broad set of information charted and to determine the most relevant themes of the scoping review (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). Finally, this analysis of the articles revealed several themes shared across articles.

Results

In the next section, we describe the results of the scoping review. First, we outline details related to study participants and settings. Then, we describe results as they pertained to the two research questions.

Participants and settings

As depicted in [Table 1](#), variability existed in the reporting of setting, participant and student demographic characteristics, with substantial rates of missing data. Participants represented a wide range of general and special education teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals/educational assistants, and related service providers (e.g. therapists) across countries, communities, and school levels. In 6 of the 11 studies (55%), participants were majority female (DeSimone and Parmar 2006; Grenier 2010; Hackett et al. 2016; Hutchinson et al. 2015; Mu et al. 2015; Naraian 2014). In most studies, student disability status or type was reported, with the majority being learning disability and intellectual and developmental disabilities. All studies in this review examined inclusive education for students with disabilities.

The contexts of the studies varied greatly spanning five countries. One qualitative study took place across three countries (England, Portugal, United States; Kugelmass 2006). Aside from this study, all others existed solely within one country. Moreover, the majority of studies employed qualitative research methods. Specifically, one qualitative study examined teacher agency in Cambodia (Hackett et al. 2016) and one mixed methods study

Table 1. Participant demographics and study settings.

Author	Method	Sample Size	Participant Types	Country	Participant Gender	Participant Race and Ethnicity	Student Disability Label	Grade Level	Setting
An and Meaney (2015)	Qualitative	4	Physical Education Teachers	United States	Female (2); Male (2)	White	IDD; LD	K-6	Suburban
DeSimone and Parmar (2006)	Qualitative	7	Math Teachers	United States	Female (7)	X	LD	6–8	Suburban
Grenier (2010)	Qualitative	7	Principal, Special Education Director, Teachers, Physical Education Teachers, Paraprofessionals	United States	Female (4); Male (2)	X	IDD	K-8	X
Hackett et al. (2016)	Qualitative	6	School Directors, Teachers	Cambodia	Female (4); Male (2)	X	EBD; LD	K-6	Rural (2); Urban (1)
Hutchinson et al. (2015)	Mixed methods	208	Teacher Candidates	Canada	Female (88%); Male (12%)	X	IDD	K-8	X
Kugelmass (2006)	Qualitative	X	X	England Portugal United States	X	X	Not specified	K-12	Small cities
Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons (2016)	Qualitative	70	General Education Classroom Teachers; Student Support Teachers; Educational Assistants; Principals; Assistant Principals	Canada	X	X	Not specified	K-8	Rural; Small city
Mu et al. (2015)	Mixed methods	15	Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC) Teachers	China	Female (11); Male (4)	X	Not specified	K-12	Urban
Naraian (2014)	Qualitative	19	General Education Teachers; Special Education Teachers; Paraprofessionals; Speech Therapists; Therapist; Principal	United States	Findings focused on female teachers	Asian; White	Significant disabilities	K-12	Suburban
Naraian and Schlessinger (2018)	Qualitative	7	First Year Teachers	United States	Female (3); Male (4)	Asian American; White	Not specified	6–12	Urban
Stockall and Gartin (2002)	Qualitative	7	General Education Classroom Teachers; Special Education Teachers	United States	X	X	Deaf; Hearing Impairment	K-4	X

Note. EBD = Emotional/Behavioral Disability; IDD = Intellectual and Developmental Disability; LD = Learning Disability; X = Finding Not Reported.

examined teacher agency in China (Mu et al. 2015). Two studies took place in Canada (Hutchinson et al. 2015; Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016). Of these two studies, Hutchinson et al. (2015) used mixed methods and Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons (2016) used qualitative data collection and analysis. Lastly, six studies took place in the United States and all were qualitative (An and Meaney 2015; DeSimone and Parmar 2006; Grenier 2010; Naraian 2014; Naraian and Schlessinger 2018; Stockall and Gartin 2002).

Conceptualising inclusive education and teacher agency

The first set of results answered the research question: How is inclusive education conceptualised in the extant literature as it relates to teacher agency and students with disabilities in K-12th grade? First, we describe how authors conceptualised ‘inclusion’ or ‘inclusive’ education or practices. Then, we discuss ‘agentic action.’

Conceptualising inclusive education

Broadly defined, the concept of inclusive education was characterised as ‘reform that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners’ (Kugelmass 2006, 279) or learners with individual differences (Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016). However, inclusion was also defined with an explicit reference to students with disabilities being educated alongside students without disabilities (An and Meaney, 2015; DeSimone and Parmar 2006; Hutchinson et al. 2015; Kugelmass 2006; Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016; Mu et al. 2015; Naraian and Schlessinger 2018; Stockall and Gartin 2002). In other words, inclusive education was viewed as remedying segregation of students with disabilities by placing them in general education. Within the majority of articles reviewed, general education or general education classroom placement was identified as a necessary component of inclusion (An and Meany 2006; DeSimone and Parmar 2006; Kugelmass 2006; Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016; Naraian and Schlessinger 2018; Stockall and Gartin 2002).

Conceptualising agentic action

Different theoretical underpinnings supported researchers’ conceptualizations of agentic action. For instance, Naraian and Schlessinger (2018) used figured worlds (Holland et al. 1998) to describe agency as the indivisibility of personal attributes and school contexts. Two teams (An and Meaney 2015; Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016) used Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura 1986) to define agency as freedom and flexibility to interpret and react to imposed environments in order to intentionally re-construct contexts.

Agency was also described as collaborative action through the active collection of tools and strategies used by school personnel to facilitate student proximity and activity with one another (Stockall and Gartin 2002). Collaborative action included instructional strategies that afforded student choice-making (Kugelmass 2006). Teachers were reported to have generated collective energy and action through collaboration in inclusive planning, teaching, and problem solving (Grenier 2010; DeSimone and Parmar 2006). Collective decisions were reported as increasing school capacity for inclusive education through

policy and procedure, such as eliminating academic assignment according to disability label (Kugelmass 2006).

Teacher agency was also considered to be active. In this respect, teachers moved beyond their underlying beliefs about the value of inclusive education, and were actively thinking about, planning for, and anticipating barriers to inclusion (Hutchinson et al. 2015). Also, teachers engaged in ongoing learning and demonstrated their beliefs and values (Naraian 2014) through the actions by which they constructed learning environments (An and Meaney 2015). Because the classroom contexts were not static, teachers were required to adapt teaching routines and instruction activities as needed (Stockall and Gartin 2002). Thus, agency existed through ongoing reflection and change in pedagogy and practice.

Teachers' agentic actions

The second set of results pertain to the research question: What are teachers' agentic actions towards inclusive education for students with disabilities in K-12th grade? Next, we report on four themes that answered the second research question: (a) instructional strategies, (b) collaboration, (c) family-school-community connections, and (d) other agentic moves.

Instructional strategies

Teachers' agentic actions towards inclusive education manifested in multiple ways. Across all 11 studies within the scoping review, teachers reported instructional strategies or instructional moves to work toward inclusive education for students with disabilities in grades K-12. For our purposes, we defined instructional strategies as 'techniques educators used to cultivate student learning and improve instruction.'

Student-centred strategies

In six studies, scholars discussed how teachers ensured instructional strategies were student-centred. For example, teachers, through interviews and group discussions, described how they learned about students (An and Meaney 2015) to relate the curricula to the students' interests and everyday lives (Naraian and Schlessinger 2018). Teachers also engaged in instructional strategies that supported the 'unique development of each child' (Kugelmass 2006, 282) and built relationships with students in creative and agentic ways (Naraian and Schlessinger 2018). In another qualitative inquiry, Grenier (2010) described how educators deepened their knowledge of students to be more student-centred. This knowledge expansion led to an appreciation for student skills and strengths which subtly shifted teacher beliefs and actions (Hackett et al. 2016; Grenier 2010; Mu et al. 2015; Naraian and Schlessinger 2018). In one mixed methods inquiry, teachers believed that to understand student learning differences better (Mu et al. 2015). They also had to be careful not to locate difference or disability within the student as a deficit (Naraian and Schlessinger 2018). Thus, teachers supported students with empathy (Hackett et al. 2016), which they viewed as paramount to supporting inclusive education.

Differentiation

In two mixed methods studies (Hutchinson et al. 2015; Mu et al. 2015) and one qualitative inquiry (Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016), research teams uncovered how teachers used differentiation within classroom contexts. Instructional practices (Hutchinson et al. 2015; Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016) as well as assessment strategies (Hutchinson et al. 2015) were candidates for differentiation. Through differentiation, teachers invited students to engage and participate by showing learning through multiple modalities. In fact, teachers intentionally changed their own teaching styles to ensure greater student participation (Hutchinson et al. 2015). Differentiation was viewed as a mechanism to support learning for all students across school spaces (Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016) as well as a means to accommodate learning differences within classrooms (Mu et al. 2015). Flexible grouping and curricular supports were two agentic strategies teachers used to facilitate inclusive education.

Flexible grouping

In three qualitative studies, scholars reported that educators used grouping techniques to differentiate instruction. For example, teachers in Cambodia discussed intentional groupings wherein teachers made ‘structural alterations’ (Hackett et al. 2016, 11) to support students in classrooms. Others described grouping strategies used to strategically partner students for different purposes and facilitate student participation. These grouping strategies included peer mentoring (Hackett et al. 2016), peer tutoring (Stockall and Gartin 2002), flexible grouping and cooperative learning (Stockall and Gartin 2002). Teacher advocacy can also support flexible grouping strategies. Naraian and Schlessinger (2018) described how teachers advocated for student literacy groups rather than whole group reading.

Curricular supports

In three qualitative studies (DeSimone and Parmar 2006; Stockall and Gartin 2002) and two mixed methods inquiries (Hutchinson et al. 2015; Mu et al. 2015; Naraian 2016), scholars discussed how and why educators used curricular supports (e.g. modifications, accommodations, adaptations), for inclusive instructional practices. Scaffolding or providing large print, scribes, and assistive technology were cited as examples of accommodations in one study (Hutchinson et al. 2015). In addition, DeSimone and Parmar (2006) reported how adapting instruction to meet student individual needs (e.g. keeping place on pages, using a number line, recalling math facts, following a sequence of steps to solve a problem) was different from adapting instruction for content specific areas such as mathematics (e.g. equivalent fractions, decimals and percentages, one- to two-step word problems). In another qualitative study, interviews, observations, and school documents exemplified how modified instruction focused on reducing the number and length of assignments or problems (Stockall and Gartin 2002). It was reported that teacher discourse around learning needs (Naraian 2016) was one salient motivation for providing curricular supports. Said differently, teachers commonly cited students’ needs as the impetus for adapting assignments, handouts, and activities (Hutchinson et al. 2015) as well as modifying equipment and environments (An and Meaney 2015) to honour differences (Mu et al. 2015). Instructional strategies were the most frequently discussed agentic action educators engaged in for inclusive education, appearing in all 11 articles.

Collaboration

Teachers' agentic actions also included collaborative acts. In nine studies, teachers reported on collaboration with school personnel as a mechanism for inclusive education for students with disabilities in grades K-12. We defined collaboration as 'partnering and teaming with school personnel.' Teachers' collaborative relationships with families and community members is discussed later.

Collaboration or any iteration of the term was considered a 'skill' (Mu et al. 2015), 'approach' (Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016), 'role' (Naraian and Schlessinger 2018), and 'place' (Naraian 2014) as in collaboratively taught classrooms. This is an important distinction given that the results indicated collaboration took many forms. Three qualitative inquiries (DeSimone and Parmar 2006; Kugelmass 2006; Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016) and one mixed methods study (Mu et al. 2015) reported collaboration as an approach involving work with teams. Teaming enabled teachers and other school staff to cultivate a sense of collective agency together rather than individual agency. Teams provided opportunities for sharing ideas, supporting one another, and problem solving regularly (Kugelmass 2006; Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons 2016). However, general education teachers did not always report feeling that they were authentically team teaching (DeSimone and Parmar 2006) and special education teachers often wondered about the congruence of their roles as co-teachers to those of their counterparts (Naraian and Schlessinger 2018). In the name of collaboration, studies targeting pre- and in-service educators sought out general education teachers, school psychologists, special education teachers, and related services personnel (i.e. speech/language pathologist; An and Meaney 2015; DeSimone and Parmar 2006; Grenier 2010; Hutchinson et al. 2015). That said, collaboration was a commonly examined agentic action discussed in 9 of the 11 included studies.

Family-school-community connections

Involving families and community members was another reported teacher agentic action. In six studies, authors discussed the importance of educators connecting with families and community members as a component of inclusive education. We defined family-school-community connections as 'study participants discussing the importance of partnering with families and community members for inclusive education.' However, family-school-community connections were reported differently across the six studies. For example, one mixed methods study described educators who were teaching students with disabilities in their neighbourhood schools for the first time. The teachers sought more information to effectively teach students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Mu et al. 2015). In two studies, family-school connections were deemed vital as teachers gathered student-specific information from families during the school year (An and Meaney 2015; Mu et al. 2015). In one qualitative study using data from ethnographic case studies of inclusive schools in England, Portugal, and the United States, school personnel engaged with families about local knowledge and supports and then integrated this knowledge into staff development activities (Kugelmass 2006). Hackett et al. (2016) cited community and school interconnectedness as a key factor in cultivating resources and communication between school and community. Moreover, the presence of such

connections was more salient in some studies than others. For example, communicating with families was considered ‘working with other adults’ in one mixed methods study (Hutchinson et al. 2015, 47). In another study, Lyons, Thompson, and Timmons (2016) found that participants cited multiple ways family-school partnerships impacted the school culture and inclusive education, including communicating regularly and building collaborative relationships with families. While researchers cited varied reasons for the importance of family-school-community connections, participants in only 6 of 11 studies reported on this component of teacher agency for inclusive education (Haines et al. 2015) and in fact, several studies reported barriers to collaboration.

Barriers

In two qualitative inquiries, authors cited barriers to family-school connections. An and Meaney (2015) described how teachers lost the opportunity to attend student-focused school meetings (e.g. Individualized Education Program meetings), creating a barrier to forming relationships with parents. Naraian (2014) described how educators struggled to build family-school partnerships. The author also explained how educators excluded families from the teaching and learning experiences of day-to-day classroom activities, making it difficult to build family-school partnerships (Naraian 2014). In addition, facilitators and barriers to family-school-community connections may be an underexplored concept when examining teacher’s agentic actions for inclusive education.

Other agentic moves

The studies reviewed here reported additional agentic moves. We defined Other Agentic Moves as unique agentic actions described by study participants. These additional moves are worth noting because they exemplified the dynamic and complex nature of schooling, inclusive education, and teacher actions.

First, Naraian and Schlessinger (2018) discussed how new teachers navigated dissonance as they grappled with the tensions between what they were taught in their preparation programmes and the incompatible language, ideologies, and actions occurring in their schools. For beginning teachers from this study, dissonance was productive as it spurred agentic action. In another study, Hutchinson et al. (2015) reported 25% of pre-service teachers had advocacy experiences during their fieldwork focused on inclusive education for students with developmental disabilities. While few pre-service teachers reported advocacy-related experiences, those that did felt more confident in their skills and knowledge focused on inclusive education (Hutchinson et al. 2015). Third, Mu et al. (2015) described how teachers sought out knowledge and resources for inclusive education. Teachers pursued new knowledge by staying up-to-date on ‘special education theories’ and inclusive education policies (Mu et al. 2015, 576). Teachers also reported how they actively pursued resources and supports, in contrast to waiting for or retroactively finding help and support (Mu et al. 2015). Finally, An and Meaney (2015) found it was important for physical education teachers to move beyond discipline-specific goals and become integral members of interdisciplinary teams. Here, student-focused documentation informed actions for inclusive education (An and Meaney 2015).

Discussion

The purpose of this scoping review was to better understand how teacher agency (Gourd 2015; Naraian 2010, 2014) impacts inclusive education for students with disabilities in grades K-12. Based on the results of this scoping review, extant research on inclusive education and teacher agency is understood as dynamic, actionable, and collective. Teachers in this review held varying beliefs and levels of self-efficacy. Yet, some of their actions were aimed at improving or attempting inclusive education. While this scoping review included vastly different school contexts, conclusions can be drawn about the factors that influence teachers to engage in instructional and collaborative efforts to better support students with disabilities through inclusive education.

Studies included in this review varied widely in terms of participants and geography, with marked differences in the context of schooling, as well as conceptualizations of inclusive education. Due to a lack of information on school type, it is difficult to sufficiently compare the highly contextual variables within each reviewed study. Another important aspect of the limited data pertained to teaching experience, with only one study reporting the participants' average and range of years teaching. Contextualised information about the schools did emerge when the authors provided descriptions of how participants' exhibited agency, which highlighted the connection between agency and environment, particularly in reference to both the individualistic and collaborative nature of agentic action. Half of the studies referred to students with disabilities broadly, without providing sufficient details regarding the level or severity of the disability. This indicates that either all students with disabilities were part of inclusive education efforts or that some students (e.g. with intellectual and developmental disabilities) may not be part of inclusive schooling efforts (Morningstar, Kurth, and Johnson 2017; Kleinert et al. 2015). Globally, students with intellectual and developmental disabilities continue to experience stagnant rates of inclusion when compared to their peers with other disabilities (Kurth et al. 2018; Grech 2014).

The issue of academic assignment, commonly referred to as educational placement (e.g. special education, general education; Annamma and Morrison 2018) continues to be pertinent to systems that historically and persistently educate students with disabilities in separate settings, which was evident in this scoping review. Eight of the studies reported how perceptions of disability were constructed by the separation of students with disabilities, and therefore, a defining characteristic of inclusive education was to integrate students with disabilities into general education settings. Specific strategies aimed at teaching students with disabilities in general education were evident and participants' concerns extended beyond the mere physical presence of students with disabilities in general education classes. All studies alluded to inclusive education as an ongoing endeavour, which necessitates the agency of teachers to be in continuous motion – literally and figuratively.

Teachers used a variety of instructional strategies to increase and improve inclusive education. For example, teachers leveraged knowledge about students to arrange supports in ways that maximised social and academic opportunities in six studies. Others have reported these student-centred approaches as critical to dispelling myths about the need for specialised methods for students with disabilities (Causton-Theoharis et al. 2011). Differentiation and flexible grouping as described by these studies have been popular strategies within general education in recent years (Peterson et al. 2018), and teachers in this review were able to apply them in creative and necessary ways.

Other agentic teacher actions discussed were creating and using instructional strategies and curricular adaptations that supported students' academic opportunities. Providing curricular adaptations is an ongoing process dependent on student and ecological considerations (Janney and Snell 2013). In a recent review of special education documents in the U.S., scholars found accommodations (e.g. large print for reading, scribe for writing) to be more prevalent than curricular adaptations (Kurth et al. 2019) in students' individualised instructional plans. In this review, however, curricular adaptations were not present in most of the studies. It could be that such adaptations were present, but not reported systematically.

Most studies cited collaboration or collective agency as important for enacting inclusive education. Some teachers were reported to have negotiated methods of co-teaching and by doing so, co-constructed their pedagogy for inclusive education with their colleagues. As many schools face significant barriers to inclusion, such as personnel and financial constraints (Tiwari, Das, and Sharma 2015), collaboration for inclusion is paramount to enacting sustainable solutions (Jones, Forlin, and Gillies 2013). Once pre-service teachers leave the university network of support for enacting inclusive education, they will most likely experience difficulty navigating the cultural norms of schools in which exclusionary special education are the norm (Naraian and Schlessinger 2018). Similar situations were reported to have spurred teachers' advocacy efforts as they engaged with colleagues to discuss inclusive education and problem solve segregation of students with disabilities.

Drawing from family and community funds of knowledge is imperative to family-school partnerships, including the provision of inclusive education (Moll et al. 1992). Family-school-community partnerships are elusive for many families, largely due to an imbalance of power in which schools dominate educational decision-making (Love et al. 2017; Lalvani 2014). Teachers in the studies reviewed also reflected the impact of professionalization – which gave a sense of expertise over families – as less than half of the studies reported family engagement as critical to advancing inclusive education. Some teachers, however, enacted agency by engaging family and community stakeholders in dialogue on inclusive education and community-based resources and supports. Limitations and implications for future research are discussed next.

Implications for future research

One implication of this study was the specificity of the inclusion criteria. Given the inclusionary criteria, only 11 articles were identified. It was evident that teacher agency and action, in contrast to beliefs and perspectives, were less prevalent notions associated with inclusive education (e.g. Forlin et al. 2011). Yet, the articles reviewed collectively presented implications for further research. Based on the results of the scoping review, further research focusing on active teacher agency for inclusive education ought to include changes in teachers' actions over time as they enact inclusive education. In addition, future research ought to consider how teachers navigate intersectional oppressions (e.g. ableism, racism, linguicism) in schools. These contextual barriers were not at the forefront of the articles reviewed. Such oppressions would include those that the focal teachers faced and/or those oppressions their students faced. Also, the emerging results describing nuances of teachers' agency as collective action is ripe for future research. Some questions

to consider, include – How are teachers engaging in agentic actions alongside or with various stakeholders? How do teachers find other school personnel willing to make classrooms more inclusive and what do those relationships embody? How are teachers enacting agentic actions for inclusive education through an intersectional lens?

The second implication centres on the research questions driving this study. This scoping review sought to reveal what actions teachers engaged in as they worked towards inclusive education as well as how the authors conceptualised (a) inclusive education and (b) agentic action. Yet, schools are multifaceted systems and teacher agency for inclusive education has many complex processes and constructs, not merely actions. Most likely, there are additional processes and constructs yet to be uncovered. For example, exclusionary processes, meaning those that prohibited or inhibited teacher agency for inclusive education, emerged in the studies. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate the systems, processes, and constructs (e.g. social, ideological, political) that prohibit teacher agency for inclusive education. Such systems, processes, and constructs are pertinent to informing what specific barriers teachers face in the field that work dependently or in tandem to rationalise excluding and marginalising students. For example, studies contextualising pre-service teacher experiences and opportunities for developing self-efficacy and advocacy for inclusive education would support greater understanding of constraints on the agency of in-service teachers. Some research questions still to be answered include: What systems and processes afford or constrain teacher agency for inclusive education? How is teacher agency propelled or dispelled within a dual licensure teacher preparation programme?

Another implication of this review was the focus on teachers. By focusing on teachers, we uncovered specific actions for inclusive education, including instructional strategies, collaboration, and family-school-community connections. However, teachers are not the only lever required for inclusive education. Prior research has examined the roles and/or perspectives of family members (e.g. Lalvani 2014; Mueller and Buckley 2014) and principals (e.g. Kuyini and Desai 2007; Praisner 2003) as they relate to inclusive education. Yet, more research is needed in understanding the agency and actions various stakeholders, including state- and federal-level policy makers, school board members, administrators, and paraprofessionals, engage in as they work towards inclusive education. Pertinent research questions include: How are policy makers connected to the actions that teachers and paraprofessionals engage in for inclusive education? How are school board members influencing how state-level policies impact inclusive education? What do administrators know about teachers' agentic actions?

Conclusion

This international scoping review of teacher agency revealed that student centred supports, differentiation, flexible grouping, curricular supports, collaboration and family-school partnerships are key areas in which teachers can utilise agentic actions to advance inclusive education for students with disabilities. To improve access to inclusive education for students with disabilities, teachers alone are insufficient as they must collectively engage others, including teachers, administrators, family members, and policy makers to enact durable and sustainable inclusive education practices. Nevertheless,

many teachers who wish to improve inclusive education want to know: What can I do to produce change? These key actions can provide a concrete and meaningful starting point by which teachers can leverage their agency to support equitable access to education for students with disabilities.

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Dr. Amanda Miller's research focuses on how schooling mechanisms afford or constrain opportunities for girls of color with moderate to significant support needs. She also studies teacher preparation for culturally sustaining inclusive education and family-school-community partnerships with and for families from diverse backgrounds. Her research is grounded in critical and participatory paradigms.

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- * denotes articles included in literature review