

BUILDING A NATIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

**A Report on a National Consultation into Canadian Interest in
Strengthening Research into Inclusive Education Conducted by York
University and the Roehrer Institute**

little
involvement

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Introduction

This national consultation report focuses on inclusive education and interest in strengthening Canadian-based research into this potentially powerful educational reform. Inclusive education, in general, is taken to refer to placement of persons with disabilities in regular education environments in order to best meet their academic and social educational needs. However, as this report will indicate, no agreed definition of inclusive education has developed in Canada, or beyond. Suffice it to say at this point that reform toward education for all Canadians with disabilities in regular education environments is controversial. With its focus on regular education environments with only few exceptions, inclusive education challenges the special education model that posits a range of educational placements moving from regular education environments to completely segregated environments.

The Salamanca Statement proclaims that:

- Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs,
- Educational systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,

- Those with special education needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them in a child centered pedagogy capable of meeting those needs,
- Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficacy and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system.

The Consultation design called for five regional meetings in representative major communities. The cities and the five regions in the order meetings were planned were:

- Toronto – Ontario Region, November 10, 2001
Regional Chair: Mr. Kevin Finnegan
- Winnipeg – Saskatchewan/Manitoba/NWT/Nunavut ,
Dec. 8, 2001, Regional Chair: Dr. Rick Freeze
- Edmonton – British Columbia/Alberta/Yukon Region,
Feb. 2, 2002, Regional Co-Chairs: Paul Kohl & Heather Raymond
- Halifax – Atlantic Provinces Region, Feb. 16, 2002
Regional Chair: Dr. Vianne Timmons
- Montreal – Quebec Region, March 16, 2002, Regional
Co-Chairs: Dr. Robert Dore & Dr. Serge Wagner

Each regional meeting was planned over a Friday to Sunday weekend.

FINDINGS

Positions Taken on Inclusive Education by Participating Organizations

Some 165 organizations ranging from Pacific to Atlantic and from Canada's southern to northern borders prepared written statements of their positions relative to inclusive education. Detailed analyses of the positions revealed seminal differences between groups of organizations. Generally speaking, one group of organizations supported reform toward the inclusive model, whereas a second group supported continuance of the special education model. The division between groups was not neat and clean with all organizations of certain types in favour of one model and all organizations of other types in favour of the other.

The following discussion on application of the inclusive education model deals with analysis of points raised by a number of organizations favouring the inclusive model, but also supported by organizations holding reservations regarding movement toward inclusive education. A subsequent discussion presents points raised by these organizations and summarizes their reasons for supporting continuation of the special education model. In both instances details of comments from individual organizations are provided to support overall points .

- **The inclusive model applies to all levels of education**

The points noted below lay out the essentials of the breadth of application considered appropriate for inclusive education. Inclusion should be available from earliest educational experience and carry through all other life educational experiences, most especially those within the formal education system and in the general community. Though only a few example points are

some argued that the entire education system should be inclusive, whereas others believed that regular education setting placement extended only to a portion of the population of Canadians with disabilities. To a large extent those groups which favoured inclusive education used terms such as “include, all, every” and “inclusion”. Those with appreciation for placement of some learners with disabilities in regular settings and others in more specialized settings tended to use other terms as will be seen later. This difference in use of terms signals a definitional confusion which some participants believed required clarification through research.

- **Modifications and adaptations must be available to those included.**

Agreement that modifications and adaptations of instruction were necessitated by placement of persons with disabilities in regular education settings was general. Those persuaded that inclusive education could be extended to all learners took it as a requisite reality that teachers would modify and adapt to successfully include. Agreement ended, as will be seen later, when the position that adaptations and modifications could support successful placement of all learners in regular settings was advanced.

- **Diversity, including diversity of ability, is to be valued in education.**

A centrepiece of the inclusive position was that if one valued diversity in education, then it followed that learners with disabilities should be part of regular education settings. No difference was to be perceived as causing less acceptance in regular settings than would any other difference. Race, gender, behaviour, appearance, and disability were all seen as equal in this regard.

That regular education settings should reflect the diversity of the full community was a point raised often during the national consultation meetings. The dividing point came when some participants covered all learners with disabilities with this argument and others said diversity could be extended only so far.

- **Students and parents, as citizens, have a right to choose inclusion.**

The cement between the bricks of the argument of those favouring change toward inclusive education models was that , as citizens, students and parents have a right to choose inclusion. To be denied this right was to place limits on the citizenship of some and not others. Presentations made in writing to the national consultation and orally during consultation meetings were replete with reference to “true choice, right to choose, children educated together” and ”citizenship”. Not all agreed that choice of inclusive education was a right, however. Type and degree of disability could override this right in the minds of some participants.

- **Inclusive education has a wide range of advantages for all**

Many benefits noted by various associations do not appear above as they were mentioned less frequently. They are noted here briefly to complete this laying out of the values found in inclusive education by some Canadian organizations.

- Personal growth
- Stronger post-secondary learning
- Peer modeling

- Enhanced learning for peers
- Increased learning for students with disability
- Greater expectations by teachers in inclusive settings
- Development of independence
- Development of confidence
- Empowerment of typical peers
- Development of leadership in typical peers
- Preparation for future life
- Students learning from each other
- Development of friendships
- Access to regular curricula
- Everyone is welcome.

Positions of Organizations Favouring the Special Education Model

Various organizations favoured continuing the special education model for Canadians with disabilities. While agreeing that many benefits attached to regular classroom placement these organizations believe such placement not to be in the interests of all persons with disabilities, nor within the power of all educational systems. Instances of agreement among both organizations with concerns regarding moving toward the inclusive education model and organizations favouring the inclusive education model

were noted in the previously detailed analyses. Points where views diverged are discussed in this section.

- **Placement in special education settings to meet needs of persons with disabilities.**

A number of organizations stated that they held a philosophy of inclusive education though expressing conditions regarding applicability to all.

- **Preference for a Continuum of Possible Placements**

A result of conditional acceptance of inclusive philosophy for some students is preference for a continuum of alternate placements for other learners with disabilities.

- **Belief in a Most Enabling Environment.**

Various associations believe that supporting an individual student's learning requires choice of a particular environment viewed as most in keeping with a student's needs and abilities. This position is based on the belief that the range of alternate placements characteristic of the special education model provides various learning environments, one of which will be best suited to the identified learning needs of any particular individual. Those who advocate for inclusion believe regular education settings to be the most enabling and only choice.

Summary

Positions relative to inclusive education among participating organizations revealed two salient points

Firstly:

All organizations, less one, agreed that placement of learners with disabilities in regular education environments is beneficial to those learners and to the learners around them. This being the case, learners with disabilities should be welcomed at all levels of regular education systems.

Secondly:

Participating organizations split into two groups when it came to how many learners with disabilities could be included in regular education settings. One group, largely community advocacy agencies, people with disabilities and their parents, with some provincial/territorial governments, and some education systems, believed that inclusion in regular community education settings could and should be extended to all learners with disabilities. The second group, largely comprised of school systems, provincial ministries of education, and some parent advocacy groups, believed that some learners with disabilities could best have their needs met in specialized environments rather than in regular education settings.

This situation signals a deep rift between parts of the national community with regard to how best to serve the educational interests of Canadians with disabilities. To a too great extent the division appears to be between members of the regular community, parents, advocates, and people with disabilities, plus a number of governments and educators on one side, and the general education community and provincial ministries of education bolstered by a number of parent advocacy organizations focused on specific areas of disability (e.g. learning disability) on the other. This is a disturbing finding. It raises many questions of rights and equity for that 9 to 15 % of

Canadians who are disabled in the view of the education system, a system all Canadians by law must attend for a good portion of their lives.

**These questions cannot be answered and clarification provided
until our nation determines that they are of
sufficient importance to warrant allocation of
resources to their investigation.**

RESEARCH NEEDS POSED BY CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS

This report section focuses on the many specific research questions which combine into the larger questions referred to previously. Given that participants agreed that research needed to be undertaken in an effort to bring clarity to aspects of a major issue which affects, in fundamental fashion, the lives of every Canadian with disabilities, participants were requested to apprise the national consultation of what research studies were needed. Hundreds of specific research projects were suggested. Analysis indicated that they could be categorized as follows.

- **Human rights and social justice**
- **Professional development of educators for inclusive education**
- **Professional development of educational assistants for inclusive education**

- Best practices for inclusive education
- Effects of inclusive education
- Secondary schools and inclusive education
- Post-secondary education and inclusive education
- Cost and inclusive education

Summary

Participants posed literally hundreds of possible research questions. These have been categorized and similar specific questions from various participants blended into the questions detailed above. A daunting number of major areas requiring research investigation and clarification have emerged from discussions during this consultation. There is no doubt but that Canadian research into inclusive education would be valued by those concerned with disability and education. As a number of participating organizations argued, a Canadian perspective on research into inclusive education must be developed and that research must be of high quality.

PARTICIPANT CONCERNS REGARDING STRENGTHENING OF CANADIAN RESEARCH INTO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Previous discussion indicates considerable agreement among national consultation participants that Canadian research into educational reform toward inclusive approaches in education is needed. Even those with reservations regarding change toward inclusion agreed that research into

how best to educate Canadians with disabilities in regular education settings was needed, though not all might be placed in such settings.

Discussion now turns to concerns the organizations contributing to the national consultation had regarding strengthening of Canadian research. Concerns were not expressed regarding the actual strengthening of research. Concerns centered about practical issues, issues of the design and quality of research, and issues of research focus.

Summary

No level of concern and much approval were expressed regarding strengthening Canadian research into inclusive education. The following concerns were shared by significant numbers of participants, regardless of where they stood on the issues of educational philosophy and placement.

- Where will needed funding come from?
- Who will stimulate research?
- How will policy & practice be linked to support children, families, & communities?
- How will findings be disseminated?
- Will comparative studies be undertaken?
- Will both quantitative & qualitative studies be undertaken?
- Will longitudinal studies be undertaken?
- Will research be conducted in rural & remotes areas of Canada?

- Will studies be culturally sensitive?
- Will transition programming be a focus of research?
- Will research include both Francophone & Anglophone areas of Canada?
- Will collaboration be a hallmark of Canadian research into inclusive education?
- Will persons with disabilities & their families continue to be treated as research subjects & not as collaborators?

RESEARCH PLAYERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

This national consultation provided participants with a rare opportunity, that of conceptualizing who should be involved in research into educational reform toward inclusive education and what their relationships should be. As the following discussion indicates, participants had a clear view of the players.

- **The Federal Government**
- **Provincial governments, particularly Ministries/Departments of Education**
- **Territorial governments, particularly Ministries/Departments of Education**
- **Parents and families of persons with disabilities**

- Persons with disabilities, youths, and adults
- University and other researchers representing various disciplines
- School system educators: teachers, specialist teachers, administrators, educational assistants
- Advocacy and support organizations of various types, including organizations seeing value in continuing with special education models
- Typical students
- The private sector

RECOMMENDATIONS

This national consultation was designed, organized, and conducted, and this final report prepared between early September 2001 and the end of April 2002. It involved five regional meetings in which representatives of 176 Canadian organizations with interest in disability, education, and inclusion participated.

Participating organizations were requested to make written submissions to the consultation on the topics of Position Regarding Inclusive Education of the organization, thoughts on Needed Areas of Research for Strengthening Canadian Research into Inclusive Education, Concerns Regarding Strengthening Canadian Research, and Players in Strengthening Research and Their Relationships.

Many organizations took advantage of this opportunity. During each full day Regional Meeting participants were provided with a description of the context of research and inclusive education in Canada, heard from speakers presenting views of parents, persons with disabilities, advocacy organizations, First Nations groups, early childhood educators, elementary and secondary educators, and post secondary educators. Afternoons were devoted to small group discussion of research needs, concerns, players, and other issues. Data derived from each of these information sources were analyzed, and themes categorized. These themes served as a basis for the following recommendations with regard to federal government action in inclusive education and strengthening of Canadian research in the area.

- 1. That the federal government assign endowment funds to support development of an on-going Canadian network of university-based research centres with the mandate of studying inclusive education as it relates to the Canadian education system from early childhood through university.**

Every participating, save one, supported the position that Canadian research into inclusive education required strengthening. This recommendation is rooted in the belief that many Canadians with disabilities would benefit from education in regular community settings. Some organizations believed inclusion could extend to all learners with disabilities. A lesser number believed there were limits on inclusion. This recommendation also is rooted in the belief that Canadian research on the Canadian educational situation is necessary in guiding and investigating inclusive education. Action is considered necessary as Canadian research into inclusive education is largely nonexistent. A significant number of

participating organizations stated clearly that Canadian universities should lead the strengthening of research. There was general agreement that the federal government, as the national government responsible for the welfare of all Canadians was the appropriate agency to act in this area.

An endowment strategy is recommended to ensure that any research centre established be a long-term reality. Educating Canadians with disabilities to the level of their potential will remain a challenge due to a number of foreseeable factors. Any established centre would use annual interest as a fundamental support and work to attract additional funding from its community and from organizations supporting research into various aspects of disability, education, and inclusion in community.

2. That the federal government work with the organizations participating in each regional meeting as partners in determining which university, or partnership of universities, serve as the site(s) for a research/service centre in that region.

This recommendation is based on the belief that selection of universities to function as research/service centres should be connected closely to the communities they will serve. Organizations attending regional meetings demonstrated by their participation an interest in strengthening Canadian research around inclusive education and in ensuring that the mandate of any such research/service centre serve the needs of persons with disabilities and their families. Participating organizations held definite opinions about the design of research/service sites, the types of research to be undertaken, and who should partner in research activities. In many ways, it is the members of these associations who are the consumers of inclusive education.

3. That research centres be developed in both the English and the French university systems.

Movement toward inclusive education is apparent in both English and French speaking areas of Canada. In the interest of Canadians with disabilities in both language communities, research into inclusive education should be strengthened in both. Note should be taken that large French speaking communities reside outside Quebec and that Quebec, itself, has large Francophone and Anglophone populations and universities.

4. That research centres established be linked in a collaborative network to ensure that a variety of players participate in research, that resources are used well, that potential for both national and interprovincial research studies are facilitated, and that dissemination of research findings is facilitated.

Participants emphasized that collaboration should be a required characteristic of any research initiative taken in Canada around inclusive education. The philosophy of inclusion rests heavily on the value of people working together toward a beneficial end. The experience of participants was that university researchers often did not consult widely when designing studies and that research findings were not well disseminated. Participants also believed that what Canadian research is available often had too narrow a geographic focus. Canada is an immense nation, elementary and secondary education are provincial responsibilities, school systems and universities, and colleges are independent organizations with individual needs and interests. However, the move toward inclusive education is national in scope

and what is researched in one part of Canada may have import to others. Therefore, studies which are national or interprovincial in scope are of value.

5. That research into inclusive education, including the following areas, but also others, be undertaken by Canadian researchers. Those general areas named were:

- Development of definitions of inclusion as understood under the inclusive education model and integration as understood under the special education model
- Inclusion, human rights and social justice
- Attitudes of elements of Canadian society toward inclusive education
- How the inclusive education model and the special education model impact on citizenship of Canadians with disabilities
- Models for inclusion at the early childhood, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels
- Professional preparation of classroom teachers, specialist teachers, administrators, and educational assistants for inclusive education
- Best practices in inclusive education:
- Educational service delivery
- Funding of inclusive education
- Instructional strategies for inclusive education

- Development of supportive resources
- Effects of inclusive education experience on persons with disabilities, their peers, their families, their teachers, their communities in both the short term and the long term
- Comparative effect of inclusive models of education and special education models of education
- Comparative cost of these models of education for Canadians with disabilities
- Application of inclusive education in urban, rural, and remote areas of Canada
- Involvement of First Nations, Inuit, and multicultural groups in inclusive education

Each of these general areas were mentioned by numbers of participating organizations as central areas for research investigation. Each is regarded as of importance by significant elements of those Canadians with interest in disability, education, and inclusion. Many ideas for specific studies under each general area may be found in the detailed appendices of this report. Areas such as these could well form the research activity component of a national research agenda around inclusive education.

6. That universities selected for endowment funds to support development of a research/service program into inclusive education be informed that the following should characterize research efforts.

- Research efforts should emphasize partnerships with persons with disabilities, parents, advocates, educators, professional educator organizations, and advocacy groups, among others, in a community of researchers model.
- Research efforts should develop a focus on policy and practice in inclusive education
- Both short-term and longitudinal research should be conducted into central questions of inclusive education
- Both quantitative and qualitative studies should be undertaken.
- Research and research results should be in forms accessible to the general community as well as to the academic community

It was apparent that participating organizations, though desiring strengthening of Canadian research into inclusive education, did not wish university researchers wholly to control the research process nor determine what research be undertaken. All wished the community outside the universities to be consulted on research possibilities and involved in the actual research as active and real partners. They wished those being studied to have a say in how, when, where, and why they were studied. They were interested in studies which informed them, educators, and government.

7. That universities receiving endowment funds be informed that successful universities would be those:

- With affirmative action policies for persons with disabilities

- With existing commitment to research and resource development in inclusive education
- With existing commitment to community partnerships
- With programs of undergraduate teacher preparation with strong elements of inclusive theory and practice
- With programs of graduate student study and research into inclusive education
- With supportive programs across a number of disciplines
- With commitment to strengthening their existing programs around inclusion

Various Canadian universities have invested time, energy, and funds in initiating research, development, and teaching activities around inclusive education, both across the university and in various departments. They have established programs on which to build and will thus serve as strong platforms on which to develop a powerful and capable network of researchers and research activities to meet Canadian needs.

- 8. That, immediately, the federal government allocate resources to clarify definitions of inclusion as understood under the inclusive education model, of inclusion as understood under the special education model, integration as understood under the special education model, mainstreaming as understood within education generally, and the most enabling environment.**

Throughout the national consultation process it was evident that participating organizations often were using the same terms, but with different meanings. Resulting confusion interfered with communication at times. This confusion and interference poses a major barrier to the building of collaboration and the development of a strong education system for Canadians with disabilities. It also poses a concern when collaborative research and national and interprovincial research are considered.

9. That, in order to stimulate immediate research activities around inclusion by the centres established and in Canada generally, the federal government in collaboration with provincial/territorial governments explore and find ways to equitably fund research into inclusive education in Canada over a five year start-up period.

Given that stimulation of research into inclusive education has not been a priority of any Canadian government to date, it will take time for any centres established to build to find funding for any amount of research and to begin to fulfill their mandate. In addition, it will take time to establish collaborative working relationships with community partners, time which might be shortened if research projects became a reality shortly after establishment of a Canadian network of research centres. This is a kick-start recommendation. Its acceptance will indicate the degree of commitment of Canadian governments to stimulating research to strengthen education for Canadian citizens with disabilities.

10. That, in order to ensure development of future researchers in the area of inclusive education, a number of federal scholarships tied to research in disability, education, and inclusion be made available to

appropriately qualified Canadian graduate students, particularly at the doctoral level .

As no Canadian university has developed a graduate studies focus on inclusive education, a continuing supply of graduate researchers versed in disability, education, and inclusion is far from ensured. At present, Canada depends on a hit and miss system in which a student who wishes to study and research inclusion may or may find that her/his university's graduate program has faculty members with the requisite knowledge, interest, and time to instruct or advise on research in the area. At the same time, due to the recentness of interest in inclusive education, university and private scholarships have not yet been established. Knowledge of the need for a new understanding of education possibility for persons with disability and of the value of inclusive education has not been generalized. For instance, private foundations with interest in education were invited to participate in the national consultation. None attended. A stimulatory program would be of benefit, particularly in the immediate future.

11. That preference be given, all other considerations being equal among candidates, to graduate students with disabilities in awarding of the aforementioned scholarships.

This recommendation is based on a number of facts. Almost all present researchers into disability, education, and inclusion are able-bodied persons. In general, scholarships to persons with disability for the purpose of studying disability are few. There is growing interest in the communities associated with disability that persons with disabilities take an active role in

research. A signal from the federal government in this area would be noticed by many others.

12. That a national centre for dissemination of research findings from Canada and other nations be established immediately with the purpose of ensuring that all Canadian universities, colleges, school systems, research institutes in the area of disability, provincial/territorial departments of education, advocacy organizations, and associations of persons with disabilities are kept informed of research into inclusive education.

This recommendation signals need for action in the immediate future in informing Canadians in many walks of life of research into disability, education, and inclusion. At present, there is no Canadian dissemination centre for such material. It was apparent throughout the national consultation that the great majority of participants felt need for such information to guide them in their endeavours to strengthen education for Canadians with disabilities, but were frustrated at its lack of availability. Adding to the frustration was the fact that when research findings were available, they were written above the level of the ordinary layperson. Information could not be accessed as there was no vehicle for dissemination and when some was accessed, it was in a form which challenged understanding. As being informed is the first step in understanding need for change and the direction of change, and change toward inclusive education is challenging Canada right now, it seems imperative that a centre for dissemination of information in Canada be established, and that the centre have the resources to disseminate information in plain English/French.

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