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CURRENT STATUS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN
ONTARIO: THE EXCLUSIONARY OUTCOMES OF MARRYING
VOCATIONAL
AND SPECIAL EDUCATION
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ABSTRACT

The Government of Ontario's universal student success initiative makes the claim that, through expanded programs, Ontario high schools are "changing to meet the individual needs of students and to help more of them succeed" (More Ways to Succeed, 2008, p. 2). Although it is up to each individual school board to determine the types of vocational and special education programming they provide, it is becoming increasingly common for Ontario's vocational programming to be available only for students receiving special education. This paper explores how the ideas that drove the creation of vocational education in Ontario have become extremely disconnected from the current reality of vocational schools. Recent trends in high school programming are leading towards the marrying of vocational and special education two terms that are by no means synonymous. Through interviews and document analysis, this case study of one vocational high school highlights the current status of vocational education and illuminates how it has become linked to special education. This study also considers whether current practice in a vocational school that was originally founded on a vision of practical education for all is aligned with the current inclusionary model's promise of equitable access to a variety of programs for all learners.

INTRODUCTION

The ideas that drove the creation of vocational education in Ontario appear to have become disconnected from the current reality of vocational schools. Recent trends in high school programming have led to the marrying of vocational and special education—two terms that are by no means synonymous. This exploration of the current status of vocational education illuminates a system that has become inextricably linked with issues that plague special education. The Government of Ontario's universal student success initiative makes the claim that, through

expanded programs, Ontario high schools are "changing to meet the individual needs of students and to help more of them succeed" (More Ways to Succeed, 2008, p. 2). However, a case study conducted through unstructured interviews shows a trend toward vocational education becoming available only to students who are entitled to special education programming.

HISTORICAL LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL WORK

Vocational education arose in two waves during the century to meet specific economic and educational needs of Ontario citizens. Despite this, vocational education has largely been overlooked by both sustainable funding and educational policy resulting in an unclear identity within the education field. Perhaps more interesting is the recently formed, seemingly inextricable link between vocational and special education that makes determining the current status of vocational education challenging. An examination of the historical beginnings, policies, and academic research in the area of vocational education highlights the shift from a clearly-defined program of education to meet student and societal needs to one that is vague and lacking identity.

Research in the area of vocational education is troubled by many issues beginning with the lack of a universally accepted definition and the fact that the term 'vocational education' in itself has become rather vague; it is applied in a variety of ways and means different things to a multitude of people and organizations. Although much of the historical literature focused on postsecondary technical training, that is not the definition of vocational education that this study employs. Vocational education, for the purpose of this paper, is defined as education targeted at teaching skills and knowledge in high school that are useful in occupations for which post-secondary education may or may not be required.

In order to explore the current status of vocational education, a brief historical overview is necessary to provide context. Historically speaking, the development of vocational schools in Ontario can be viewed as two waves: the conception (1910-1920) and the revival of the late 1950s. Beyond a few key reformers, such as Charles Dubcombe and Egerton Ryerson, the modest beginnings of vocational education went unnoticed by most educators in the 19th century (Hodgins, 1898, p. 322). It was the

Industrial Age that brought vocational education to the forefront in the early 20th century as an answer to rising concerns about the "appropriate relationship between schooling and work" (Axelrod, 1997, p. 106). In the beginning of the century, factories had diminished the need for apprenticeship training in trades but that soon became a matter of concern for employers who faced an increasing number of unskilled potential workers.

In a matter of years, school reformers began to argue that public education needed to more actively prepare youth for the new demands of the industrial age. Danylewycz (1991) argued that the age of vocational education in Ontario dawned when the Industrial Education Act of 1911 and the Federal Technical Education Act in 1919 were passed. These two acts caused an increase in technical schools in Ontario from one in 1901 to 63 in 1935. Further, enrolment drastically increased during a short period of time and by 1935, 32% of high school students were receiving vocational programming. The popularity of vocational education was evident in the growing numbers of working-class adolescents spending more time in class than in workshops (Camicchio, 2001, p. 36).

However, as the drastic increase in enrolment was left largely unchecked, the attention paid to vocational education soon faded, and numbers began to taper off in these programs—it appeared as though those forming policy believed creating the programs would single-handedly solve the problems. It was not until the late 1950s when Ontario was faced with an increasing dropout rate that interest in vocational education was renewed. Federal policy initiatives attempted to combat a recession and increasing unemployment at the exact moment that baby boomers were about to enter a labour market already filled with unskilled workers. Having the insight from what occurred following the first wave of vocational schools in Ontario, the government was more prepared with a funding structure and plans for developing the necessary curriculum. That federal plan was to take the form of the Technical and Vocational Assistance Act of 1960 (TVTAA) whereby the federal government would pay 75% of the cost for expansion and would pay even higher operating costs of programs where at least 50% of school time was devoted to vocational subjects (Gidney, 1999).

One problem that was raised by educators when faced with funding for such schools was the lack of curriculum. Policy makers addressed this with the "Robarts Plan" which was nothing short of a full-scale rewrite of courses to make vocational subjects more accessible to all students. The plan provided technical training but also kept options open allowing student choice between job market or grade 13 preparation for higher education in their final year of study. The goal was to keep more students in school until graduation and it was definitely achieved. In 1960 62% of students aged 15-19 remained in school and by 1971 that number jumped to 77% (Gidney, 1999, p. 46). TVTAA money created a building spree resulting in the construction of 278 new technical schools during the same period. Thus, by the early 1970s there were flourishing numbers of vocational schools providing technical programming throughout the province.

Despite the inclusive intent of the Robarts Plan, it was anything but a success for vocational education. Many historians have argued that failure was the result of opponents who began to speak out about the way that vocational education reinforced industrial stratification of society with the goal of consolidating the power of business. Such arguments are the earliest signs of the current issues involving the accessibility of vocational programs in high schools in Ontario that are inherent in the following case study. For example, Smaller (2003) argued that it quickly became apparent that these new vocational programs of the 1960s focused overwhelmingly on certain kinds of students _clearly defined on the basis of their gender, class, race and ethnic backgrounds (p. 16). Further criticism grew in all sectors when federal funds were withdrawn leaving the provinces and school boards to pick up the full cost of vocational programs (Lyons, Bikkar, Randhawa & Paulson, 1991, p. 143).

The failure of vocational education to maintain the necessary funding and policy support following the second wave may have played a pivotal role in the current status of vocational education in Ontario. Vocational education is no longer a specific, defined type of programming; it has become married to special education in many cases. Since the 1960s revival, very little attention has been given to vocational education which has cemented its vague role in the larger educational sphere in Ontario. However, upon examination of the policy documents that schools used to form

vocational programs, the intention of making technical education available to all students is clear. A sample resource guide produced by Denniston (1976) *It Isn't Easy Being Special: Let's Help Special Needs Learners* states that technical skills are important and should be accessible to "all students, both regular and special needs" (p. 17). Although this American resource guide was written to allow people with special needs access to vocational training, the salient point is that all students should have access. The goal of vocational education has always been job-readiness for entry-level employment and apprenticeships which should be available to any student interested in skill-based jobs.

Similarly, a 1987 document entitled the *Handbook of Vocational Special Needs Education* focused on making vocational education available to all by providing opportunities to master skills through hands-on practice. It also held that the "basic premise of [the] mainstreaming concept is that exceptional and non-exceptional children have common needs" and neither group should be deprived of a mode of learning (Meers, 1987, p. 15; see also Clark, Dyson, & Millward, 1995; Wright, 1978). A publication over a decade later, *Vocational Evaluation in Special Education* (Hursh, 1998), explored virtually the same concerns testifying that the problems have yet to be addressed.

The confusion that arises in the policy documents is not aided by the constant changes within the field of special education during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The recent shift towards inclusion is not without controversial issues; the claim made by the Ministry of Education in *Education for All* that "all students can succeed" holds true to this (2005, p. 4). Despite government reports, such as *The Transition from Initial Education to Working Life: a Canadian Report for an OECD Thematic Review* (2000), there remains a complete lack of attention to this link with special education. This shift has resulted from policy mandates including the recent requirement that all high schools must provide a broad range of programming. However, this requirement only seems to apply to regular high schools and not vocational schools. Mainstream schools need to provide programming for all levels but policy did not direct boards as to the types of programming that must be provided in existing vocational schools. This debate of equality raises a fundamental concern of the current status of vocational schools in Ontario

where capable students are being denied access to the skills needed to function in workplaces and college programs. The best equipped schools with industry-experienced staff are becoming accessible only to students who require more modification than inclusion at the regular high school level can provide.

The Ontario Ministry of Education's recent publication, *More Ways to Succeed in High School* (2008), contained a section on technological education courses as a means to help at risk -students stay in school. This policy document claimed that schools also offer new technological education courses and have expanded existing programs (p. 6). However, if the government really wanted to increase the success of at-risk teens, it would make all the programs available to all students. The following case study argues that vocational programming is becoming available to an increasingly limited number of students which has created inherent problems within the system. With the emerging trend of decreasing numbers of vocational programs and a deficit in skilled trade workers, there are stirrings of a renewed call for attention to vocational education. For the most part, this call is being made by educators who see this as more of a global issue. Smaller, a professor at York University, made this evident in his statement that: "If Ontario is any example, there has been a rapid and continuing decline in the numbers of students enrolled in vocational courses in secondary schools over the past decade. Canada does not seem to be alone in this regard" (Smaller, 2003, p. 2). Despite a wealth of historic and current research on the unique function of vocational education within the public school system there is a significant lack of policy attention to pressing systemic issues.

A recent conversation (after a series of unanswered phone calls and emails) regarding the marrying of special and vocational education with an Education Officer for the Ontario Ministry of Education is revealing. The officer, "Julie," was willing to discuss where the alignment came from but was very clear that the information she gave me was "not ministry information; it is experience based" (personal communication, November 23, 2009). Julie repeated a number of times that "historically," vocational schools were for lower functioning students and that the aim has never been to provide programming for all students. This reasoning is in direct contrast to the ideas that drove the creation

of vocational schools in Ontario. Although it is up to each individual school board to determine the types of vocational and special education programming they provide, Julie predicted that Ontario's vocational schools will "probably end up with only special education students in the near future" (personal communication, November 23, 2009).

A survey of academic literature in the field of educational research shows that there is little to no attention given to this problematic synthesis of special and vocational education. Recent research by A. Taylor (2005 and 2006), M. Taylor (2009), Terzi (2008), Fink (1999), De Vore (2009), Hyslop-Marginson et al. (2007) and Hyslop-Marginson and Pinto (2007) demonstrated this gap as their research collectively focuses on literacy skills, human capital, training, and union partnerships. Despite the various perspectives, topics, and issues covered, one trend overlooked by researchers is the exclusionary aspect of vocational education's recent ties with special education. The following case highlights the need for additional research in this area because the synthesis of special and vocational education may have serious ramifications for students and educators. This connection between vocational and special education is not new; the United Nations designated 1981 as the International Year of the Disabled Person and the proceedings show early signs of marrying the two. The accompanying publication defined the newly forged link between special education and vocational skills training with the number of articles which focus on vocational skills (Griffith, 1998; Palomaki, 1981; Versnel, Hutchinson, Munby & Chin, 2008). It has been nearly 30 years and nothing has been done to separate vocational education from special education.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK DESIGN

The following case study of 'Secondary School' (SS) was designed to examine the original purpose, intended population of the community, and the current reality of one Ontario vocational high school. The focus of the unstructured interviews was to discuss demographic changes in the school over time and the ramifications of those changes for students and educators. Creswell (1998, 2007) stated that one must define the focus (what the phenomenon is) and the case (the real-life situation) in order to

determine whether grounds exist for employing case study. For my study, I sought to explore the phenomenon of the marrying of special and vocational education in specialized schools in Ontario. The setting for the study was at one school to determine if the marrying of the two types of education has occurred and examine the day to day experiences of educators working in the midst of such change (Dooley, 2002). As a result, a case study methodology was chosen to emphasize the contextual analysis of one particular school to determine the relationship between vocational and special education.

Commonly cited challenges against time-consuming case studies are that the results provide little basis for 'scientific' generalization — particularly from those questioning sampling for statistical generalization. Perhaps the most common challenge cited among researchers conducting case study is that the approach is flexible and there is a lack of 'how to texts' to guide researchers through design, data collecting, and analysing processes (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). However, the reasons for choosing case study outweigh the challenges in this examination of the current status of vocational education.

Case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding a phenomenon. In addition, case study provides rich results and a holistic account of a phenomenon that can lead to concrete, context-dependent knowledge that is useful in developing practice-based theories. Case study illuminates meaning to expand researchers' experiences; these insights, in turn, can form the basis of tentative hypotheses to help structure future research. Case study, thus, offers opportunities for obtaining descriptive depth and formation of a basis for future comparisons regarding the nature of a phenomenon. In the end, case study generates or generalizes contextual theoretical knowledge, particularly in single studies (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gerring, 2004; Merriam, 1998; Yin 2009).

Prior to beginning to collect any data the phenomenon under study was isolated: the changes that have occurred in vocational education in the past three decades. In conducting the literature review it became evident that the drastic shift in vocational and special education programming has remained largely unexplored (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The decision to use a single case

was made because the goal was to provide rich description of the phenomenon in its natural education context through deep sources of information. One key consideration in employing case study is determining the boundaries of the case. The purpose of placing boundaries is to limit excessive data collection by determining the time, space, activity, and event under study (Creswell, 1994; Hancock, 2006; Yin, 2003).

According to Merriam's (1998) framework, case studies can be categorized by their features, discipline, and intent. Within this framework, this descriptive case study aims to provide rich description of the phenomenon of vocational education evolution that has not been explored to date. Yin (2003, 2009) provided the methodological framework for the following descriptive case study because it is aimed at presenting descriptions of a phenomenon within its unique context and thereby leads to potential explanations for future research. The disciplinary orientation is a historical case study as the interview material gleaned is bounded by time and the phenomenon is a historical trend that was traced through the literature review in the preceding section. Context is a pivotal concept to case study methodology because research is conducted within situational and historical context. In essence, contextual relationships are what bring understanding to the phenomenon under investigation. As a result, there is often an examination of diverse issues and contexts in a single case study.

Although case study can employ a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods in various combinations, the following case study used interviews, observation, and document analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 102). Case study is a suitable methodology because the phenomenon of the current status of vocational education is contemporary and the data sources are multiple. The data collection was a two-fold process and consisted of unstructured interviews (that were recorded and transcribed) with educators in a vocational high school and document analysis of promotional materials from the school. Triangulation of the various data sources allowed for the "championing of multiple perspectives" (Stake, 2005, p.453). In order to address validity, I used multiple perspectives to clarify meanings and eliminate data redundancy.

PARTICIPANTS

Participant recruitment for interviews was done through purposeful sampling. The target population was not a random sample of staff at the school; it was to gain historical perspectives from teachers and administrators who had been at the school for a long period of time (two of them had been there since the school opened). The insights provided by these interviewees contributed to increasing researcher understanding of the trend and the complex relationship between special and vocational education. During the course of data collection, six educators in various roles were interviewed (1 guidance counsellor, 1 administrator, 3 teachers, and one government official). The conversations focused on interviewee experiences of change in vocational education over time from their 'grassroots' vantage points.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Unstructured interviews were chosen as the data collection method because the nature of the phenomenon led itself to focused conversations. Such informal interviewing is characterized by a total lack of structure or researcher control. The purpose of unstructured interviews is "to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms, and at their own pace" (Bernard, p. 211). Here, Bernard's (1994) rule provides a useful guideline for researchers employing unstructured interviews: "Get people on to a topic of interest and get out of the way. Let the informant provide information that he or she thinks is important" (Bernard, p. 216). Unstructured interview techniques were used to guide the interviewer's attention to relationship, rapport, active listening, and probing. Probing was used to generate further explanation through asking open-ended questions. Attention was paid to ensure that flow remained throughout the interviews so the researcher did not interrupt or lead the discussion. Silent probes (stop, look, listen), encouraging probes (nodding and gazing), and clarification probes (to connect or elaborate ideas) were also employed.

The advantages of unstructured interviews lie in their versatility which allow for a wide range of issues to be covered from a personal perspective at an in-depth level. The flexible nature allows participants to open up at their own pace and in their own time while researchers listen to the story in its entirety and interject with questions as needed through probing. Unstructured

interviews allow researchers to note facial expressions and body language which can be extremely useful data (Berg, 2001; Firmin, 2008). Researchers can also stop and ask for clarification as needed which was used a number of times during this project.

Unstructured interviews require a degree of trust and rapport between researcher and participant; "the strength of the interviewer-participant relationship is the single most important aspect of a qualitative research project"(Knox & Burkard, 2009). These interviewees are fellow educators and previous informal discussions had occurred prior to the interviews about education policy and our experiences as educators. The interviews were one-to-one and each lasted over an hour. The participants had stories to share and their reminiscent musings brought a facet of rich description to the data. The interviews were taped for later transcription while notes were also taken during the interviews. Attention was paid to notable ethical issues inherent in the data collection and analysis as outlined by Corbin and Morse (2003). The project included informed consent (which outlined participation risks and benefits) and there was no element of deception or covert research. The researcher was aware of the personal responsibility to the interviewees and ensured that confidentiality and anonymity would remain for both participants and location.

As a single-case study, the analysis occurred within the case. In order to promote rigour, methodological triangulation was employed. Member checking was used following analysis and a copy of the findings was given to the participants for verification. The interview data was combined with the document content analysis findings that outlined board policy, provincial policy, and school promotional materials. The detailed case study data was used to confirm the findings of the initial literature review (Stake, 1995) and was easily compared and contrasted with the school promotional materials.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The case study is of one particular vocational school and, as such, cannot speak for all vocational schools in Ontario. As a result of the gap in current vocational education research, it was not possible to compare the data to other studies. In spite of this limitation, the information gathered in this case provides evidence

of the shift and raises future implications for vocational education in the province. The school, SS, no longer mirrors the Ministry of Education's promise of equity in education as the case study supports the trend of marrying special and vocational education. It appears that the two terms are now synonymous in this school.

Since its conception 22 years ago, the motto of this particular school, SS, has been "success for all students." This motto evokes a community where all students thrive and hone skills. 'Dan', a teacher who has been at SS since it opened, explained that the original philosophy of SS (and all vocational schools) was to "expose students of all functioning levels to the trades through hands-on ability" (Personal communication, October 8, 2009). Dan maintains that to be a true vocational program, a school must give all students the opportunity to learn a trade and upon graduation move into those trades in various capacities. The school's recent promotional brochure highlights the combination of academic and technical classes offered which focus on the unique learning styles and diverse talents of all students. The claim is made that "students here benefit from hands-on learning, strong support from staff, training in vocational and life skills, and on-the-job experiences" (District School Board, pamphlet).

The school itself is a community where students can try different vocations and find their areas of strength. It has a full program for childcare, cosmetology, woodworking, foods, baking, catering, metal shop, horticulture, autobody, and autoservice. It is through "meaningful career pathways for students. ...along with their training as educators, our vocational staff bring experience in their fields, giving students a valuable understanding of the workplace" (District School Board, pamphlet). All students take a semester of cooperative education to allow them to apply, refine and expand their technical and academic skills through real world work experiences.

The school's motto, however, does not acknowledge a trend that may very well be occurring in vocational schools across Ontario: it is not success for all students, only those who fit the special education criteria may attend. At SS and other vocational schools in the District School Board, students have to be identified as exceptional with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) entitling them to special education to be granted access. Further, having an

IEP does not guarantee admittance and students must be well below grade level to be offered placement at SS. Interestingly, nowhere in the brochure or promotional video does it say the programming is only available to identified students. The only clue is the statement in the brochure outlining the catchment area which serves a very expansive geographic area and is only revealing to those who work within the board and have knowledge of typical catchment areas.

A further reality of the school is the level of employability in these trades by recent graduates. The province of Ontario, noting a lack of students entering the skilled trade sector, developed the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) which is a program that promotes school to work transition. The goal is for OYAP to open doors for students to explore apprenticeships in skilled trade occupations during grades 11 or 12 through cooperative education placements. The OYAP website makes the prediction that "40% of new jobs will be in skilled trades" as a means of supporting the direct transition from high-school credits that count toward apprenticeship hours in post-secondary technical programs.

However, only one student at SS was signed on under OYAP last year and Dan believes that this is "indicative of the shift away from technical to special education in vocational schools." This fall saw only four students accept placement in the applied stream program. Most local schools have three levels: academic (university-bound), applied (college-bound), and

locally developed compulsory courses (LDCC: predominantly workplace-bound). SS has specialized programming with applied, LDCC, and vocational level one (certificate stream where students do not finish with a diploma). Given that this population is becoming obsolete with new legislation forcing home schools to offer LDCC programming, SS is losing the students who can go to college and secure apprenticeships. 'David', another teacher who has been at SS since it opened its doors, provides a further reason for these students deferring placement at SS; the fact that more jobs require post-secondary education than in the past is heavily reported while the shortage of workers in skilled trades is given much less attention (Personal communication, November 20, 2009).

The experiences of teachers at SS do not seem to support the brochure's claim that "we prepare our students for the world of work, apprenticeships, and for some, college programs." David points to the drastic shift in the school community in the last five years as the vocational level one student population (functioning more than five years below grade level) has increased from 10% to 20%. In fact, 2009 intake numbers show this trend is increasing at an alarming rate. Of the 102 students in grade nine, 63 are vocational level two students (who function 3 to 4 years below their grade level) and 39 are vocational level one students (Personal communication, November 20, 2009).

The full range of programming (from vocational level one to college-bound students) at SS is only shown by the four students in the applied level stream. However, these few students will more than likely go to their home schools next year after having their academic courses in such small classes. Notably, these few high functioning students are the same students displayed in the pamphlet which may not provide an accurate representation of the school demography. Two of the interviewees noted that the 2008 board-made DVD depicted the highest calibre students in the school to attract those who have a choice whether they come or not. The majority of students who come to the school do not have a choice and, presumably, do not warrant attention in promotional materials.

The reality of the school community today presents many challenges to the students and staff. Dan points to the "negative

perception people have of vocational schools. Rather than being viewed as a great opportunity to receive valuable hands-on training that leads to tangible, industrial jobs, the "stigma is that these schools are only for behaviourally challenged, learning disabled students" (Personal communication, October 8, 2009). Dan claims that this trend is occurring elsewhere and the impact on the school is palpable with staff struggling to provide technical training. As a result of the public perception, many potential trade students no longer came to SS and the transformation quickly occurred from a vocational to special education school.

Nowhere is this transformation more evident than in the technical trade (tech) classrooms. The school is now in a position to have shop classes with increasing numbers of students who are not successful in such settings. The teachers who teach these trades and have experience in the trades are at odds with their job and expertise. An extensive interview with the foods department staff at SS points to major problems that have arisen. The foods department has had to get creative and change their entire program due to the change in student demography. As a result, 'Paul' leads an Autism Spectrum Disorder class of grades 9-11 in a small kitchen where he teaches life skills and feels this is at odds with what he was hired to do. The reality of the situation is seen in his recollection that the first day was spent "teaching them how to wash hands. They were frustrated [that] we couldn't get to baking, but each time one scratched his armpit, played with his hair, flicked his jacket zipper, wiped his nose, etc. he/ she had to start again." Paul recalls that "4 of the 6 were afraid to put a tray in the oven" (Personal communication, October 8, 2009).

The foods teachers, for their part, are making the best out of a challenging situation where they are not able to provide technical, industry related training to the vast majority of students. The few industry-capable students finish the paper work, master the skills, and go on to work independently in the kitchen. These students now have to learn with less attention because of the increasing population of students who cannot work on their own. Paul reflects that "I still don't completely like it and it is a work in progress and each class is different." In the cafeteria which serves a population of 500, Paul and his department have two or three kids doing the bulk of the work while the rest are "learning not to be afraid of the fridge door and washing vegetables". The reality is that out of a class of 15, 12 students will not find employment in the industry. Paul remains positive that "maybe we teach life skills at both ends

of the student spectrum. We just seem to teach life skills by teaching tech skills" (Personal communication, October 8, 2009). He reminisced that it has been years since he has had a student go on to take culinary foods in college and misses the demographic of students he originally came to the school to teach.

Another challenge Dan outlines is that as technology advanced, the requirements of many trades "superseded the ability of many students." There is no way the current funding model allows the school to keep up with the equipment needs of many programs (Personal communication, October 8, 2009). David agrees that the "lack of provincial and federal monies to keep shop equipment up to date with the real world" is disheartening for both staff and students (Personal communication, November 20, 2009). The result of funding challenges and board policy change has caused SS to move away from its purpose and become a place where the focus becomes life skills. Dan maintains that there is a place for life skills but it cannot be the only focus of the school. Dan states that after his 22 years he can firmly say that the best model is a composite school that provides the full range of academic and technical programming so all students have access and, in particular, those who plan to enter skilled labour are exposed to the trades.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ontario needs to examine the current reality of vocational education that is seemingly at odds with the ideas behind its formation and the current inclusionary philosophy of universal student success. Vocational education has its roots in providing all students with practical technical knowledge and skills but this case study unmasks some areas of concern. Additional research in this area will determine whether the findings of this case study can be generalized to other vocational education secondary sites in Ontario. The trend appears to be driven by policy changes which have tied vocational education to special education in Ontario. The result is that technical education has wound up in a compromising position: vocational schools are no longer required to be available to all students; this is directly at odds with the egalitarian nature of education in Ontario in the 21st century.

The terms vocational and special education are by no means synonymous and the two areas of education were founded and formed with completely different aims. By marrying the two systems of education the ramifications for educators and students

may be detrimental. This case study of an Ontario school raised many issues plaguing this marriage between vocational and special education. SS school has moved from being an option for all students to being only available to those who are formally identified as needing special education. The criteria of vocational education should not be solely deemed on ability level; the goal in the creation of vocational programming was to prepare students who are motivated to work in skilled trades after high school. By adding the requirement of functioning at least four grade levels below age-level, the majority of the school population is not in a college-bound stream.

As a result, the focus within SS curriculum programming has shifted from skilled trades to life skills, which is special education curriculum. Vocational schools were formed to provide a broad range of technical programming including high-level technical skills training and life skills training. However, by limiting enrolment to students who are exceptional, schools are compromising their technical education programs. By returning to inclusive enrolment and allowing any interested students to attend, the school may attract students with the motivation and ability levels to enter the skilled trades upon graduating.

Additional research in this area may lead education policy makers (at the provincial, board, and school levels) to question the current status of vocational education in Ontario and result in a more defined identity for this important branch of the education system. The aim of preparing students for jobs in technological trades has been completely lost in the current provincial programming policies that only allow certain students to access technological secondary school facilities. In light of the shortage of apprenticed workers in the province, one can only presume that the education system has played a large role in creating the shortage. This shortage may be the result of individual boards limiting the exposure of the majority of students to technological programs in high schools. By making programs only available to particular students, Ontario has lost many potential trade workers and, arguably, perpetuated the shortage of skilled labourers. Although the government of Ontario is beginning to provide incentives to entice students to go into skilled trades programs, much more needs to be done to combat the growing shortage. Perhaps by forming new policies for vocational schools in Ontario and clarifying the role of technical training at the secondary level, the province will begin to make a concerted effort to address the

systemic ramifications of the marriage of vocational and special education.

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