CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FROM THERE TO HERE: THE PASSAGE TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract

The growing educational practice of including all learners in the regular classrooms of community schools concerns many educators who find it to be overly innovative and too sharply disconnected from previous practice. However, the contemporary emphasis on inclusion of all learners may be seen as simply the present and future form of an ages-old societal movement toward inclusion of learners with disabilities. History records a discrete series of changes in societal regard for this group of learners and a steady progression from absolute exclusion from education to full inclusion within regular classrooms. Present inclusive philosophy and practice may best be understood in the light of the historical change in educational philosophy and practice.

We used to be there. Now we are here. It is often said that we have to understand history to have a firm idea of how the present came to be, and to form a picture of what the future might look like. That saying is as true for how the educational system and the community in general have included children with disabilities as it is for anything else. There is a history of how we moved from where we used to be in inclusion to where we are now.

Present understanding of the term "inclusive education" is that it is a recent phenomenon. The term is recent, but inclusion of children with disabilities in education is not. "Inclusive education" is simply the latest term for offering education to those whose learning is challenged. The difference in this particular term is that it signifies that all children, regardless of differences in learning ability, are placed in age-appropriate regular classrooms of their neighbourhood schools for their education.

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Education may be seen as being placed on a continuum of inclusionary periods. From distant times when education was characterized much more by exclusion for the great majority of all possible learners, those with disabilities and those without, to the contemporary period when educators and others struggle with "inclusive education," there has been continuous movement along the continuum toward less exclusion and more inclusion.

Inclusion by Class: The Early Years

Though educational opportunities have been offered to those with disabilities for centuries, acceptance of such individuals within the mainstream of education does not have a long history. Certainly inclusion of such individuals with other learners in regular classrooms is quite recent. Historical precedent began with total exclusion from education.

Not only were children with disabilities excluded from education, they were excluded from community. In many places those with disabilities could not live in a village or town. Remember those with leprosy who were expelled from their own communities and forced to wander from place to place ringing a bell to warn others that they were coming? Remember the children of Sparta who were taken outside their communities and left in the wild to die? Remember all those who were seen as a burden on a society which rejected them as unable to contribute to the community or to learn the skills required in daily life? Such individuals were considered as less than human and worthy only of death in many early societies.

It is easy to interpret educational history as a history of exclusion. Society has been exclusionary and continues to be exclusionary to a great degree. However, even within the exclusionary reality of early societies with regard to those with disabilities, the first, faint glimmerings of educational inclusion may be seen. We know, for instance, that some families were sufficiently wealthy and influential that their children, though disabled, were educated by tutors. Ponce de Leon is an example of one such tutor. He taught the deaf sons of wealthy Spanish families the rudiments of oral and written communication in the 1500s (Winzer, 1987). Numerous individual examples of this type have been evident over the centuries.

Until the mid 1700s a limited number of children with disabilities obtained the benefits of education and, through those benefits, some degree of inclusion in society. In Canada, a colonial country at the beginning of the 1700s, the same pattern of tutorial education for some children with disabilities, if their families had the resources, was evident.

Figure 1

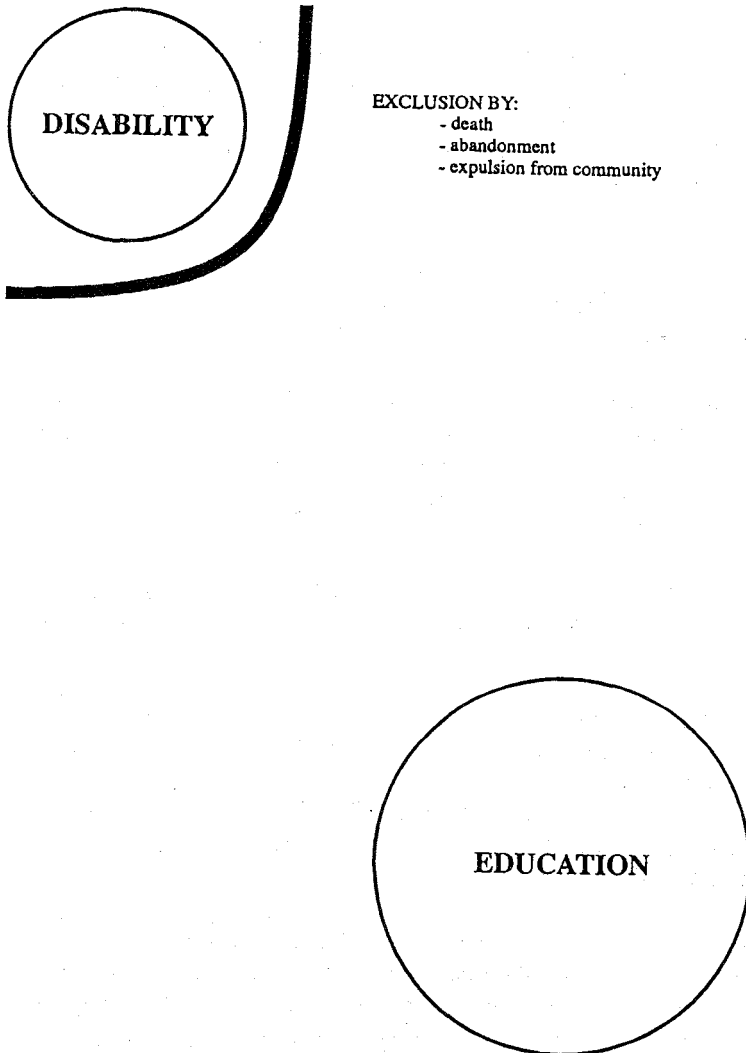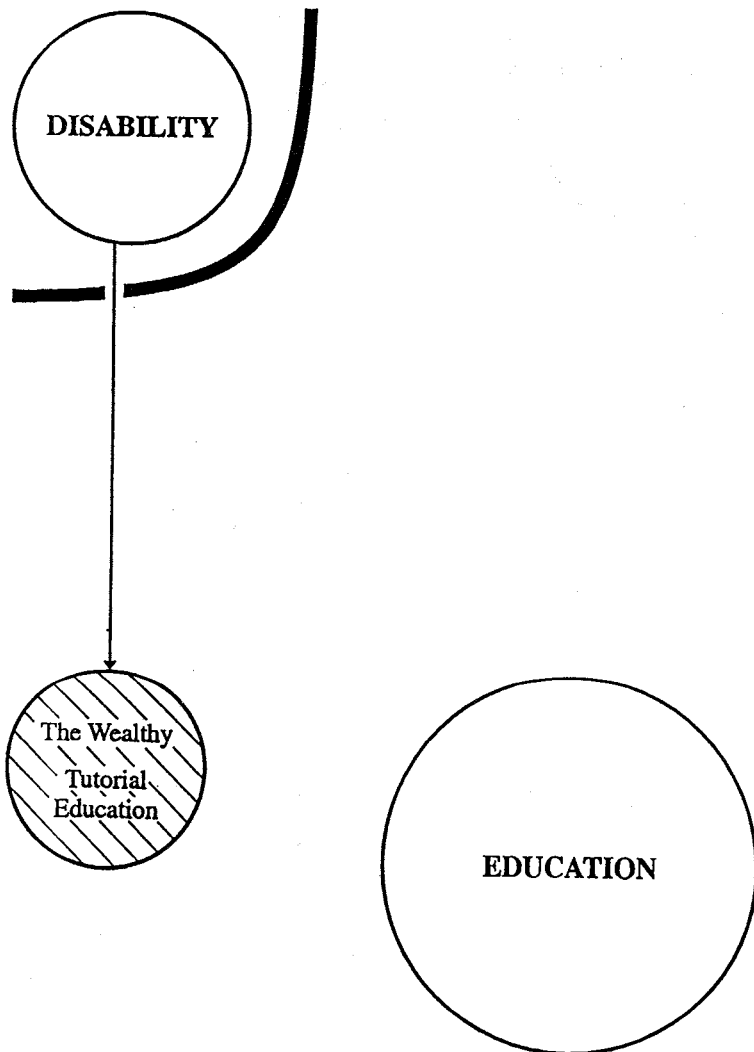**Exclusionary Education: How It Was in the Beginning**

DISABILITY

EXCLUSION BY:
- death
- abandonment
- expulsion from community

EDUCATION

Figure 2

Inclusion By Class: The First Movement

From the mid 1700s to the early 1900s, in most Western countries, more and more individuals with disabilities were included in education, particularly in residential schools. In general such inclusion continued to be restricted to those from families in the upper economic strata, although there were some institutions for the needy. Eventually females with disabilities came to be represented, in modest numbers, among those offered some degree of education. Residential schools for children with the sensory disabilities of deafness and blindness became relatively common. Individuals with physical impairments, too, were beginning to appear in educational venues. It was in this period that deafness, blindness, and physical disabilities were seen to have "face validity," with the appropriateness of "special" educational provision being obvious to all (MacMillan & Hendrick, 1993). It was less obvious that the intellectually and behaviourally challenged could benefit from education, though some were "included" in residential institutions with varying degrees of habilitative programming.

With halting progress through the economic, cultural, governmental, and religious conditions of the times, inclusion in education, albeit inclusion at a distance from regular education structures, began with the male children of a few influential families. Education slowly spread to include females, limited numbers of the less wealthy, and even of the poor. In the Canadian instance, the passage to educational inclusion began with the establishment of orphanages, which may or may not have had educational components, and schools for children with sensory handicaps. Most individuals with any significant degree of challenge to learning continued to be excluded from education. The facilities which did exist, though segregated, were inclusionary in that they formed the first substantial public educational offering for people with disabilities.

Inclusion By Disability: The Segregated System

By the twentieth century, society had recognized that certain groups of individuals with disabilities should be exposed to educational (deaf, blind) or habilitative (intellectual and behavioural) services. Though gender, race, and class differences were not responded to with equity, and the educational and habilitative institutions most often were set well away from major centres and regular education, the passage to inclusion in education had begun and momentum gained. By 1900, there were rare instances of day classes in regular schools (MacMillan & Hendrick, 1993).

Though such classes were the exception, their growth, and the inclusion of more and more children with disabilities, resulted in the creation of a special education segregated system, which paralleled the regular education system, and competed with it increasingly for funds and personnel. An entire new

Figure 3

**Inclusion By Disability: Grouping in Segregated
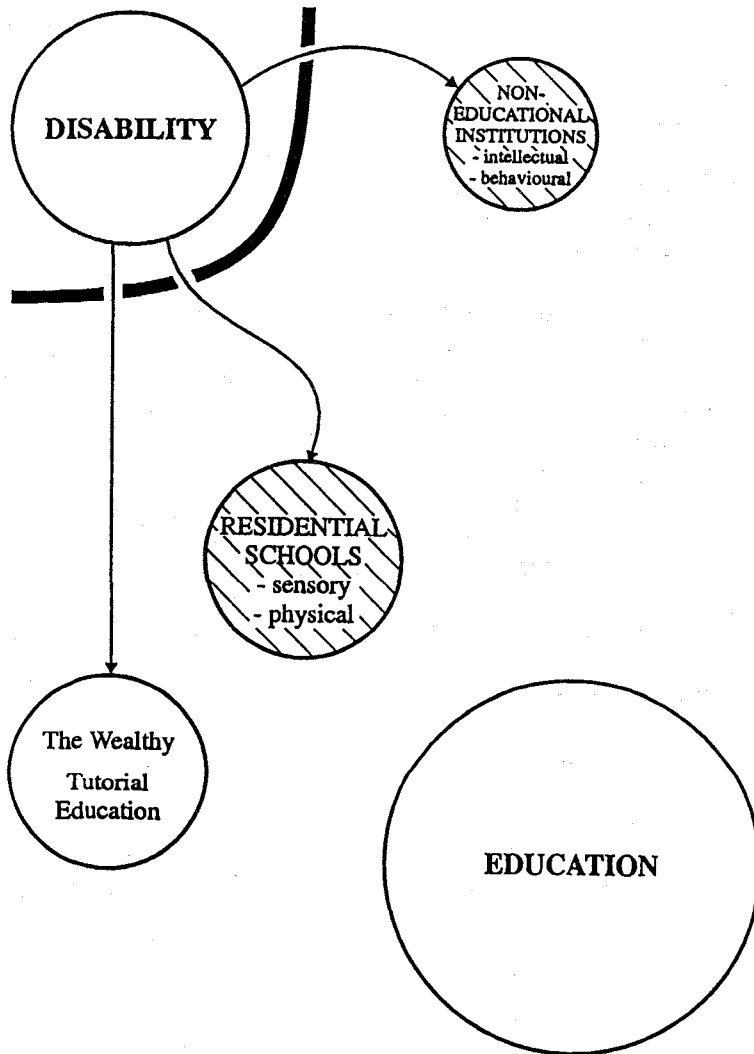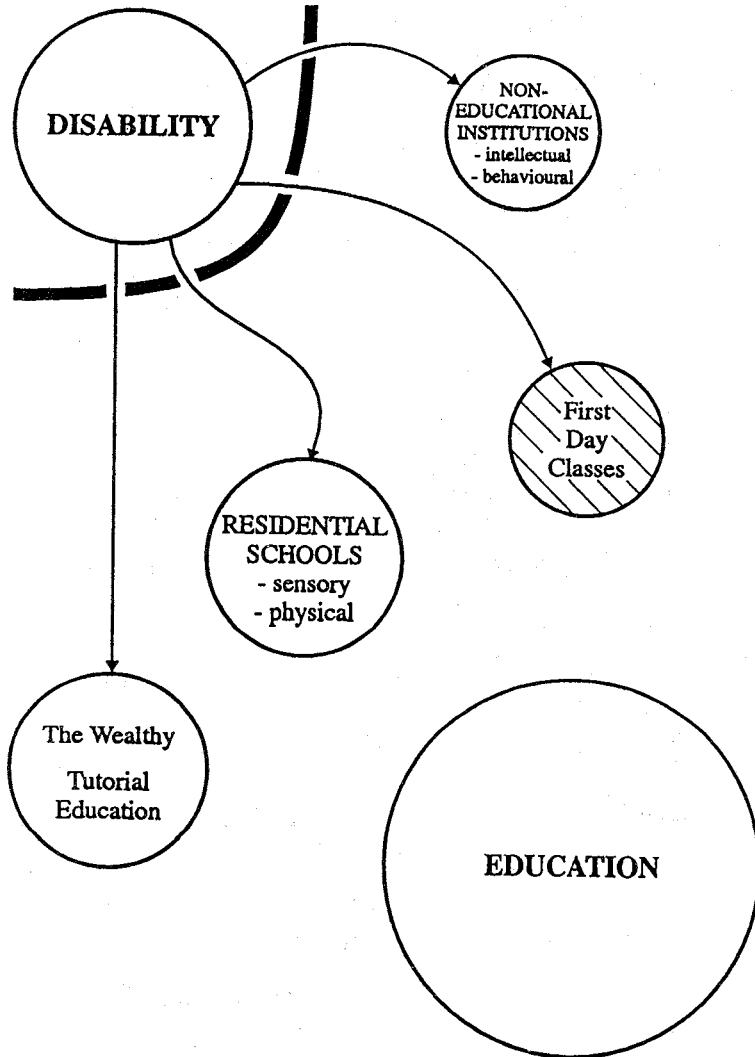Residential Schools and Habilitative Institutions**

DISABILITY

NON-
EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTIONS
- intellectual
- behavioural

RESIDENTIAL
SCHOOLS
- sensory
- physical

The Wealthy
Tutorial
Education

EDUCATION

Figure 4

**Inclusion By Disability: Beginning of the
Parallel Segregated System**

DISABILITY

NON-
EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTIONS
- intellectual
- behavioural

First
Day
Classes

RESIDENTIAL
SCHOOLS
- sensory
- physical

The Wealthy

Tutorial
Education

EDUCATION

bureaucracy, complete with specialized administrators, specialized teachers, specialized teacher preparation programs, specialized assessment methods, specialized instructional methods, specialized associations of teachers, specialized associations of parents, specialized publications, and specialized transportation systems was firmly in place and in its heyday by 1970. The process of development of this system was one of including children with disabilities, many of whom previously had been excluded from education completely, within the segregated special education system, but closer and closer than ever before to families, homes, and communities.

Driving what was fundamental change in education was fundamental change in societal regard for children with disabilities. Lazerson (cited in MacMillan & Hendrick, 1993) hypothesized that four concomitant social changes, apparent at the turn of the twentieth century and centred on recognition of the value of education for the populace in general and criticism of the public school system as inefficient, led to the growth and elaboration of a segregated, parallel, special education system composed of residential schools, day schools, and special classes in centrally designated schools. Each change can be interpreted as evidence of a continuous, though hesitant, movement toward the inclusion of students with disabilities within the educational system.

- **Society began to regard the school system as a logical agency within society to address social problems.**
  Social problems such as cultural, racial, and ability differences were designated as educational problems. Society expected educators to deal with them and to alleviate them.

- **The new corporate-industrial model of organization.**
  Structures such as "centralization, specialization of function, administrative hierarchy, and cost accounting" (p. 29) gained advocates in society. They were seen as increasing educational efficiency, particularly with regard to those whose learning was suspect.

- **Education was viewed as being not merely an academic enterprise for those who could keep pace.**
  The benefits of vocational curricula which would prepare certain groups of students for successful employment gained appreciation.

- **Lastly, the intelligence test was developed as a scientific tool.**
  Psychologists and educators believed that the intelligence test could differentiate accurately among children on the basis of intellectual ability with the resultant direction of most children to "regular" education and others to "special" education.

Within seventy years one public system of education had grown into two with the second system including children who had previously been excluded from education completely or allowed only to visit its margins. The development of a parallel, segregated system was another major step, and a rapid one in educational terms, toward inclusion.

Son of Inclusion By Disability:
## The Least Restrictive Environment

Segregated special education has its roots in the medical model. Difficulty experienced in dealing with regular academic curricula was seen as a deficit, a deficit which could be remediated to greater or lesser degree through administration of special education. Degree of deficiency could be measured by IQ tests and other standardized tests, remedial activities provided, and degree of academic recovery measured by those same tests. The parallel special education system was developed to offer children with disabilities maximum opportunity to develop their potentials and do better in the world than they otherwise would. That was the guiding rationale for separate schools, separate classes, small class size, specially prepared teachers, and specialized instructional methods.

Unfortunately special education has not fulfilled the promise that so many had for it. As MacMillan and Hendrick (1993) noted, "Special classes failed to demonstrate substantive advantages over regular classes" (p. 39), despite advantages of pupil-teacher ratio and specialization. The majority of children who entered special education never left. The exit route was much narrower than was the entrance. It was an "eye of the needle" exit. Dissatisfaction with the results of special education, and particularly with separation of "special" students from "regular" students, grew over the years even as the size and sophistication of the special education system grew.

As with so many aspects of life when differing findings or values pull society in conflicting directions, educators were pulled both toward and away from special education placement as appropriate for students with challenges. Some might see a classic approach-avoidance syndrome in their reactions. In typical fashion, the educational society and governments opted for compromise. The concept of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) was articulated and acted on formally or informally in many jurisdictions (Stainback, Stainback, & Bunch, 1989). Whereas the term is generally taken to mean that a student should be placed full-time as close to the regular classroom as possible (Salend, 1994), with due regard to needs and degree of challenge to learning, two definite forms of LRE have developed.
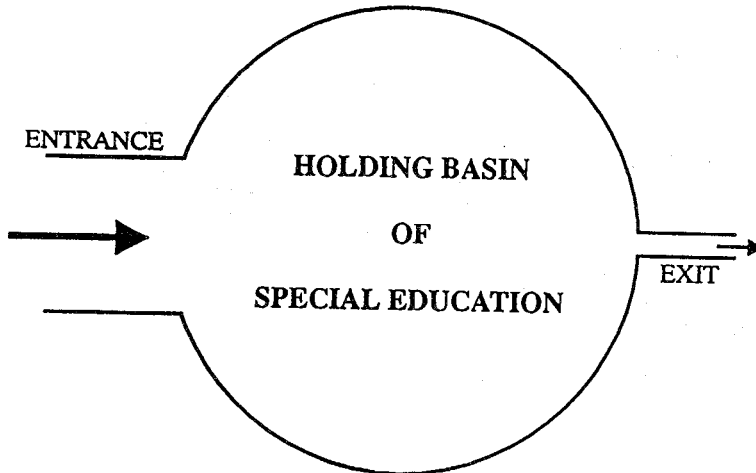
Figure 5

Inclusion By Disability: Growth of the Parallel System
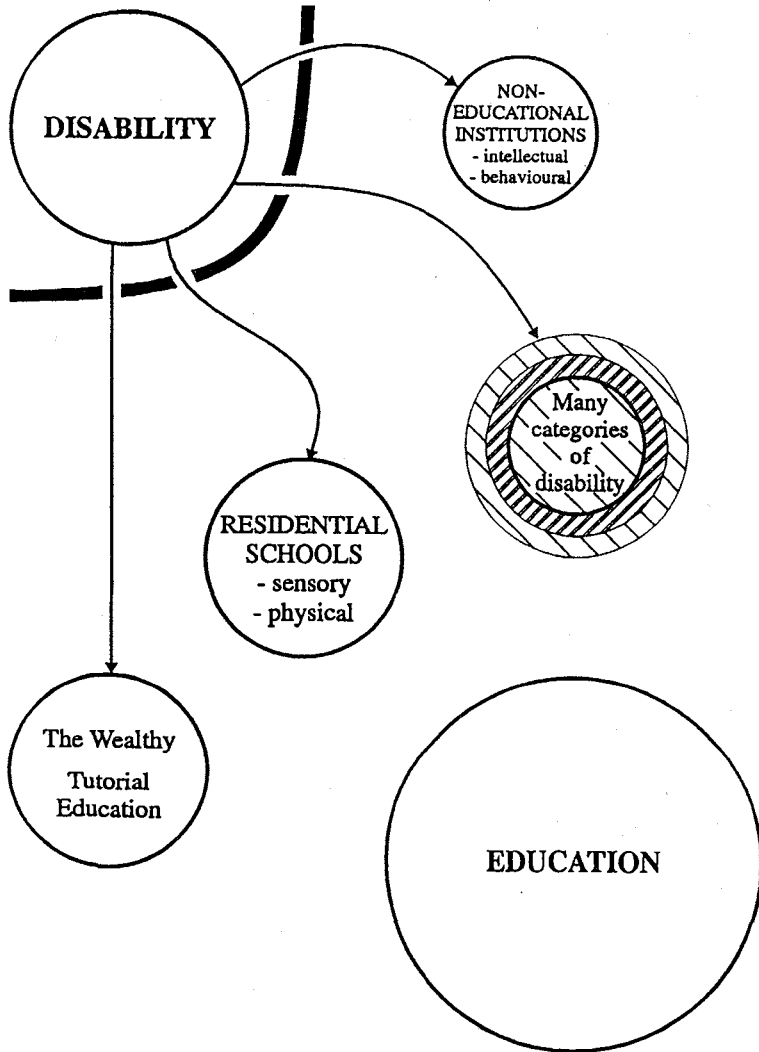
Figure 6

## "Eye of the Needle" Exit Model of Special Education

1. Full-time placement in a classroom and program as close as possible to the regular classroom and program, if not actually in a regular classroom.

2. Split placement between special and regular classrooms to "gain the benefits of both."

The two forms of LRE reflect growing acceptance by Canadian and other educators of the value in having children together in educational settings. The first recognizes that the greatest value is to be found in regular classroom placement and represents the first significant move from parallel systems to a single, united educational system. The second, split placement or "son of inclusion by disability," is a Solomon-like compromise by educators which cleaves in twain the educational life of children with challenges to their learning. It is regarded as acceptable middle ground by those who value special education placement, but who know they have to give in at least partially to pressure from those who prefer full-time regular class placement for all. It is regarded, too, as acceptable by those who simply want to cool down the argument and live a more peaceful life. For those who fervently believe that to be partially included tears a child in half, and leaves her/him in a never-never land, this "son of inclusion by disability" interpretation of the least restrictive environment is not acceptable.

Figure 7

**The Least Restrictive Environment:
Moving Closer to the Regular Education System**
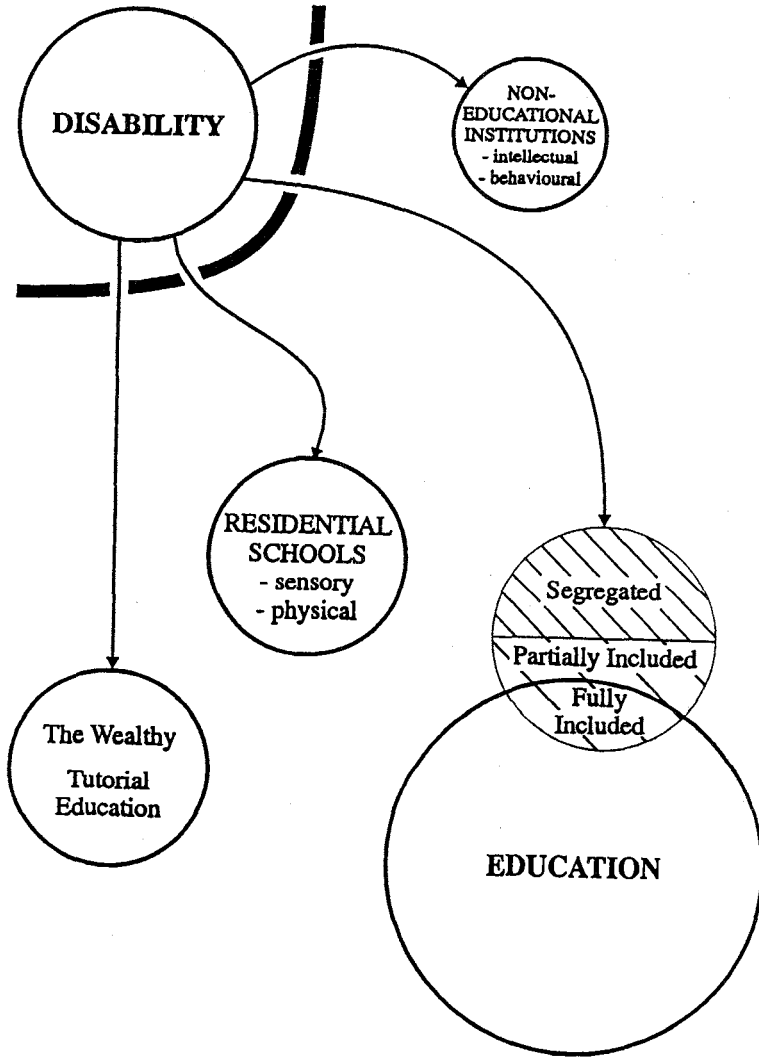
Between approximately 1970 and 1985 educational compromise was a major dynamic. Many students, almost all classified as mildly to moderately challenged in their learning, were placed in regular classrooms. Others were neither fish nor fowl and were educated in the land of split placement. Still others, primarily those with higher degrees of challenge to their learning, remained in segregated schools or classes.

If the least restrictive environment and its variations can be conceptualized as "son of disability by inclusion," it may be seen that the offspring was regarded as possessing questionable legitimacy.

Inclusion By Right: The Regular Classroom

Not all have accepted the least restrictive environment concept. Those who see little right and much wrong with special education have pushed their demands for regular classroom placement vigorously in the past ten years. They have taken their fight to the courts, the media, the government, and the public. *Choice of placement in a regular classroom, if such is desired, is advanced as an issue of human rights and natural social justice.*

With equal vigour others dispute the value of regular class placement and advocate the continuance of segregated special education. Such advocates may be divided into four camps.

The first is comprised of parent groups such as Canadian associations in learning disabilities and giftedness. Such groups have fought hard and long for the benefits they see in special education classes. Availability of special education is perceived as a rights issue and governmental legislation of regular class placement for all children is feared. Access to special education classes is demanded.

The second group defends "quality education" and high achievement levels. Members of this group fear that widening diversity within regular classes will dilute achievement and place the nation in a weakened competitive position internationally. This view is articulated in the position paper of the Quality Education Network of Ontario (1992, May) in the following terms: "Students with severe disabilities cannot be fully integrated into a classroom without seriously encroaching on the educational rights of the majority of students." To this group inclusion in regular classrooms of students with challenges is educational anarchy.

The third group is educators who are concerned that regular teachers will not be supported when children with challenges enter their classrooms. They

see teachers as unprepared professionally to deal with diversity in terms of ability and as pawns at a time of economic stringency. They argue against inclusion as an infringement of teacher rights on the basis that eductors have practical concerns which "center on inappropriate placements, inadequate training, class time and discipline" (Capitol Publications, Inc., 1994).

The fourth group is educators and others who believe that enforced inclusion will be detrimental to the interests of a few, or many, students whom they believe benefit from segregated education. This group tends to include teachers who have spent their teaching careers in special education settings. They value what they have worked for and have experienced educationally. A particular focus of this view may be found within the community of educators and deaf individuals associated with residential schools for deaf children. Baldwin (1994) views inclusion as founded in idealism and lacking reality. He posits that "Although advocates of full inclusion might argue that (special) programs are isolationist in nature, we in turn argue that special programs are best equipped with the resources needed to prepare most deaf students to enter the mainstream of life." Similar arguments are made for other categories of educational exceptionality by relevant authorities.

Despite the reservations of such groupings, present striving for inclusion in regular classrooms is simply today's aspect of a societal movement which began hundreds of years ago. Advocates argue that just as King Canute could not halt the incoming tide from covering the beaches of England, so opponents will be unable to halt the tide of inclusion in the long run. In this instance the tide is one of children with disabilities entering regular classrooms directly, without recourse to a parallel, special system.
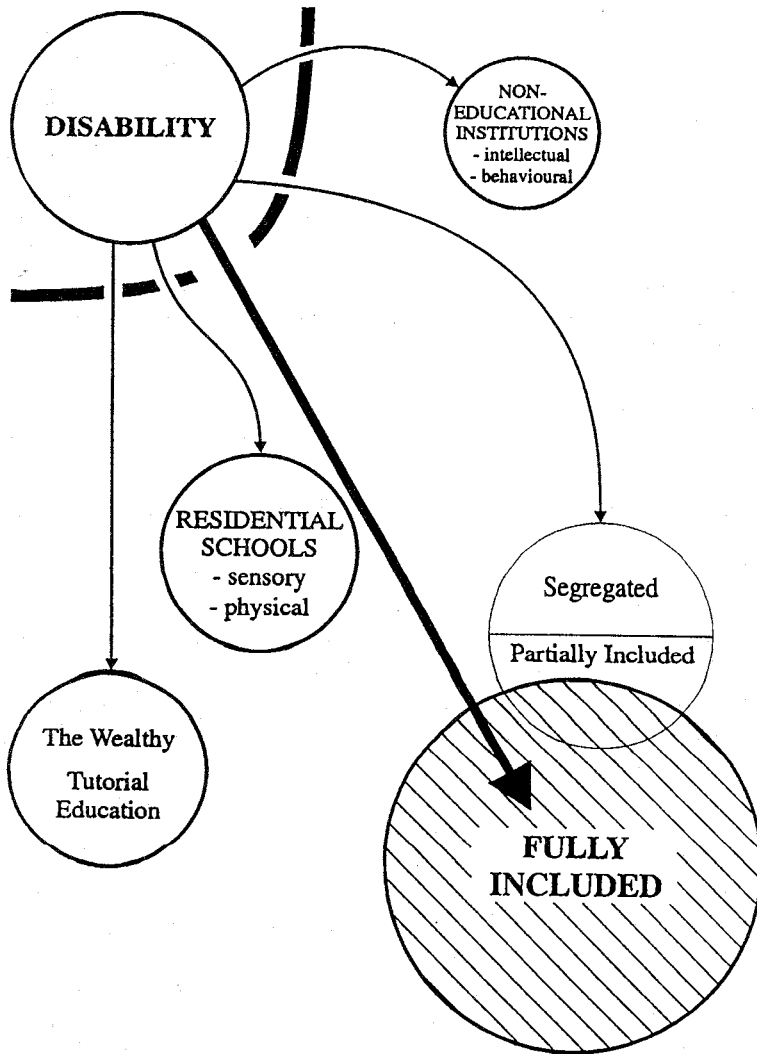
A number of provincial governments have opted for, or are in the process of opting for, inclusive education policies. A growing number of school systems have taken inclusive education stances. Individual educational leaders are creating channels and pools of inclusion in the midst of segregation. Teacher preparation programs are slowly recognizing the need to prepare all teachers, and not simply a few specialists, for increased regular classroom diversity by ability. Considerable time may pass before the movement is complete, but the tide is coming in.

Summary

Formalized approaches to education have a history extending back many centuries. In Canada this history is relatively short. A common element, no matter the length of existence of various approaches to schooling, is that until the last two hundred years, formal education was characterized by exclusion of

Figure 8

Inclusionary Education: The Direct Route

DISABILITY

NON-EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
- intellectual
- behavioural

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS
- sensory
- physical

Segregated

Partially Included

The Wealthy

Tutorial Education

FULLY INCLUDED

learners with special needs. Only with painstaking slowness did such learners begin to take their place in education. The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the extension of public education to almost all children. It was at this point that the large number of children who were challenged by the age-grade, academically focused model basic to the educational structure of the time came to the attention of administrators. In order to include these children efficiently and to respond to their perceived needs, special education structures which parallel regular education were created.

With startling speed for education, this new parallel structure grew and attained strength through the first seven decades of the century. More and more students with challenges to their learning were included in education for the first time. Within recent years a move beyond parallel special education structures to inclusion has occurred for many children. Though presently a controversial movement, as those tied to the past and with vested interest in the parallel system argue against increased inclusion, the inclusive education movement may be seen simply as a continuance of the centuries old movement from exclusion to inclusion in the educational community. It may be seen, too, as the future.

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