

# Disability - Education – Inclusion

A Collection of  
Blogs  
Articles  
Thought Pieces

By

Gary Bunch

National Director, Canadian Association of Inclusive Educators  
Chair, Marsha Forest Centre  
Senior Scholar, York University, Toronto

[gbunch@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:gbunch@edu.yorku.ca)

2011

## **CONTENTS:**

- **Disability and Inclusive Education**
- **Denying the Benefits of Inclusive Education**
- **World-Wide Change to Inclusive Education for Learners with Disabilities**
- **Transitioning to Life After School**
- **Government, Inclusive Education & Confusion**
- **The Ins and Outs of Disability and Education**
- **Disability, Student Health & Inclusive Education**
- **A Lesson Plan for Belonging:  
Inclusive Education Imparts More Than just the Curriculum**
- **Student Attitudes: Making Friends or Making Fun?**

**For more blogs and information on Disability and Inclusion in Communities,  
check the Canadian Abilities Foundation website.**

**Prepared by the Canadian Association of Inclusive Educators  
caie.info**

**July 2011**

## ***DISABILITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION***

***I am really interested*** in inclusive education and disability. When the issue is disability, inclusive education means kids with disabilities are educated in the same classes as all the other kids. This, as you likely know, is a big change from special education. The big difference is that special education believes that some students with disabilities need to be segregated from their typical peers. They must go to special classes or special schools. There is no segregation in inclusion.

***Special education was a boon*** to kids with disabilities when it began to take off around the middle of the last century. Before that, kids with disabilities mostly were not in school. The growth of special education meant that they could get an education, even though they had to go to segregated settings. At that time, special education was a really big change – and a positive one.

***But change does not stop.*** Progress continues to be made. New and better ways to do things are found. That does not mean that the older ways were bad. It just means that new ideas and new ways to do things have been found, and that they do a better job than the older ideas and methods.

***That is what is happening*** in education for learners with disabilities. We have learned that inclusion in regular classrooms of community schools is better education than is exclusion. Teachers, who used to practice special education methods, but now have moved to inclusion, have found it to work. The needs the students have do not disappear when students with diverse abilities are included. Inclusive education requires all the supports that special education does, but the support is delivered in the regular classroom, not in a special setting. When they are included, almost every kid is happier. They are accepted. They learn. In fact, research is now saying that inclusive education is better for all the kids. Those with disabilities learn from their typical peers. Their typical peers benefit from having more diversity in their classroom. They learn lessons about life that are not taught in textbooks, and they have a more complete understanding of what community means. The United Nations recognized this when it declared its policy of Education For All, and said that education in the regular classroom is the right of all learners. Inclusive education is more socially just for all and leads to stronger education for all.

***That doesn't mean*** that everyone agrees with inclusive education. Not everyone agrees with change. Change upsets some people – especially when that change challenges what they always have believed. Inclusive education is a revolution in how we think about disability and learning. Revolutions tend to create a lot of heat and friction. It takes time for things to settle down and for change to be accepted.

We need to go through the heat and friction of revolutionary change in education to reach social justice for learners with disabilities. The benefits are worthy of the struggle.

Blog, March 2009

## ***EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSIVE EDUCATION***

*You may have seen* the recent movie, Slumdog Millionaire. It was shot in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India. The movie began with shots of a section of Mumbai called Dharavi. Dharavi is known as the largest slum in Asia, and is home to some 700,00 people. The conditions in Dharavi are tragic for many of its inhabitants, particularly the children, most of whom have little to look forward to in life.

*I know Dharavi* because I have worked with the National Resource Centre for Inclusion (NRCI) in Mumbai. Under the leadership of Dr. Mithu Alur, NRCI is giving many young children in Dharavi a chance for a better life. Dr. Alur and her colleagues have begun an inclusive early childhood program (Ugam) in Dharavi.

*The Dharavi Ugam program* is the most exciting program in inclusive education I have seen anywhere. I have been privileged to visit the program frequently as a consultant, and, working with the Marsha Forest Centre of Toronto, to provide financial support.

*Today, some 16 individual preschool centers* (Anganwadis) have been set up in Dharavi. A morning and an afternoon program runs in each, with about 50 children each half day. At present, 16 individual Anganwadis are operating. If my figures are correct (and the figures are changing as the program continues to expand), up to 1600 children are being educated through the Ugam program each year.

*The first step* in setting up the program was to approach the Street Bosses in Dharavi. Street Bosses are people who control parts of the slum. Without their agreement, it is very difficult to begin any new program in Dharavi and to have it safe from various problems. The Street Bosses see value for the children in the program and have been very supportive of its initiation and expansion.

*The teachers in the Anganwadis* are not typical teachers. They are mothers from the slum who receive some pedagogical training from NRCI. They are supported by a number of NRCI staff who visit and support the Anganwadis on a regular basis. Continuing professional development ensures that the mother-teachers extend their skills.

*The Ugam program* runs on a shoe string. The Anganwadis are very limited in space. You would not see so many children in such small spaces in Canada. The children write on small, old-fashioned slates. Books and paper, even pencils and crayons, are far too expensive. Only a few rudimentary teaching supplies are available. The mother-teachers do their best to create teaching aids from whatever materials they can access.

*As I write this it sounds* very bleak. However, a visit to an Anganwadi denies this. They are happy places, full of confident learners. The children's faces beam as they go about their lessons and as they receive visitors. They dress their best on their birthdays and holy days of their religions. Wearing their finery gives them an opportunity to shine.

*Each Anganwadi* is attended by a diversity of children. All are from the slum and are what we would call “of low socio-economic status”. The “girl child” is a focus, as many girls in India, and particularly in slum environments, do not have access to education. Another focus is children with disabilities. A variety of religions are represented. The program is inclusive in many ways.

*Children learn from four different curricula.* They study an early childhood curriculum based on the English model. They study a locally developed nutrition and personal hygiene curricula. As you might expect, nutrition and hygiene are major concerns in a slum environment. Lastly they study English. A degree of competency in English opens up many opportunities.

*The children do not miss their classes* if at all possible. Their parents know that an education can be a passport out of the slum. Having their children go to an Anganwadi is a sacrifice for families. Children, no matter how young, are part of the workforce of Dharavi. The families are sacrificing part of their incomes by sending their children to the program.

*Slumdog Millionaire portrayed the dark side* of the Dharavi slum. And it is a daunting and challenging environment. but the early childhood program started by Mithu Alur and her colleagues show another side of Dharavi. There is personal striving for improvement and willingness of the individual, no matter how young, to work hard and sacrifice in search of a better life.

*As I said at the beginning,* the Ugam program is the most exciting inclusive education program I have seen anywhere. It is an example of what can be done with imagination and the effort needed to change imagination to reality.

Blog, May 2009.

## ***DENYING THE BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION***

***Why is inclusive education***, educating typical learners and their peers experiencing disabilities in the same classrooms, important for all learners? Why is it important for our entire society?

***The right to education*** was gained by Canadians experiencing disabilities only in the recent past. Prior to approximately the late 1970s and early 1980s, schools did not have to educate learners experiencing disability. Some centers maintained special schools, but few admitted those experiencing disability to regular classroom settings alongside their typical peers. Though some school systems did decide to educate students experiencing disability, there was no legal requirement to do so. Even when some students experiencing disability were admitted to school, it was mostly those with mild and moderate levels of challenge who could cope in acceptable fashion with the academic and behavioural standards of the schools.

***But, eventually***, provincial and territorial governments began to pass legislation requiring school systems to provide access for students with diverse abilities. The result was increase in the number of special schools and great increase in the number of special classes. Some more capable students experiencing disabilities were admitted, conditionally, to regular class settings. These moves all were in accord with the special education model under which a student is placed according to individual academic achievement and behavioural quality. The special education model was considered the strongest response to the need to educate learners experiencing disability. One of the negative aspects of the special education model was that students were segregated for their education. This resulted in distancing learners experiencing disabilities from their typical peers, both in school and community. This unfortunate result was considered acceptable in order to maintain strong education.

***Today, the special education model*** is challenged by the inclusive education model. Proponents of inclusive education argue that inclusion will result in a stronger education system and more flexible, accepting communities. Why? What advantages, if any, does the inclusive model have over the existing model still endorsed by the majority of Canadian educational jurisdictions?

***Here are a few things*** we now know about the advantages of the inclusive education model.

- Inclusion in the school system results in more accepting and positive communities and stronger education. Inclusion is supported by the United Nations and its various bodies as the most appropriate answer to issues of diversity and moving forward into the future. To the UN, inclusion is a matter of human rights and social justice.
- Learners experiencing disability achieve at higher academic levels in inclusive settings than in special education settings. This fact, increasingly, is supported by research.

- Learners experiencing disabilities develop greater behavioural strength in inclusive settings. This fact, increasingly, is supported by research.
- The learning of typical learners is not negatively affected by the inclusion of peers experiencing disability. This fact, increasingly, is supported by research.
- The learning of typical learners is strengthened and expanded, particularly in understanding of diversity and equity, by inclusion of learners experiencing disability. This fact, increasingly, is supported by research.
- Inclusion promotes friendships and understanding between typical students and their peers experiencing disabilities. This fact, increasingly, is supported by research.
- Regular classroom teachers, supported by their administrators and specialized resource staff, can teach classes diverse in abilities. This fact, increasingly, is being demonstrated by teachers working in inclusive settings.

*The question* at the head of this discussion really should be, “Why have so many Canadian governments and educators continued to support the special education approach when inclusion is a more socially just and effective, and practical approach, not just for learners experiencing disability, but for all students – and for their communities?”

Thought piece, 2010