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INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

The place of people with disabilities in our world is undecided. There are some who argue that they have the same place as anyone else, that they are simply members of the wider community with the same rights, responsibilities, needs, and strengths. Josephine Jenkinson (1993), for instance, argues that persons with intellectual challenge should participate in decision making activities in their own interest, seeing such participation as "in accord with principles of human dignity and autonomy" (p. 372). Others believe that many of those with disabilities have no rightful place in the mainstream of regular society and that accommodations made to assist them in societal interaction are acts of charity which may be rescinded. The Jerry Lewis' of today, well intentioned as they might be, fit comfortably into the ethic of helping those with disabilities from the same charity motivation noted by Davidson, Woodill, and Bredberg (1994) in their analysis of images of disability from the 19th century.

Society continues to struggle with its commitment to do what is necessary to bring about a world which is not divided on the basis of characteristics such as gender, race, and heredity. It is a struggle begun long ago and likely to go on long into the future. In our view the struggle around those with disabilities will be decided in the favour of those who desire that difference should not divide, but the conflict will continue for some time yet. We have but begun the battle.

The education system is a centre in this struggle, an eye of the storm. Over the past century or so children who differ from the majority of their peers in terms of physical, sensory, emotional, and intellectual characteristics have gained access to education. Most commonly, this access was not to the same settings as those not labelled as handicapped. At first the pace of access was halting, but more recently it has accelerated significantly. Indeed, the right of all children to education has been legislated in some countries and is being advocated in others. In this, society has made a major step forward.

The translation of this right to education varies from child to child within the majority of educational systems. The determining factor is degree of difference in one or more of the categories mentioned above. When first faced with the understanding that society believed children with challenges should have access to the education system, educators responded with what has now become known as special education. It was believed up to quite recently that what a student with disability needed was a protected environment in which to learn: a place away from

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the jeers of other students; a place where special programs could be brought to bear; a place with special teachers and special equipment; a place where the child with disability would enjoy the security of being with like others. There was absolutely nothing wrong with this thinking - at the time. Society had not previously attempted to educate large numbers of those with some type of disability. The development of segregated special education provision was based on the best understanding of educators, psychologists, the medical field, governments, and parents. Those who worked to develop, improve and maintain special education services were, and are, dedicated, hard working, and well intentioned. Many students received needed assistance in special education classes. Many were challenged to learn as well as they could. The development of segregated special education was a boon to parents and children and a progressive step by a concerned society.

But that is the story of yesterday. Today, a growing number of educators, advocates, parents, and individuals with disability are persuaded that, though special education provision was a necessary starting place, new understanding suggests that it would be inappropriate to be satisfied with what has been achieved to date. They point to the success of programs that have left traditional, segregated special education structures behind and moved to include students with challenges in regular classrooms of community schools. They point, as well, to research which suggests that special class placement, while undertaken for the best of reasons, has not proven to be academically and socially stronger for the average student with disabilities, than would be regular class placement. In fact, at a time when progressive thinking and action are required to meet the needs of those with disabilities, something less is often offered. Curt Dudley-Marling and Don Dippo (1995) suggest that contemporary thinking such as that represented in the theory of learning disabilities, "despite its impressive rhetoric, is fundamentally conservative in that it functions to preserve ideological practices by reinforcing taken for granted assumptions of schooling" (p. 413).

Educators have long accepted that full time segregated placement is not ideal for many students. That is why so many students, primarily those with lesser disability, have been enrolled in regular classrooms. Unfortunately, in reinforcement of traditional assumptions of disability, a large number have been enrolled with the proviso, explicit or implied, that to remain they would

have to keep pace with the other students in the classroom and that sufficient resources be available. They not true members of the classroom, but visitors always and visitors on condition of acceptable progress and sufficient resources, both as defined by the teacher. A significant number of other students attend regular classes for some subjects and are withdrawn to special classes for other subjects. They are also visitors to regular classrooms, but without even the appearance of conditional full time attendance. As noted, the right of all students to be in a regular classroom routinely is subject to the rights of teachers, and comes out in second place in that equation. Slee (1993) has suggested that determining right to placement in a regular classroom on the basis of "getting more resources is inadequate. Depicted in this way, the politics of integration becomes the politics of struggling to open the public purse wider to wrest more funds for the integration program" (p. 351). We interpret such barriers to regular classroom membership as adjustments leading to conditional full or part time participation in regular classes, and, as such, highly questionable. The idea of resources outweighing children and of individual teachers determining if a child is maintaining acceptable pace in learning is not one which is acceptable. Without argument, necessary resources should be available and teachers should always be evaluating progress, but resources and lockstep progress with other students are not the deciding considerations. Making them so demeans both teachers and students.

However, education is moving on. With today's knowledge supporting them many educators, parents, advocates, and individuals with disability believe that it is time for all children, regardless of degree of disability, to attend their community schools in classes with their neighbourhood peers. They cite research which indicates that regular class placement is equal to or superior to special class placement (i.e. Baker, Wang, and Walberg, 1994/95), and that regular students, too, benefit from experience in inclusive classrooms (i.e. Staub and Peck, 1994). They find comfort and motivation in studies, such as that by Hunt and Goetz (1997), which lay out guidelines for inclusive practice: (a) parental involvement; (b) positive learning outcomes; (c) opportunities for friendships; (d) positive learning for regular students; (e) collaboration; (f) curricular modifications. There is a sufficient body of evidence out there for us to realize that inclusion is not a dismissible, theoretical construct. How can it be when so many teachers practice it every day and so many regular students and their peers with disabilities benefit from experience

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in diverse classrooms every day?

Conversely, others decry inclusion for both students with mild and severe disabilities as poor education. They believe that inclusion is an utopian ideal and that research does not prove its feasibility or value. They seem unaware that other utopian ideals, such as girls and women being fully accepted members of the educational community or people of differing colour and ethnicity being educated together, have come to pass and have proven their feasibility and value.

Enough of that type of discussion, though. We are not particularly interested in the conflict between those who support and those who deny inclusive education. Our own experience, experience which includes years spent in segregate and partially segregated settings ranging from residential schools to community schools, tells us that more students than ever imagined can be educated well in regular classrooms. Flexibility and creativity are necessary. The view of who can be recognized as a student must change and expand. Teachers must enter into collaborative relationships with colleagues, parents, and relevant others. The financial and personnel commitments made to special education situations must be renewed and follow students to the regular classrooms of community schools. Teacher preparation must prepare all teachers to work with all children. To us facts such as these are obvious and must be acted on to support inclusion, just as similar steps must be taken to support any educational reform. There is sufficient evidence of the power and potential of the inclusive approach to persuade us to devote our efforts to furthering it and to clarifying it for interested others.

One task the two of us recently undertook was to review the available literature for studies which lay out the benefits of the inclusive approach, studies which point to practice which, while generally supportive of inclusion, requires alteration in some instances to support inclusion well, and studies which focus on already supportive strategies. Our efforts resulted in this book.

To us acceptance or rejection of inclusive education for all students is primarily a matter of attitude. There is no longer any argument that the inclusive approach cannot work, that teachers cannot undertake it without unfair stress, that the education of other students will be harmed, or that included students will suffer wholesale rejection by their peers. Such arguments are disproved by the fact that teachers successfully practice inclusion in preschools, elementary schools, and high schools every day. We know that any significant educational reform will draw resistance

from some or many educators due to fear that their working conditions will be affected, that the task is beyond their capacities, and due to the implied or direct challenge to the manner in which they have understood and practised their profession. Therefore, the first two sections of the book examine teacher attitudes, and the attitudes of other participants in the practice, toward inclusion. We believe that attitudes and their roots, whether negative or positive, must be understood for reasoned reform of what has been accepted as the only way to do things. Without knowing what teachers, parents of included students, parents of regular students, and the students themselves believe, efforts to move ahead and address concerns will be less fruitful than they should be. Teachers do have concerns about inclusive practice, but they also see many values in it. These values should be our guides in development of strategies to deal with these concerns.

Closely related to the attitudes of those involved in inclusion of students with challenging needs, is what actually happens in terms of student progress. Sections three and four examine social and academic achievement respectively. Represented in these sections, in addition to discussion of achievement, are supportive strategies, such as social skill programming and peer tutoring. Success in inclusion is not simply a matter of adding students with challenges to regular classrooms and waiting for the dust to settle. Careful planning and good teaching are as necessary in regular classrooms as they are in any situation where teachers work with students with diverse abilities.

The next section focusses on the behaviour of students who are included. Behaviour is an area of fundamental concern and may be the one which alerts teachers most. When we speak to individual teachers, groups of teachers, and future teachers, it is routine to discover that they believe almost all teachers will encounter students whose behaviour is dangerous and fundamentally disruptive. Our own experience tells us that this is not the case, though there are students whose needs can result in explosive behaviour. There are just not as many such children as teachers fear. But it is a fear. Therefore, we included discussions which suggest how to understand the behavioural problems some students have, and how to respond to them with skill and effect. Flexible solutions can be brought to almost any situation given positive attitude, knowledge of appropriate strategies, and collegial support.

One valuable response to behavioural needs is to enlist the assistance of a child care

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worker or educational assistant. Both of these paraprofessionals can work with the teacher to respond to behaviour in positive ways. We extended this point into a discussion of the paraprofessional in the next section. These staff members have become and, in our view, will remain a vital support for many students and teachers. Paraprofessionals are not teachers, and should not be expected to take on teacher responsibilities, but together the teacher and the paraprofessional can forge an effective team. The variety of needs that paraprofessionals can address is large, and though they are not needed for as many students as some believe, when they are in place and well prepared, they can work wonders.

To us this kind of question, "What is the role of the paraprofessional in the classroom?", leads to larger considerations. After all, the paraprofessional is but one part of an overall plan. It is at the level of the overall plan, or model for instruction, that all the pieces become apparent and how they fit together becomes clearer. The model chosen to address any particular need is important. It is important in determining aspects such as whether a paraprofessional should be worked into the program, or whether peer tutors might meet the situation more effectively. Such strategies should be thought through before inclusion is attempted. The model for any educational reform is best approached with forethought. But forethought can be a luxury. Time is not always available. Events have a habit of simply happening and then you are left to develop your model for inclusion as you go along. The articles in this "models" section outline procedures for when time is available, but also chronicle what can happen when events overtake educators who have responsibility for the education of all students. Sometimes, it is possible to plan in advance. Sometimes you just have to do it.

Our final two sections turn to strategies which are common among those who practice inclusively, and which have support through research as well. Their use can be preplanned or they can be put in place as needs arise.

First we isolate collaboration as a major strategy. We do this because collaboration appears as a basic element of every model of inclusion with which we are familiar. It is a fundamental practice within this educational reform. Inclusion calls for teachers to work together in support of students with challenging needs, for parents to be involved in planning, for the input of related professionals, and, very definitely, the cooperation of the regular students in the

classroom.

The final section reviews explorations of particular strategies. The ways to support inclusive education require careful examination of one's basic understanding of the teaching and learning process at one end of the spectrum of practice, and of daily, functional tasks such as how to deal with homework at the other. The teacher's task is indeed varied. It calls for a reflective practitioner who is not afraid to explore new ground or to question old tactics. In fact, the task of teaching all children calls for teachers to teach well and, at its best, to teach all comers. .

We have referred to inclusive practice as educational reform. In fact, it may more appropriately be regarded as the natural result of reform which has been in progress for many, many years. In an effort to place students with challenges in the contemporary context of education, we began this book with an interpretation of how education has regarded such students over the ages. The present-day move to what we call inclusion, in our minds, is part of the centuries old concern with individuals with disabilities and their place in society. We focus on the educational society as that is our area, but societal concern for this group encompasses everything from birth to marriage to death. We see a connectedness, a continue move from complete segregation toward a future of complete involvement in community. Our role as educators is to try to understand what is happening, identify barriers, and clarify positive concepts and strategies.

Therefore, we have chosen to deal with how best to support inclusive practice and those who wish to choose it. We see little value in arguing over whether education should be moving toward more inclusion. It is. We are. The world is.