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An Interpretation of Full Inclusion

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Full inclusion is a recent player on the educational field. Due in part to its recency, the meaning of full inclusion, the roots from which it has sprung, and its potential contribution to children, parents, and teachers are misunderstood by many.

A Generic View

Full inclusion, in the educational sense, argues that all students must have the opportunity to be enrolled in the regular classroom of the neighbourhood school with age-appropriate peers, or to attend the same school as their brothers or sisters. Inclusion in the regular classroom requires that both regular students and those with some type of challenge to their learning receive "appropriate educational programs that are challenging yet geared to their capabilities and needs as well as any support and assistance they and/or their teachers may need to be successful in the mainstream" (Stainback and Stainback, 1988). Conversely, full inclusion does not suggest that any student with special needs should be enrolled in a regular classroom *unless* that classroom is welcoming, *unless* an individualized program designed to address the learning needs and styles of the child is put in place, and *unless* the specialist support personnel, services, and materials necessary to support inclusion are available as and when needed. If attempts were made to place children in classrooms where these requirements were not met, those who advocate inclusion would consider that both the theory and practice of the concept were being abused. Inclusion of all children in the regular classrooms of local schools does not spring from a desire on the part of a school system or political body to save money or to discontinue the preparation of teachers with specialized knowledge of challenging conditions.

All the supports available within the separate special education service delivery model are recognized as valuable and needed. The question is "Where should these supports be available to the individual student for maximum benefit?". Those who advocate full inclusion believe the answer to be in the regular classroom of the neighbourhood school, alongside age-appropriate peers and within the normal diversity of the community.

The fundamental characteristics of full inclusion may be summarized as:

- Education in the regular classroom of the immediate community for all children in the community.
- Valuing of individual differences whatever their extent.
- Recognition of the appropriateness of a diverse community within the school system.
- Seeing all children as children and not as labels.
- Recognition of the capacity of regular teachers to be responsible for the education of all children.
- Recognition of need for appropriate support systems to facilitate the learning of all children in a classroom.
- Equal partnership of parents, and of children when possible, with educators in the educational decision-making process.

Diversity Within the Mainstream

The concept and the practice of full inclusion rise from the philosophy that "all children belong and can learn in the mainstream of school and community life. Diversity is valued;it is believed that diversity strengthens the class and offers all its members greater opportunities for learning" (Stainback, Stainback, and Jackson, 1992). This is a philosophy that, in its purest and simplest sense, encompasses all children. All children learning in a shared educational environment with other children according to individual need is considered a worthwhile goal.

Basic to the advocacy of full inclusion is the belief that there are not two separate groups of learners, divided by one group being "regular" and the other group being "disabled". All students are seen to be part of the normal, daily, diverse citizenship of our cities, towns, and villages. There is only one set of effective teaching practices, not one set for regular learners and another for special learners.

Disability as a Social Construct

There are many more similarities among children than there are differences. What differences exist, be they of a physical, social,intellectual, or psychological nature, are to be expected, accepted, and valued as contributing to the stimulating texture of the fabric of life for the entire community (Lipsky and Gardner, 1989). Inherent in the theory is that disability is a social construct. It is a creation of those who have regarded, measured, and categorized others, not on the basis of who or what those others are, but on the basis of one particular aspect of difference. Advocates of full inclusion argue that such social constructions are of limited, if any, use and undermine the formation of community. It is a social construct which has denied choice to children and parents, which has separated children from families, and which has defined those with physical, social, intellectual, and psychological differences as less than others, as something to be devalued and set apart. As Goffman (1963) stated, it is a view of humanity which stigmatizes certain individuals as discredited or discreditable with resultant negative consequences. Those who argue that all must have the choice of inclusion in neighbourhood schools and neighbourhood communities place the struggle for inclusive education within the series of civil and human rights movements of recent history. To them it is a matter of social justice and human rights—for every-

one. Inclusion is seen as broader than simply an educational or disability issue. It is a matter of equity and full citizenship with all that these terms mean.

Observations Supporting Full Inclusion

Supporting the movement to full inclusion are three general research findings which have a bearing on this discussion. One is that effective teaching strategies used for regular learners are the same as those most effective for any learner, whether or not that learner is labelled as special (Larrivee, 1985). A second finding is that the early promises of academic gain and speedy return to the mainstream of education which persuaded many to turn to separate special educational services have not been realized. The research gives any positive benefit of separate education mixed reviews at best. Advocates of full inclusion do not find sufficient strength in the educational contributions of separate education to support its continuance. The third finding is that teachers have modest expectations for children in separate environments. Though not all situations are the same, there is and has been a tendency for specialized situations to focus on the weaknesses of learners rather than areas of strength, and to create curricula which are not designed on the same principles and with the same rigor as are mainstream core curricula. Putnam (1993) notes that the concerns around access to the core curriculum of the community involve both quantity- "how much time is spent actively engaged in instruction", and quality- "how differentiated the instruction is". One might pose the question "Is it possible for small groups of teacher-specialists working in separate special programs with a small number of students who are similar only in their handicap, to replicate the continuous change and forward movement in curricula and expectations of the larger regular educational community?". Advocates of full inclusion would argue that academic achievement in regular classrooms equals, and likely exceeds that under existing special education structures. The social side of learning would be enhanced among learners with special needs since they would have many models of regular behavior around them in and out of school. It might also be argued that teachers in regular classrooms have higher expectations for social growth than do many in separate situations.

Full Inclusion and Choice

Choice is a fundamental right of all children and parents to those advocating full inclusion in the regular classrooms of neighbourhood schools. The strength with which some parents, advocates, and educators argue for full inclusion springs from the fact that choice has been denied many children with disabilities by the educational systems of the past, and continues to be denied them in the majority of educational systems of the present. Parents, and students when they are of age to contribute to discussion, have not been accorded a seat at the table where placement decisions are made. So strong has been the practice of excluding them from discussion, that it has taken legislation to give them any voice at all. Even under recent legislation, the voices of parents and students remain second to those of educators and administrators. The essence of the struggle for full inclusion is the desire for the right of choice of placement within the educational system, a choice which remains denied for too many children.

Community Base

Full inclusion is viewed as having passed beyond the educational strategies of mainstreaming and integration. Placing children with special needs under the responsibility and ownership of regular classroom teachers supported by specialists versed in the area of a child's needs, and not the other way around, is seen as a fundamental educational reform. It is viewed as a part of the holistic framework which regards the school as only one component, albeit a central one, of the child's acceptance and education. The community as broadly defined is involved in inclusion. The school, as one part of the community, must accept and value any child within the community as a person who can learn and who can contribute to the natural diversity of the community. Once within the school, every child must have the supports necessary to facilitate effective learning and realization of individual potential without the restraints imposed by labels, separate bussing, and being clustered with others "like her/himself" in separated situations.

Deafness and Full Inclusion

The above discussion has spoken to the generic position of those who advocate full inclusion. It has not focused on any particular group of students. Those who wish to reform schools to include all learners do not focus on specific groups, believing that the fundamental characteristics of inclusive education would benefit all if enacted within our communities.

As an educator, a former teacher of children who are deaf, a former administrator in residential schools, a professor with extensive experience in preparing teachers of the deaf, and a person with deaf relatives educated in residential schools, I have asked myself repeatedly how well the concepts and practices of full inclusion hold up when applied to children who are deaf.

On the academic side, I am aware of evidence supporting the position that deaf children are educated to higher academic levels in regular classrooms than they are in separate educational facilities. This position has been documented repeatedly, though not without exception, in research investigations (Foster, 1989; Paul and Quigley, 1990; Stoefen-Fisher and Balk, 1992). Foster (1989) cites Kluwin and Moores who suggested differ-

ences in academic achievement might be accounted for by "such factors as high expectations, exposure to greater quantities of demanding material, the availability of individual student support, and training in academic content by mainstream class teachers" (p. 38). Conversely, this appears to suggest that separate classes for children challenged by deafness are not characterized by sufficiently high expectations, sufficient quantities of demanding material, available individual student support, or teachers well prepared in academic content. Advocates of full inclusion would find this a powerful argument for movement to regular classrooms.

Likewise support may be found for the thesis that all children benefit from the use of a similar set of effective teaching practices. It would be difficult to argue that children who are deaf require a separate set of teaching strategies which can be delivered only in a special setting. Whereas some may argue for specialized curricula for children who are deaf, to the best of my knowledge those curricula are taught using standard teaching techniques with perhaps more emphasis than usual on the visual approach. The language of instruction, be it ASL or oral/auditory, does not alter the basic instructional approach.

Things become a bit more fuzzy for me when the social side of education is considered. Paul and Quigley (1990) and Foster (1989) note that research indicates an uneven scenario when deaf students are integrated. Some socialize with their hearing peers, some interact more with their teachers, some have a minimal social life at school. Lee and Antia (1992), in recognition of a need to identify "those aspects of the environment that need to be changed to foster social relations" (p.428) between deaf and hearing students suggest that the framework of contact theory may lead to improved social relations. Foster (1989) may summarize the situation most fairly when she states "There are advantages and disadvantages inherent in each educational model" (p. 37).

The social discussion is intricately related to the issues of the use of sign language and the development of the culture of deafness. It is these two issues which create a difference between the many members of the deaf community and other communities of people with disabilities. I will not attempt to review the discussions around sign language and culture here as they are too complex for the space available. Suffice it to say that many deaf adults and many hearing people working with them believe strongly that forcing deaf children to attend regular classes would be an injustice. My understanding of the point of view of inclusive education is that this strong belief rests not so much on academic benefit and need for a specialized instructional approach as on the desire to maintain a critical mass required to support a particular language and culture. Inclusion or separation of students challenged by deafness is essentially a cultural/linguistic, rather than educational, debate, though it is being worked out primarily within the framework of education.

Final Word

This point brings me back to the issue of choice. In my opinion, most people identified closely with full inclusion do not argue that all children should be forced to do one thing or another. Indeed, they argue that is exactly what they are fighting against. It is wrong to deny families, on the basis of a child's physical, social, intellectual, or psychological difference, a choice of where that child may go to school. Though those who value the benefits they find in inclusion in regular classrooms argue strongly for their rights and the rights of their children, they would support the primacy of choice over compulsion in educational placement for any individual child. This is a view to which I personally subscribe.

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Full Inclusion and the Deaf Student: A Deaf Consumer's Review of the Issue

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A discussion of full inclusion[1] and the education of deaf students is timely, given the increased interdependence of the general and special education systems and the current thrust toward development of a single unified system of education